



<b>Title</b>	Urban home: young male migrants constructing home in the city
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<b>Publication date</b>	2021-08-25
<b>Publication information</b>	Fathi, Mastoureh, and Cairíona Ní Laoire. "Urban Home: Young Male Migrants Constructing Home in the City." Taylor & Francis, August 25, 2021. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2021.1965471">https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2021.1965471</a> .
<b>Publisher</b>	Taylor & Francis
<b>Item record/more information</b>	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10197/28191">http://hdl.handle.net/10197/28191</a>
<b>Publisher's statement</b>	This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies on 25 August 2021, available online: <a href="http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/1369183x.2021.1965471">http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/1369183x.2021.1965471</a> .
<b>Publisher's version (DOI)</b>	10.1080/1369183x.2021.1965471

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# Urban home: Young male migrants constructing home in the city

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## Abstract

This paper offers an exploration of the concept of 'urban home' (or, constructing home in city space) by focusing on two groups of young male migrants: refugees and international students in Cork, Ireland. Walking methods and photography were used to record migrants' geographies of urban home through the lens of everyday inhabitation of the city. We propose four dimensions to the construction of urban home in post-migration lives – instrumentality, memory, spaces of care, and future home. Our analysis shows that migrants connect to and disconnect from the city of Cork in different ways. Young male migrants in this study feel largely disconnected from hegemonic Irish society and, as such, much of their meaning-making of home is shaped in relation to an unknown postponed and undefined future time. Urban home here is not an attachment to Cork city as home, but, rather to a familiar idea of home that may take place in Cork.

**Keywords:** Urban, home, young, migrants, place, belonging, city, migration

## 1. Introduction

Home, as a central concept in migration studies, has attracted much attention in recent years (Ahmed et al. 2003; Boccagni 2014; 2017; Duyvendak, 2011; Geurts *et al.* 2020; Kochan 2016; Ralph & Staeheli 2011; Walsh 2011). Understood in a wider sense than a house or dwelling (Mallet, 2004), home can be conceptualised as a site of belonging and familiarity (Ahmed 1999) associated with positive, negative and ambiguous feelings (Brickell 2012). The concept of home is multiscalar, spanning household, community, city and nation (Blunt & Dowling, 2006) and encompassing spaces from the domestic to transnational spheres (Al-Ali & Koser 2002). In migration, quite often, 'home' is linked to longing for one's 'homeland' where ties to the 'country of origin' inform practices and feelings after displacement (Flynn, 2007), although at the same time, home encompasses 'the sensory world of everyday experience' (Ahmed, 1999, p. 341). Concepts such as *homing*, *homing desire* and *home-making* capture the dynamic and personal nature of home as a *process* that is lived and felt through practices, imaginations and desires (Ahmed *et al.* 2003; Brah 1996; Tolia-Kelly 2004; Walsh, 2011). All three terms capture, in different ways, the yearning for a home that is always somehow out of reach, and the work of re-creating and building towards that home, which we define as the process of 'constructing home' (that is, doing *and* imagining home). The quest for home with its spatial, physical and emotional aspects reminds us that home is never a finished project. The sense of home as an ongoing process, rather than a completed achievement, is about everyday practices of cultivating home (Boccagni & Brighenti 2017). We argue that home is a complex web of sense-making across different spaces and times, equally importantly composed of domestic and public/communal spaces. Whilst many of the above scholars refer to spaces where intimate relationships among family and objects are entangled, part of what constitutes home is located within 'public spaces', outside the boundaries of the domestic space (Ahmet 2013; Boccagni &

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Duyvendak 2019; Raffaetta & Duff 2013; van Liempt & Staring 2020; Williamson 2016). However, locating processes of 'constructing home' in the public space of cities in post-migration contexts has not received much attention, particularly for those who migrate alone to destinations that do not have established ethnic/migrant communities. This paper is an attempt to tease out the aspects of inhabiting public shared spaces that provide what we call 'urban home' for young male migrants who do not live as part of diasporic groups.

By 'urban home' we mean the ongoing and dynamic process of understanding, feeling and doing home, that is, *constructing home*, through *inhabiting* the city, which is not necessarily the same thing as *making a home in* the city. Therefore, we view home as a (felt) process of both practice and imagination, which we analyse through a novel methodology conducted with young male migrants (international students and refugees) in the public spaces of the city of Cork in Ireland. Our aim is to explore dynamics of urban home through asking: How do young male migrants make connections with, and through, Cork city and places within the city, in order to construct home? and how can this inform understandings of urban home in migration? To do this, we propose the concepts of 'personal histories of place' and 'spatial security'. People create their own 'personal histories' of city places, developed through their accumulated emotional, sensory, relational, and lived experiences of those places over time and use these histories as a way to not only make sense of the city but to create a liminal space for belonging. Spaces of encounter with others are a key dimension of this, which we focus on here. These personal histories form part of what we call 'spatial security' or the feeling of secure inhabitation in a place. Bottom-up knowledges created by migrants provide valuable insight into processes of belonging and not-belonging that are central to integration processes in cities of diversity. First, we detail our theoretical framework, followed by our methodology and discussion of our findings. The final part offers an enhanced understanding of 'urban home' in migration contexts.

## 2. Urban home in migration: a theoretical framework

We aim to offer a lens towards understanding home, not through a binary of belonging/unbelonging, settlement/migration, native/migrant, but focussing on everyday inhabitation in order to tease out the dynamics of constructing home when living with displacements and emplacements. In exploring home in contexts of displacement/emplacement, it is imperative to consider the scale of the city (Blunt & Sheringham 2018). By analysing home in city space, we can shed light on the lived and felt dimensions of the relationship between migrants and their host societies. Cities are 'political and spatial fields for integration' (Eckardt 2018: 62) and offer opportunities for connection and co-existence whilst, at the same time, can create disconnection, intimidation, fear and exclusion for migrants (England and Simon, 2010). Cities are constituted by social relations, including gender, race and social class (Beebeejaun 2017), which shape young male migrants' material realities and everyday encounters in cities. It is through this domain that belonging/not-belonging is negotiated and lived (Beebeejaun 2017; Williamson 2016), as everyday routinised practices of being in a place can foster a sense of belonging, while experiences of alienation and exclusion from spaces can undermine it (Fenster 2005; van Liempt & Staring 2021). As Raffaetta & Duff (2013: 342) argue, belonging to place accrues over time 'through a particular set of practices, through specific ways of *inhabiting place*'. These ways of inhabiting place can be instrumental and mundane but still meaningful in fostering a sense of belonging. However, everyday inhabitation of the city can also provoke feelings of not-

belonging or disconnection, experiences that are equally part of the process of constructing home and that raise questions, which we explore here, about the complex and ambiguous nature of urban home for male migrants and its interplay with the sense of belonging.

We are particularly interested in that aspect of urban home for migrants that is shaped in 'spaces of encounter' with others and we draw on recent debates about geographies of encounter and spaces of care (Amin 2002; Askins 2015; Peterson 2017; Valentine 2008; Watson 2006) to explore what such spaces mean for young migrant men and their personal histories of place. Amin (2002) analyses everyday micropolitics of contact and encounter between different ethnic groups, which he terms 'micro-publics', arguing that the 'constitution of such micro-publics and the terms of engagement within them, are seen to be crucial for reconciling and overcoming ethnic cultural differences' (p. 959). He suggests that 'the city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement' (p. 967) but that it is on individuals to make and remake public spaces as meaningful and creative zones. Amin's (2002) argument credits individuals and agency with an important role (which we agree with). However, Valentine (2008) questions arguments made by Amin (2002) and others in relation to the power of encounters in a city, in terms of their capacity to go beyond the immediacy of contact to become meaningful engagements in the lives of residents in a city. Valentine's (2008) research with white populations in the north of England shows how patterns of prejudice and narratives of exclusion permeate social interaction and prohibit meaningful communications that could foster democratic relationships between different people. She criticises the assumption that contact with other people necessarily translates into 'respect for difference' and warns against confusing 'taken-for-granted civilities' with 'respect for difference' (p.328).

The notion of 'spaces of care' can shed further light on the nature of social encounters. Conradson (2003: 508) defines spaces of care as a 'a socio-spatial field disclosed through the practices of care that take place between individuals'. In his view, care is a social relationship where one person commits proactively to enhance the well-being of another. He argues that the nature of care is relational and based on willingness to offer care and the other's receptivity to that. 'Spaces of care are shared accomplishments' (Conradson 2003: 508). Askins' (2015) research on a befriending scheme between local residents and asylum-seekers in an urban area in the UK highlights the role of friendship as a space of care that is co-produced, interdependent and mutual, and that becomes possible when meaningful interpersonal connections are made through everyday shared activities. We explore here how migrants connect and disconnect at different levels to and from other people who might be able to offer spaces of care.

We argue that the ambivalences and avoidances that characterise urban encounters (Valentine 2008), as well as the broader racialised and classed relations that constitute urban spaces, lead minorities to resort to constructing home in ways that are both *non-local* and *imagined*. By 'non-local', we mean that although the narratives of home are linked to *place* (*here*, in the city of Cork, and also *there*, in previous or future homes (Kim & Smets 2020), they are not tied to one place; they tend to be fluid, and the sense of belonging tends to be flexible. 'Imagined home' means that for young migrants, much of the focus on making a home is projected into their future possibilities of home (rather than here-and-now). We draw on debates about spaces of encounter and spaces of care and civility, together with our concepts of personal

histories of places and spatial security, to analyse processes of constructing home that occur in urban spaces that are not always places of welcome, care or belonging. Personal histories of place need an element of temporal and everyday inhabitation to foster familiarity and belonging. Thus, for migrants who have lived in a city for a short time, or whose status in the city is provisional, their personal histories of place are quite different to those of longer-term residents and involve elements of familiarising with and navigating the urban landscape (Buhr 2018). Furthermore, for migrants, visible and audible differences including racial/ethnic difference can mark their everyday encounters in the city in numerous ways (Hopkins 2014). Drawing on Valentine (2008), we argue that although micro-publics of everyday encounters are important in creating a space where trust can be practised, it is not necessarily enough for feeling at home in that space. For this, it is necessary to have a sense of spatial security there. As Boccagni (2017) and Boccagni & Duyvendak (2019) suggest, a feeling of security is central to feeling at home. Taking this further, we propose here the concept of 'spatial security', or the feeling of secure inhabitation in a place, drawing in part on Yuval-Davis' (2015) concept of spatial security. Thus, our understanding of spatial security involves two important dimensions: the first is the legal documentation that allows formalised links to a place and the second is the formation of place attachment<sup>i</sup>. Our participants have a relative degree of the first (having a visa or refugee status), but this does not necessarily translate into the second aspect of spatial security (place attachment, understood through the concept of personal histories of place). We argue that spatial security is the substantial basis for feeling at home in the city.

Finally, we use imaginaries about past and future home as important indicators of current spatial security and everyday inhabitation. Migrants' constructions of home are often focused on pre-migration contexts and a comparison with the present, bringing a translocal and temporal dimension to homing processes. However, memory is often as much about the present as about the past, playing a key role in processing and making sense of one's experiences in the here-and-now, and we explore here how memory mediates the lived experiences of the city for migrants. Imaginings of the future also play an important part in the meaning-making of the present time for migrants (Gil Everaert 2020; Raffaetta & Duff 2013). In particular, for young migrants, orientations to the future shape their life-worlds in multiple ways (Bygnes & Erdal 2016; Fathi 2021; Lulle et al. 2018; Ní Laoire, 2020; Sime et al. 2020). As such our analysis focuses on how personal histories of place and orientations to the future shape the ways that migrants *do* home in the city in the here-and-now.

### **3. Ethnography in the city with migrants**

Youth-Home was an in-depth study in the city of Cork with a small sample of young migrant men - refugees (not asylum seekers) and international students (from non-EU/EEA countries). These two groups were chosen as we aimed to understand the notion of home for those who had the 'official' right to stay in Ireland. The main objective was to understand how young migrant men construct home in their domestic milieus and urban spaces. Using a multi-stage participatory ethnography, the in-depth fieldwork, which took over one year (2019-2020), was composed of several stages and methods: walking interviews, a 'taste of home' method, photography of urban areas, photography of domestic spaces and re-interviewing. In all, 20 participants were recruited: 10 international students and 10 refugees. Students were invited to take part via the university's International Office and through posters displayed on campus. Refugees were recruited through a refugee support NGO, personal contacts and the project's advisory board members. The participants (aged 19 to 36 years) were all single or lived single

lives (two were married but their wives lived in other countries). The older migrants were predominately from the refugee group because the process of asylum in Ireland, like other European contexts, takes many years and by the time participants gained their refugee status, they were usually in their 30s.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 crisis, six walking interviews with refugees became suspended after initial meetings and interviews. In total 33 interviews (including walking interviews, photovoice interviews and initial interviews) with 20 participants were conducted (some were interviewed more than twice). Fourteen of these interviews were walking interviews, incorporating a photovoice method, and this paper is based on the data (narrative and visual) obtained in these interviews. Due to the methodological design, which sought depth of insight through using multiple methods with each participant, the study had to be conducted with a small participant sample. Conducting a focused study with a low number of participants comes with its own limitations. For example, due to COVID restrictions, the variety of methods used with the refugee group, who were recruited at a later stage in the project, was limited. Accessing refugees proved to be much harder than the student group; thus recruiting them took longer than expected.

Participants were asked to lead the researcher to where they 'felt at home' or where they had a story about home to tell. Each walking interview lasted between two and five hours. The conversation during the walk was recorded using a microphone attached to the interviewee's coat. Our methodology was informed by a plethora of research in human geography and urban sociology that uses visual, narrative and walking methods to understand home (Brickell 2012; Blunt & Dowling 2006; Tolia-Kelly 2004; Walsh 2011). We asked migrants to share their personal stories of places they frequented in the city and how their everyday encounters in these spaces informed their sense of home. Walking and visual participatory research (participants as decision-makers and directors of fieldwork) can offer a rich method of data co-construction. That is because 'shared' practices of walking and the dialogical space between researcher and participant leads to personal histories being shared and allows connections between places in the city, experiences of the city, migration routes and pre-migration locations to emerge. Co-construction of data in walking was enhanced through photography of spaces. We chose smartphone cameras instead of photography cameras as they were convenient, user-friendly and made transfer of photos easier. Further conversations and interviews also took place within messaging apps. The phones also made capturing participants' everyday mobilities and perspectives of the city easier (Datta 2012). Recent developments in walking methodologies also point to the importance of smartphones in the process of recording walks (O'Neill & Roberts 2020). As Pink & Hjorth (2012) argue, the prevalence of high-quality camera phones are new types of co-present visuality and sociality. Technological advancements and their use in visual aspects of walking methods provide methodological possibilities that could be reflected upon and expanded in future research.

#### **4. Analysing images and stories**

Our epistemology of home stems from our view of home as fluid and constantly changing. Understanding home through walking in the city, narrating it and capturing images of places follows Rose's (1993) approach in relation to 'ways of seeing' a city. She argues that 'the surrounding' is connected to the ways in which we become 'the viewer'. In other words, Rose

(1993) connects the places (images of the world) to the subject position of the viewer. It is through the act of observing that one gets to the position of 'knowing'. Our 'ways of seeing' stem from our own situated and intersectional positioning (Yuval-Davis 2006) as two female academic researchers, one a migrant and the other white Irish. As Collins (2003) argues, lived experiences of the world are unique, authentic and narrated from situated standpoints. As such, we argue that migrants' understanding of places offer valuable insights precisely because they often come from marginal standpoints and are *different* to those of 'locals' (in Buhr's (2018) words, locals are those who have been living in a place for long enough to have an insider's familiarity with it).

We transcribed and (where interviews were conducted in a language other than English) translated the interview recordings. The transcripts were read and analysed, alongside the photographs, text messages and fieldnotes, for each participant individually, using principles of narrative and visual analysis (Esin et al. 2013; Riessman 2008). Following the guiding research questions of the study, the analysis focused on identifying participants' narratives of home and belonging/not-belonging and their emotional attachments to places/spaces. The walking routes within the city, along with the associated narratives were analysed by contextualising them within the life-course of the participant. In this paper, we pay particular attention to how migrant narratives reveal perspectives on city spaces that may differ from those of locals.

Each interviewee was asked to lead the researcher to a café where they felt home or could taste home.



Hassan<sup>3</sup>, an Afghan refugee in his 30s, struggled to identify a place. Eventually after long deliberation and repeating that he does not know places as he does not eat out much, he chose this café in a large city-centre department store. This quiet café was the place where Hassan's friends, also refugees, met and discussed their immigration cases, because, as Hassan said, 'no-one minds them there'. In discussions between us

(the authors, each with their own personal history of Cork city), we reflected that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the café in this department store building (though under different ownership) had been a busy and popular meeting place for city residents and shoppers. From the 1990s/2000s onwards, it was unable to compete with the emergence of more fashionable coffee-shops on every corner in the city; its feeling of mass consumption and functionality no longer attracted shoppers or tourists seeking distinctive lifestyle experiences through food consumption spaces (Zukin 2008). It had become, as a result, an under-utilised space. The social marginality of this place, together with its locational centrality, has paradoxically made it a useful place for young refugees. The café offers some temporary belonging and security away from the public gaze for those who are on the margins and are visibly/audibly different, which Hassan referred to. Such a personal history of a café is

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout.

revealing of migrants' everyday experience of outsidership in the city, as well as the possibility of carving out spaces of connection to others, and we explore further in this paper how connection and disconnection are often closely interrelated aspects of urban homing processes.

## 5. Cork: Connections and Disconnections

This section outlines a number of common characteristics of everyday life in the city for our participants. These include their low incomes, separation from immediate or wider family members, large virtual friendship networks and single marital status (all but two, who were married but living separately from their spouses – Hassan, Madhav). They tended to live in private rented accommodation either with room-mates or in one case with a girlfriend (Salman). They mostly did not own cars, so relied on walking, cycling or public transport to navigate the city. Securing quality affordable accommodation was a particular challenge they all faced and if they did, other harassment issues were reported. For example, Faraz (student and refugee), narrated a case where the landlord asked him to leave the house because Faraz had used the house address for university correspondence. Or as Oorjit (student) mentioned: 'Boys can't find a house easily, because they want girls in the house'. Hassan referred to a general shortage of housing: 'No landlord is willing to rent me a large enough flat. Everywhere I go there is a list of 50 people'.

Many of them spoke about the small scale and relative affordability (other than housing) of Cork city, making it a place where they felt they could begin a life in Europe, gain third-level education, and have an active and healthy lifestyle, due to reliance on walking/cycling and accessibility of gyms: 'A bike is ideal, since walking is kind of horrendous in the rain and then a bus costs money' (Adrian, student). 'In Cork, it's so small, you can walk everywhere' (Soroush, student). While Cork city provided opportunities for them to study and work in Europe, our research reveals that their everyday lives in the city involved much relatively solitary activity such as exercising or studying. Our analysis in the four following sub-sections (instrumental places; memory, home and pre-migration places; spaces of civility and spaces of care; and future home) show that aspects of their lives in the city can limit meaningful connections to and within the city, which has implications for how they construct home.

### 5.a. Instrumental places

A sense of place-embeddedness comes with repeated practices in relation to 'instrumental' places, such as everyday walking and thinking in the city centre (Ranit, Salman), exercising, including using the university gym arena (Faraz, Madhav, Soroush, Asef, Ranit), having haircuts in barbers (Asef, Oorjit, Madhav, Salman, Mahmoud, Soroush) and grocery shopping (everyone). In this section we focus on two of these practices. Although not all participants' narratives appear in this paper, for each section we present a small number of typical examples from the data.

Barber-shops that were run by other migrants, where some form of familiarity and friendship with the barber and other customers was experienced, provided a safe and familiar space for some participants. A considerable number of the participants (7 of 14) considered going to the barbers a social practice. Soroush, a student from Iran, in his early 30s, talks about the barber he goes to:



Soroush: The barber is from Soleimanieh, Iraq. He has learned speaking Farsi, in some refugee camps [being friends] with Iranian asylum seekers. There are several reasons I go to this place.... Hmm, look, anywhere you go you have to wait for a long time. He also has a good knowledge of Iranians in Cork and of Cork in general. He can give you useful information... Oh, there is something else, he is good in cutting your hair the German style, if you notice, it is the classic style, popular in Iran. He is also married to an Iranian woman, from Mashhad, like yourself.

Soroush's reasons for going to this particular barber, apart from the 'German style' that Irish barbers, according to him, have not mastered, is the layered sense of familiarity he gets. The combination of the barber's Kurdish identity, his Iranian wife, and having lived in Cork for a long time makes this place a landmark for Soroush, from which he had taken quite a few photos, including of the barber, posing for a selfie. The barber being able to speak numerous languages (Kurdish, Farsi, Arabic, English) makes his shop a popular place and source of valuable local information for many migrants in Cork. The example shows how some places can be both instrumental and socially significant. Routinised practices of this type and finding spaces that can provide feelings of homeliness, comfort and familiarity are part of a process of home-making in the city, of making a home of sorts in the semi-public spaces of the city. While these types of practices may be taken-for-granted for majority populations, they can take on greater significance for migrants.

The second example is from Mahmoud, a student from Egypt, also in his 30s, who gave a detailed account of his grocery-shopping routine which involves multiple outlets scattered across several locations:



Mahmoud: This place has like the shops where I buy my grocery and stuff like that. So, you see an old Lidl and Tesco just here. So, I buy my grocery from here [...] And in front of this like some *halal* food

[store] where I can buy my food and stuff like that. Yeah. So, we buy stuff from Lidl here and from Tesco but because—Because they are cheap and they are—you know, like we find everything that we need. Yeah, but the main thing is cheap actually. And we have *halal* chops and these *halal* shops sell the stuff that comes from our countries. So, you know, I can find food from Egypt. And we use some certain spices in our food and these kinds of spices I can find them in here. So this is Lidl.

Finding these little pockets in a city connects migrants to aspects of their identity and heritage that are relevant to their pre-migration lives. However, these are not the same types of spaces as Amin's (2002) micro-publics, that create a sense of intercultural connection in the city. Instrumental places enable the establishment of familiarity and connections to a selected group of people in the city, that is, other migrants. This sense of familiarity might be taken for granted for non-migrants, whilst for migrants, as these practices and local places are learned, they can become particularly meaningful and as such are worthy of exploration. Williamson (2016), in her research with migrants in Sydney, found that while migrants framed their place-making practices in terms of instrumentality, such practices also fostered familiarity and meaning-making in their engagements with the local environment. Familiarity, as one of the three elements of home (the other two are heaven and haven) discussed by Duyvendak (2011), is built over time. Instrumentality of places does lead to a sense of familiarity, and as Kim & Smets (2020: 621) argue, can 'reproduce home-like settings'. However, the instrumentality of places frequented by our participants (such as commercial spaces for hair-cutting and grocery-shopping) means that these places do not in themselves have the characteristics of micro-publics. The connections migrants foster with these places remain quite provisional, seemingly superficial, and individualised, and do not seem to provide a bridge between migrants and the majority population; familiarity here does not lead to a deep sense of attachment to city. In fact, Hassan, who used the same barber as Souroush, did not feel the same about it. These everyday instrumental practices are important for the participants' sense of identity and wellbeing, but it is striking that they remain mainly solitary and largely devoid of any community/group interaction. Similarly, Howlett-Southgate (2020) in her research with refugees in Cork city highlights their social isolation and points to the lack of shared public spaces as contributing to this. The paucity of other socially significant micro-publics in our participants' lives is notable and we argue is, in fact, what imbues these instrumental places with significance – it is in the duality of connection/disconnection that everyday practices acquire meaning in the context of urban homing.

### **5.b. Memory, home and pre-migration places**

While places in the city can be meaningful to migrants as sites of instrumentality and encounters with others, connecting to places in Cork city is also done through memories of pre-migration life. Many participants narrated similarities between Cork and other places they have lived.



Connecting Cork's River Lee to Kan River in north-west Tehran, Soroush details how the river path, noise of the river, smell of wet land, green imagery of the river banks, the bridge and the arches underneath that remind him of Persian architecture, all connect him to his childhood. Soroush's yearning for a life he lived before migration, in the long walking interview along this river, and his descriptions of both places, combined to present a coherent link between stories of the places, adventures and memories of not-here. As Kim & Smets (2020) argue, some refugees (and here it applies to our student group too) blur the distinction between home here (in the host country) and there (country of origin), as elements of home are continued over the life trajectory, regardless of location.

Soroush's long recurring accounts of trips across both rivers formed an important aspect of narrating urban home, captured through memories and sensory experiences in the present. However, this does not necessarily mean there is place attachment (the second aspect of spatial security) to this place in Cork. Soroush, like other participants, connects places in Cork to other homes elsewhere. Home is reconstructed through memories and description of images in order to construct a *general idea* of home rather than a specific place attachment. These connections generate a sense of place-belongingness because of the feelings and sensations they produce that refer to place, not as a geographical unit, but as a non-local, imaginary, familiar space that facilitates a sense of belonging. This is place-belongingness to an 'idea of a place' that is remembered and realised through encountering Cork's river Lee.

Comparison is the method of making this connection, which is also captured by Salman, a student from Nigeria. He compares Dealz, a chainstore selling random cheap items, to a market in his home country, Nigeria:



Salman: Dealz is Nigeria. Okay, I'll take a picture of Dealz. It's amazing. A store where you can get literally everything very cheap.

Interviewer: Why does it remind you of Nigeria?

Salman: Well, the difference between this place and Nigeria is that this is like just one store that has everything [...] Back in Nigeria, if you want to buy anything, we have marketplaces. Those marketplaces you can find—everything you get in these you can get in there. So, I think so the fact that I know that every time I need to buy something, all I need to do is go to Dealz, okay. And back home anything I want to buy anytime I go to the

marketplace and I enter, I can get whatever I—whatever it is you're looking for you'll get it there.

Salman's juxtaposition of Dealz and the market in Nigeria is based on the shared characteristics of randomness and affordability of objects for sale. Affordability is also highlighted in Mahmoud's grocery story above. The shared characteristics of randomness and affordability and the feeling of convenience and autonomy derived from this type of shopping experience, bring the feelings of being 'there' (the market in Nigeria) into the here-and-now for Salman. Similarly, van Liempt & Staring (2021) show how seemingly mundane elements of the urban environment can become meaningful to refugees because of the memories of former homes that are triggered by their use or occupancy.

We argue that linking pre- and post-migration contexts is connected to the sense of familiarity, which may be based on affection and comfort, but also on other important 'traits' of locations, such as their accessibility to migrants with low incomes. In the above comparisons by Soroush and Salman, memory works to mediate their lived experiences of new places by making them more familiar. Moving through these locations provides a sense of continuity with the past that becomes part of defining who these young men are in the present. In this way, they make home by connecting past and present, local and distant, and in the process, build personal histories of place that can be considered translocal (Brickell & Datta, 2011). Through inhabiting the city, a sense of home is created, and home is constructed, but it is a non-local and imagined home, that is, not tied to just one place, and it relies on memories of elsewhere.

### **5.c. Spaces of civility and spaces of care**

This section explores a third aspect of urban homing, that is, participants' experiences of spaces of sociable encounter with peers and others which could translate into micro-publics or spaces of care (Amin 2002). Valentine (2008) cautions that spaces of encounter do not necessarily provide the basis for fostering more meaningful connectivity, mutual trust and feelings of home. For example, sites of sociability for young adults in the city do not necessarily foster feelings of belonging for all young migrant men equally. Ranit, a refugee from Afghanistan in his 20s, does not see Cork as a space of belonging. To him, his life preferences are not compatible with practices he calls 'Irish'. Although he emphasises that he does not have a problem with drinking and enjoys occasional pub visits, he does not like to socialise in pubs: 'that is not [my] type of culture, if I want to drink, I buy it and drink at home'. Ranit had moved to Cork from another city in Ireland that he called 'cold' and 'racist'. In his interview, he presented an account of his life in Cork devoid of any meaningful interactions with others: tellingly, he found parks more calming than places where he had to interact with people, a claim similarly made by Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2017) Latino participants who collectively use parks in Los Angeles as spaces of belonging and claims to city space. Ranit worked in a factory and his life involved episodes of shift-work and sleeping. His connections to other people in the city were not evident: in other words, he was making a 'quiet claim to the public space of the city' (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2017: 123), albeit individually.

On the other hand, Adrian, a 19-year-old, white middle-class American student, embraces the micro-practices of pub-drinking:

Adrian: Actually, I feel like, yeah, pub life definitely you get to meet some Irish people. [last Saturday] I met like a couple of people [in a pub]. Like this one guy had the same name as me and then I like met his friends and talked to them and then kind of like bonded with him and then he bought me a drink. So, I feel like pub life you really like get to relate to people because you could just have like a casual conversation.

Ranit's and Adrian's opposite views of pubs and casual conversations must be read in the context of their differently situated intersectional positions in terms of class, race, educational levels and language. 'Casual conversations' in pubs, although valuable in their capacity of creating a space of civility, are not equally available to all migrants, and furthermore, do not of themselves create a deeper relationship to the city. Adrian is a white, blond middle-class student, speaking English as his first language, who sees his true home in the United States, whilst Ranit is a Sikh refugee, wearing a turban, who fled his hometown in Afghanistan. These two subject positionings see public spaces (here pubs) differently in light of the dynamics of culture and communication. Sharing a drink and having a friendly chat with Irish people in a pub is not something Ranit experiences; in his case, such an act could be misinterpreted. These two differing migrant experiences of pub spaces show the importance of multi-layered and intersectional racialisation processes in city spaces. In analysing spaces of encounter, we need to be mindful of how a sense of belonging and feeling of inclusion are enabled or inhibited by the socio-spatial dynamics that constitute different city spaces, albeit within an intersectional framework (Fathi 2017). Even those encounters which can be considered sociable and civil (such as in Adrian's case) do not necessarily foster deep belonging, and importantly, are experienced very differently among young migrants with different intersectional identities.

However, geographies of care can still emerge in certain circumstances. Conradson (2003) argues that 'spaces of care' emerge as socio-spatial fields, where one person takes interest in promoting others' well-being, proactively and in practical ways. Soroush (discussed above), and Negassi, a student from Ethiopia raised in a refugee family, developed a study pattern on the university campus. They would meet weekly in Soroush's office or in the café in the same building, where Soroush would answer Negassi's questions on maths and computer programming. These locations where they studied and formed a relationship transformed the cold environment of the institutional café and office into a space of care for both. Drawing on Boccagni & Duyvendak (2019), it could be said that the public space of encounters for these two students was domesticated into a space that could be called 'home'. Soroush, in a third interview, was asked why he helps Negassi:

Soroush: I believe when you know something and this can help others, you should not deprive them of that. Unfortunately, university space has turned into a business place, a trading space. I still see university as a place for gaining knowledge, for science, you know, and sharing it. and I see this as an ethical duty, if you can help others you must do it.

His commitment to teaching Negassi free-of-charge is because of a personal scholarly duty felt as a PhD student. He believes in his mission and the role of universities in society as places of knowledge. This relationship of care is one that is marked by *respect* (going beyond taken-for-granted civility) and thus makes the university space more homely and hopeful for both young men. Negassi, who was the youngest participant, constantly praised Soroush and his kindness, telling us how important these sessions were to him. Meeting Soroush was one of the few interactions he had outside his formal lectures and his family home.

Spaces of care are dependent on interactions with other people; they are not given but created. What we found is that such spaces of care, even in a provisional sense, are very rare for the young male migrants in our study. As Valentine (2008) argues, cities do not necessarily provide spaces where low-level civility can scale up to meaningful connectivity. Large proportions of the everyday lives of these young migrants are based on solitary activities (such as studying, exercising, walking and shopping) and the interpersonal connections they make can be quite short-term because of the provisional nature of their residence in the city (as refugees or international students). Similarly, Reber (2021) shows how a sense of belonging can be elusive for temporary migrants especially when opportunities for companionship and connectivity are limited. For this reason, creating spaces of care in the city is not easy for young male migrants and the existence (if at all) of such spaces remains temporally limited. Our point is that creating a provisional space of care, however, is a sign of home-making in public space and indicative of the work done by migrants themselves to care for each other and to create these homely spaces of care, away from the dominant sites of sociability in the city.

#### 5.d. Future Home

Finally, urban home for single young men is framed around imaginations about their future life but with reference to national, European and transnational concepts of home. Their future plans are linked to the dynamics of the job market (finding a job) and other aspects of settlement plans (such as, starting a family). We demonstrate in this sub-section (Future Home) that our participants' constructions of home in Cork are related to their imagining of, or aspiring for, a future home in another place. The provisional and tentative nature of their attachments to people and places in the city can be understood in the context of future aspirations, which are either located elsewhere, or anywhere. In order to appreciate this, we refer again to our concept of 'spatial security', that is, the legal status of permission to stay along with the feeling of place attachment. When migrants know they *can* stay in a country but only for a certain number of years, they develop some form of spatial belonging, but this remains temporary and provisional. Asef, a student from Indonesia, in his early 20s, puts this interplay of spatial security and long-term planning in an interesting way. His parents, who own a business in Indonesia, constantly ask him to return there to take over the business but he predicts that they would restrict him a lot in terms of his lifestyle. As such he is hesitant to return, as living there does not fulfil his 'future dream'.

Interviewer: What is your dream?

Asef: Europe. This Europe dream [sic].

Interviewer: You want to stay in Europe.

Asef: To stay in Europe. But to be honest, I feel like—I don't have my own home yet in Jakarta and I don't have money for that. And I feel Cork is my home now.

Asef's European dream, in the context of spatial security and place attachment, is entangled with the visa arrangements of his postgraduate degree, which allows him to live away from Indonesia. His notion of Europe as a dream is about imagination of what a home may look like. He was asked why Europe, Cork and home were linked for him:

Asef: Because my home is everywhere, something like that. Wherever I stay and I feel like I can do anything and I don't have much responsibility, I feel at home, something like that. Because like when you feel pressure, when you feel like a pressure, like a big pressure, it's

not a home at all for me. Even like if in my own home [Jakarta], like my own home, and I feel pressure, I don't feel like home.

The pressure Asef refers to is the sense of restriction and control that he experiences from his parents. His stay in Europe limits their influence in his life, and it does not matter where he is once this pressure is kept at a distance. As such, for him, Cork is only an example of a location that fulfils his European dream. His future plans incorporate a sense of a mobile home, which can be anywhere (but Jakarta) and is not nostalgic about the past home but is formed in movement away from it (Ahmed et al. 2003). Unlike Asef, Ranit sees his future life in one specific location, Manchester, since his family are there and can arrange for him to meet a like-minded young woman for marriage. The possibilities of creating a settled home (in a different location) means that Ranit's imagination of future home is not in Cork either, due to his sense of detachment from Cork:

Ranit: So for me I just want to experience living with them that I used to have in Afghanistan. I don't have that anymore. So that's what I want to try. If I don't like it, I can come back any time here. I have that option. But I want to try. I want to live there. And my mother she always just cries, 'You have to come. You have to come here.'

His plans for a settled, close-to-family experience of a home could bestow some security and stability. Being a recent Irish citizen, Ranit's legal status allows him some freedom of movement in order to find or create a home. His sense of alienation from the city did not cease upon becoming Irish, and because he had no family in Cork, he had decided to leave. In other words, Cork does not provide a full sense of spatial security for either of them (for Ranit because of the absence of emotional connection to Cork and for Asef due to restrictions on his student visa).

Imagined future home may (not) be about Cork; yet, Cork provides the settings and spaces in which future home is lived and felt in the present. Home in Cork city is provisional for these migrants who have fragile positions within the Irish immigration system or do not have access to meaningful spaces of care in the city. Similarly, as Gil Everaert (2020) highlights, provisionality means that migrants 'inhabit the meanwhile' while waiting in circumstances of uncertainty. More secure attachments to Cork city could be fostered if, structurally, planning for a future in the city were possible. In the absence of such possibility, these migrants are all too aware of their spatial insecurity and they live with this by postponing their ideal home to some point in the future.

## **6. Migrants' personal histories of place in Cork city – translocal and provisional belongings**

The urban geography of Cork makes living a single life as a migrant on a low income possible for students and refugees due to its relative affordability (apart from housing), its small size which offers some though limited opportunities for bonding with people, and the possibilities for active and healthy lifestyles. Also, crucially, it offers a springboard for future migrations, by enabling them to work, study or acquire the legal status that would prepare them to transition to bigger cities in the future (such as Dublin, Manchester, London, US cities). However, their lives in the city are circumscribed by provisional residency statuses, lack of economic and social capital, absence of family members, and the paucity of micro-public spaces that are welcoming and meaningful to them, factors that combine to reduce their spatial security in the city. These positive and negative aspects of life in the city, while providing some opportunities for connection and attachment, also disconnect them further from Cork city, orienting their

practices towards plans for the future rather than making a home and investing in Cork emotionally. For example, none of them talked about meeting new people for dating or falling in love in Cork which could make leaving more difficult and emotionally charged; instead, such endeavour was put on hold for a future life. It is in the absence of these meaningful encounters that connections to the city of Cork remain temporary and instrumental.

The cultural hegemony of Irish society and Cork city is intertwined with practices and places that many of the participants do not approve of, or feel belonging to, such as drinking in pubs or going to nightclubs, or which they do not have access to, such as local and familial social networks. Their own personal histories of places tended to be limited to 'day-time' places such as shopping centres and places of worship, leisure (parks) and exercise (gyms). Occupying spaces such as the university campus and rented rooms in shared houses, these young migrants move between marginal and central spaces in the city, but their narratives reveal that their presence in public spaces is often solitary, instrumental, and limited by material circumstances. They do not feel much connection or spatial security; in Valentine's (2008) terms, there is a lack of possibility for engagement in meaningful encounters that could give rise to new democratic relationships and, in Yuval-Davis' (2011) terms, the possibilities of belonging for them are limited. However, as Gil Everaert (2020<sup>4</sup>) argues, even in situations of uncertainty and provisionality, migrants 'build meaning in suspension, belonging in exclusion, home in homelessness, and routine in temporal uncertainty'. We argue here that migrants do connect to, and through, the city in ways that are important to their everyday lives in the here-and-now, their transnational connections and their pasts and futures. As shown in Kuurne & Gómez's (2019: 233) research on feeling at home in neighbourhoods, the daily constructions of inclusionary and exclusionary boundaries enable and constrain people's possibilities for belonging. Migrant men in our research inhabit the city in ways that are meaningful to them (they feel included) and they do not participate in those public spaces where they feel otherwise (feeling excluded). As such, through everyday inhabitation of the city, and their imaginings of future homes, they construct their identities, maintain their wellbeing, plan for their futures and maintain their transnational connections. Their narratives of urban home, as such, are translocal (Brickell & Datta 2011), spanning past, present and future (Fathi 2021), constantly unfolding, but necessarily remaining provisional and temporary.

## 7. Conclusion

Migrants' personal histories of place are marginal to the hegemonic narratives of place in Ireland. For example, migrant narratives of Cork city, which reflect a marginal social positioning, tell a particular story of city life that diverges from mainstream narratives. We believe that these narratives need to be told and heard in order to open up possibilities for those little pockets of connection that Amin (2002) refers to. Most of the participants in this study strived to forge an identity in the margins of Irish society, aware of their migrant status and how they were positioned as a result. For example, almost everyone complained about housing and the difficulties associated with obtaining housing as a migrant. Despite this, they developed provisional attachments to, and through, the city, in their everyday lives. So, in this paper, we do not present these narratives as a positive, flawless act of connection to places but rather as an alternative narrative about urban home-making.

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<sup>4</sup> No page number.

Young male migrants' making of urban home is not a given by virtue of living in Cork. The four elements of urban home (instrumental places; memory and pre-migration places; spaces of care; and future home) discussed in this paper direct us to a general paucity of meaningful encounters that could result in micro-publics and spaces of care. Our analysis shows how young male migrants' home-making in the city is relatively solitary, and involves connections made to and through places that are largely instrumental, or that are meaningful in relation to memories of pre-migration places. Spaces of care, where they do exist, are forged by migrants themselves in the marginal spaces of urban life, and are particularly important, but the possibilities for meaningful micro-publics and spaces of care are extremely limited. Finally, a lack of spatial security orients these migrants' homemaking efforts towards a future home elsewhere/anywhere. Their everyday inhabitation practices are often solitary, their limited finances mean they cannot participate much in a culture of consumption, and their outsider status as identifiably 'other' adds further to their sense of spatial insecurity. This paper highlights an important aspect of home-making in urban spaces, that is, the provisionality and detachment that is experienced by young single male migrants and their postponement of making a home to a future undefined time.

We propose that the concept of 'urban home', understood as a process of construction of home through everyday inhabitation of the city, can shed new light on the lived experiences of urban life and migrancy. This conceptualisation highlights the temporality of homing and the translocal nature of the construction of home for migrants. It draws attention to the duality of connection/disconnection in the sense that spaces of connection acquire their meaning in the context of experiences of disconnection. We argue that 'urban home' is not an 'either/or' situation, in which a place either provides a sense of home or not. Instead, home can be understood as a process of home-making and homing that is more or less embedded in particular places, such as pre- or post-migration places or imagined future places. The degree of embeddedness of home in the city of one's everyday inhabitation is linked to one's personal histories of place there and degrees of spatial security there. For young male migrants such as those in our study, their personal histories of place and spatial in/security are such that they construct home in ways that are largely non-local and imagined, yet are lived and felt in the here-and-now of life in Cork. In other words, home is a fluid, constantly shifting place-feeling that is grounded in the immediate and the material, yet is loaded with future possibilities and past imaginaries.

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<sup>i</sup> Yuval-Davis refers to spatial security in terms of an immigration regime which 'allows' individuals to stay in a given country. Our concept goes beyond this and comes from the feelings about attachment to a place combined with necessary documentation that allows a migrant to stay in a space (personal communication with Fathi, 2015).