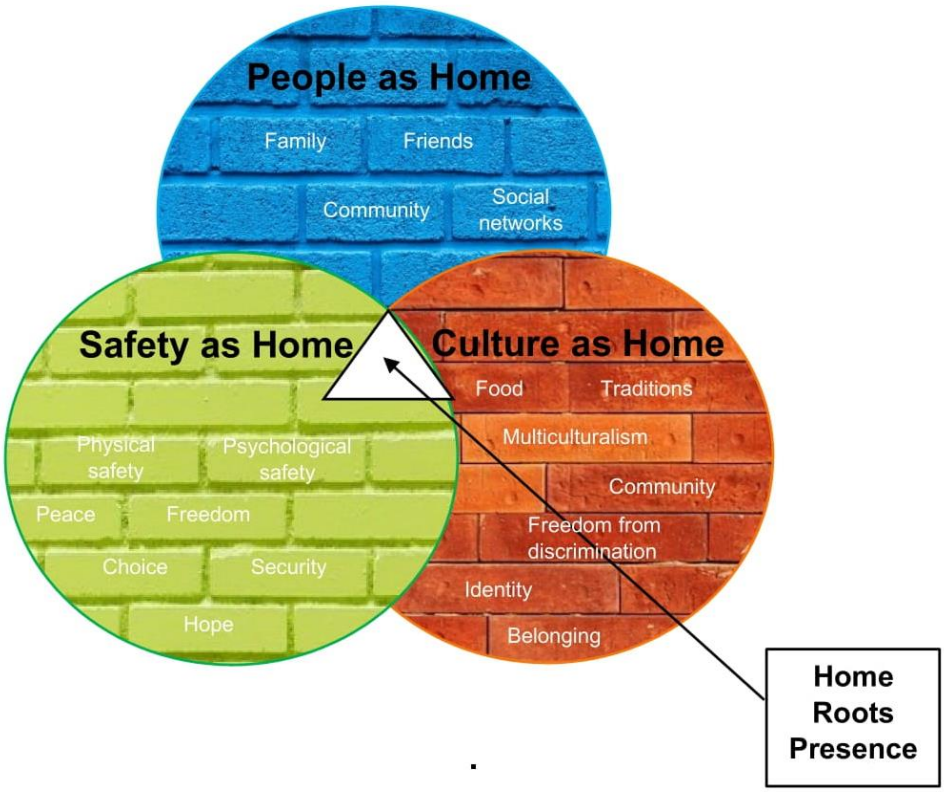
What is Home?

Experiences of Home After Forced Migration from Afghanistan to the UK as a Refugee



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Master's Thesis 2022

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Abstract

This research looks at experiences of home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK as refugees. Through conducting interviews with seven Afghan people in the UK, and collecting secondary data from the lived experiences of UK Afghans that has already been published, I argue there are three central elements of home for the people in this research. The most important is 'people as home', where you are home if the people you care about are there, and for some, home directly means people. The primary 'building block' (Hage 1997) here is family, as well as friends, community, and other social networks such as academic and professional circles. The second element is 'safety as home', where physical and psychological safety are key building blocks of home, and peace, freedom, choice, security, and hope are all parts of this. The third element is 'culture as home', where being able to see and retain some of your culture after forced migration is central to being able to feel at home. Food, traditions, community, multiculturalism, freedom from discrimination, and a sense of identity and belonging are all building blocks within this. To explain what happens to experiences of home after becoming a refugee, I present a theoretical framework that there are four potential states of being after forced migration: the 'double absence' (Sayad 2004), the 'double presence', the 'single absence', and the 'single presence'. I argue that if the building blocks discussed are present, it can enable the ability to grow and retain roots, to feel more present where you are, where some UK Afghans experience a double or single presence, or at least feel more at home in the UK. Meanwhile, the absence of these building blocks can prohibit the ability to feel at home and grow new roots in the UK, which leads to a 'double absence' (Sayad 2004). Through providing a historical, policy, and lived experience perspective of British-Afghan relations, I additionally address how British actions have attributed to the crisis in Afghanistan, thereby shaping experiences of home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK.

Key words: *home, refugees, asylum, forced migration, Afghanistan, Britain, roots, Sayad 'double absence', presence, people, safety, culture, colonialism, imperialism, memories.*

Acknowledgements

This is dedicated to my mother, Sonya Rose, for always finding a way to provide me a childhood home. The people I would like to thank the most, of course, are the seven interlocuters for taking part in this research and sharing their insight, time, and experiences with me. I extend particular gratitude to one, because this research would have not been possible without them. I also send the greatest thanks to my supervisor Tamirace Fakhoury, for all of her support and knowledge throughout this process.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

People experience home in different ways, depending on their life circumstances and who they are. However, there are elements which are true for a lot of people, and situations that shape how people experience home. This thesis gains insight into people's experiences of home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK, through conducting semi-structured interviews with seven UK Afghans, and gathering secondary data on the lived experience of UK Afghans that has already been published. The most far-reaching problem of the global refugee crisis is that so many people are forced to lose their homes. The UNHCR (2022) reports that 2.6 million Afghan people have become refugees, and 3.5 million are internally displaced. This means to understand the consequences of the refugee crisis from the Afghan perspective, it is crucial to gain understanding on Afghan refugees' experiences of home.

I have sought to understand the feelings and perceptions of refugees in relation to the concept of home and their experience of it. Issues include what it is like to lose your home, have temporary homes, try to build new homes in the UK, and not have a home? What is it like when you have to move not only house, but country, continent? Do you feel at home when this happens to you? If so, what makes you feel at home? Is it a place, a person, a community? Additionally, how does anti-refugee hostility, xenophobia, and cultural differences in the UK (Goodfellow 2019) affect someone's experiences? My interest in this subject comes from working with refugees experiencing housing, welfare, and immigration issues. It also comes from personal experience of losing homes, being homeless and migrating country because of this. However, I am not a refugee. Therefore, I have distance and closeness to the field. This is qualitative research, so it is not representative. However, it provides rich micro-narratives from the seven interlocuters, and first-hand accounts from other UK Afghans previously published.

My theoretical framework argues that there are four potential states of being, regarding home, after forced migration. This includes Abdelmalek Sayad's (2004) concept of the 'double absence', as well as the 'double presence', 'single absence' and 'single presence'. Sayad's (2004) theory on the 'double absence' argues that migration is an ongoing suffering, where you are neither here nor there. You are absent from your homeland, but symbolically and psychologically absent from your new location as well, through living in adversity and marginality, and inner turmoil after forced dislocation from home. This helps to recognise the traumas of forced migration. However, this neglects experiences where people have been able to feel at home and present where they are, after (forced) migration, growing roots to their new

home, whilst retaining roots to their homeland. The ‘double presence’ accounts for the possibility to feel both here and there, which has been approached through scholarship on copresence (notably Veikou and Siapera 2015) and migrant homemaking (notably Hage 1997) before and recalibrated here. I also introduce the possibility for a ‘single absence’ and ‘single presence’, recognising that someone might sever all ties to their homeland for trauma or other reasons. Therefore, they may experience a ‘single presence’, where they root themselves to their new location only. Or a ‘single absence’, because they have severed their roots with their homeland, but still feel psychologically and symbolically absent from their new location, for the reasons discussed.

Therefore, this thesis will answer the research question:

How do people experience home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK?

Furthermore, to gain deeper understanding in relation to my theoretical framework and scholarship relevant to the data, I have developed the three working questions:

1. *How do Afghan people in the UK experience home?*
2. *Do they have roots in Afghanistan, the UK, both, or neither?*
3. *Do they experience a double absence, a double presence, a single absence, or a single presence? What attributes to this?*

1.1. Thesis Structure

Following this chapter, I begin with Chapter 2: Context, to provide the policy and historical background behind forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK. This includes the history of British-Afghan relations from 1813 to now, showing how the UK and Afghanistan have been intertwined for centuries, and how British actions have attributed to the crisis in Afghanistan, through centuries of war, occupation, imperial interference, and withdrawal. Thereafter, I discuss the refugee and asylum crisis in the UK, looking at Afghan specific schemes such as Operation Warm Welcome (OWW hence forth), the UK’s ‘hostile environment policy’, and Priti Patel’s new asylum overhaul and Nationality and Borders Act 2022. It is crucial to begin by presenting this context, to show the background of why Afghan people leave home and migrate to the UK, and the historical and policy factors that shape their experiences. Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework, then presents the theory behind this research, with scholarship on home and forced migration, including arguments on transnationalism and a person’s roots, looking at whether people are rooted to one place or not in today’s world. Thereafter, I provide

the overarching theoretical framework of this thesis, discussed above. Chapter 4: Literature Review presents already published secondary research on lived experiences of home for UK Afghans. This provides an overview of what has already been platformed, and presents experiences of other UK Afghans, as well as the seven people I have interviewed.

Chapter 5 provides the methodology of this thesis. I have conducted a mixed method approach, gathering primary data through virtual semi-structured interviews, and secondary data, as discussed in Chapter 4. I have used a participatory approach, where the interlocuters have fed into the research design and process. This is with recognition that through having lived experience they are the real experts, and I argue, the best people to decide what the research should look like. Thereafter, I discuss ethics, self-positionality, and my motivations for this research. Finally, I present the limitations of this thesis. Chapter 6 provides the analysis and findings, with what I conceptualise as three central elements of home: 6.1. People as Home, 6.2. Safety as Home, and 6.3. Culture as Home. Through analysing the data with the theoretical framework provided, I show how the Afghan people in this research experience home after forced migration to the UK. Thereafter, Chapter 7 concludes this research, with a summary and the main arguments.

This research contributes to academia by providing scholarship that platforms the lived experiences of UK Afghans, which has been found to be under-researched, by myself and Gladwell (2021). I build on Sayad's (2004) theory of the 'double absence' and develop a theoretical framework that accounts for the multifaceted dimensions of the refugee experience. Furthermore, I offer insight into Western actions that attribute to the global refugee crisis. Finally, I highlight the importance of lived experience in academia, regarding who is doing the research, and the data provided.

Chapter 2: Context

This chapter is going to provide the context of this research, including the historical, political, and social backdrop of UK-Afghan relations, and what has attributed to the crisis in Afghanistan. I will also look at the policy backdrop of British asylum for Afghan people in the UK. This includes different routes of settlement, such as the strengths and failings of OWW. I will also look at the UK's 'hostile environment' and new Nationality and Borders Act 2022. This context shows the historical and policy background of why Afghan people leave their home and migrate to Britain as refugees, and the policies that shape their experiences.

2.1. Colonial and Policy Legacies Shaping UK-Afghan Relations

It is not possible to give a complete overview of Britain and Afghanistan's history here. However, some key issues will be explored. This includes the 'Great Game' between the British and Russian Empires, British part-colonialism of Afghanistan in the early 20th Century and the ongoing destruction created by the colonial bordering of the Durand Line. Finally, the 21st century 'neo-colonial' war and interference in Afghanistan under the banner of the 'War on Terror'. This shows Britain's relationship with the crisis in Afghanistan, and how British actions have attributed to the country's destabilisation.

2.1.1. The 'Great Game' and British Colonialism

During the 19th century, Britain invaded and militarily occupied Afghanistan twice as part of The Great Game, which was a battle for power over Central Asia by the British and Russian Empires from 1813 to 1907. Afghanistan was used as a 'buffer zone', landlocked between British India and the Russian Empire (Barfield 2010; Ghaus 1988; Khan 2011). This led to three Anglo-Afghan Wars between 1838 and 1919. Following the second war, Britain held colonial power over Afghanistan from 1979 to 1919. Britain was never successful in exercising full colonial control over Afghanistan. However, it exercised partial colonial control as a British protectorate (Hassan Kakar 2006). Afghanistan attained independence on 19 August 1919, following the Third Anglo-Afghan War. This offers a landmark triumph for Afghanistan and colonial liberation (Ahmed 2017). However, as with all colonial control and occupation, the issues created are far reaching and long-lasting. The next subsection will examine this through the Durand Line border.

2.1.2. Colonial Borders: The Durand Line

What is seen by many Afghans as the biggest and most long-lasting detriment of British colonialism is the 1893 Durand Agreement and creation of the Durand Line. Well known as "one of the modern world's most porous and contentious borders" (Ahmed 2017:56), this 15,000-mile line separated Afghan people between Afghanistan and British India, now Pakistan.

It is seen by many Afghans that when India gained independence from British colonialism in 1947, the land taken from Afghanistan should have been returned (Barfield 2010). However, it was not. The Durand Line remains, and the British Indian side was given to Pakistan. Afghan-Pak relations are corroded by conflict (Eliot cited in Ghaus 1988), where Tariq et al. (2020) state the 'root cause' is the Durand Line. It is argued that "Afghanistan's stability is, to a considerable extent, correlated with the nature of its relations with neighbouring Pakistan" (Qassem and Durand 2008:87), particularly regarding the Taliban where its eradication would require Pakistan's cooperation (ibid). Therefore, it is important to take a brief look at the Afghan-Pak conflict. The Durand Line border is a site for militant groups and drug and people smuggling (Tariq et al. 2020), and Pakistan has been a headquarters and sanctuary for Afghan militants for decades. Despite ongoing denials from the Pakistani government, there are numerous eyewitnesses and reports that Pakistani support of the Taliban has been extensive (Grare 2006; HRW 2001; Giustozzi 2022), which leads to the recognition that the Taliban could not be eradicated without Pakistan's support. This subsection has looked at Britain's colonial history with Afghanistan and the ongoing effects of this. The next subsection will now look at the 'neo-colonial' 2001 invasion, 20-year war, withdrawal, and rerising of the Taliban.

2.1.3. The 21st Century US-NATO Invasion, 20-year War, and 2021 Withdrawal

In November 2001, the US, backed by NATO and the UN, invaded Afghanistan under the banner of the 'War on Terror', with the aim of defeating Osama Bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban, claimed to be hiding him. The UK, headed by former Prime Minister Tony Blair, was and remains a primary supporter of the invasion (Ledwidge 2013; Blair 2021). In his book, *Investment of Blood: The True Cost of Britain's Afghan War* (2013), Ledwidge estimated that between 2001 and 2013 the UK spent £37billion on the Afghan war, 94 percent on army costs and a far lower 5.6 percent (£2.1billion) on civilian development (ibid), which presents the lack of commitment to civilians and nation building. Moreover, Ledwidge (2013) forecasted that at least £40billion would be spent by 2020. Regarding what he calls the 'human cost', the

government reports that 457 UK army staff died in Afghanistan (Dempsey 2021). Statistics on Afghan causalities were not properly counted so are unknown. However, the Watson Institute of International Relations (cited in BBC 2021) estimates 171,804 deaths on the Afghan side, including 51,613 civilians, 69,000 army and police, and 51,191 'opposition' militants.

There are mixed viewpoints on the 20-year occupation of Afghanistan. Some supported the US-NATO presence, attributing positives to the decline in Taliban power and thus changes to Afghan society surrounding women's rights, education, and other freedoms (HRW 2022). However, others address the atrocity and neo-colonialism of the occupation, with the high-scale murders of civilians, and rise of extremism in opposition to imperial powers (Chomsky cited in Polychroniou 2021).

The UK withdrew militarily from Afghanistan in 2014. However, retained its presence there with c.660 UK soldiers, which nearly doubled to c.1,100 in 2018 (Ali 2021; BBC 2018; MacAskill 2018). In 2021, the UK withdrew from Afghanistan entirely with the US and NATO, in what has been described by the Foreign Affairs Committee itself as a 'hasty' 'disaster' with a "total absence of a plan" (Foreign Affairs Committee 2022). The Afghan army and government collapsed, and the Taliban regained power immediately. Murtazashvili (2022) attributes this collapse to the numerous avoidable errors made by Western alliance during the 20-year war, and the establishment of a state that did not have support of Afghan people.

Through the lens of neo-colonialism, Afghanistan can be recognised as a semi-colony. This is an independent state that has been dominated by imperial power(s) in the post-colonial era, economically, ideologically, politically, and militarily (Torbat 2020). This domination has led to dependence, where prior to the withdrawal, 75 percent of Afghanistan's finances relied on foreign assistance (HRW 2022b), including 45 percent of GDP in foreign aid (World Bank 2022). Following the withdrawal, collapse of the government, and Taliban rerising to power, foreign aid was suspended, and c.$10billion of Afghanistan's assets were frozen, predominantly by America, as well as European countries including the Bank of England, plunging the country into far deeper economic crisis (Esser at al. 2022; HRW 2022b). Adam Weinstein, former American military in Afghanistan, stated that "The idea that overnight, the central bank reserves went from belonging to the Afghan people to being the transferable property of the United States is nothing short of colonial" (Weinstein cited in Lakhani and Graham-Harrison 2021). Afghanistan is experiencing a crisis not just because of Taliban rule, but severe drought, food shortages, rising prices, and widespread economic crisis (UN 2022).

As will be discussed, Afghanistan has over 6million displaced people, with hundreds of thousands more fleeing their homes since the withdrawal (Walsh and Sumption 2021).

2.1.4. Sub-conclusion

This subchapter has explored the history of British-Afghan relations. This demonstrates Britain's relationship with the crisis in Afghanistan that is causing people to flee their homes, and the British actions that have attributed to the crisis. The next subchapter looks at Afghan forced migration to the UK and the current policies shaping this.

2.2. Forced Migration from Afghanistan to the UK

2.2.1 Afghan Refugees and the UK

The UNHCR reports that there are approximately 2.6 million refugees originating from Afghanistan, the third highest country globally (UNHCR 2022), with 2.2 million residing in Pakistan and Iran (Walsh and Sumption 2021). There are additionally 3.5 million internally displaced people inside Afghanistan. Following the 2021 US-NATO withdrawal and the rerising of the Taliban, the number of forcibly displaced Afghans rose significantly. However, between 2011 and 2020 the UK received asylum applications from just 0.8 percent of estimated Afghan refugees, granting initial protection to 0.025 percent (ibid). Amnesty International UK (2021) reports Home Office statistics that over 50 percent of asylum applications from Afghans were rejected in 2021. 489 of 1,089 were successful, while many others remain waiting in the backlog of 50,000 pending asylum cases. Amnesty International highlight that some of these refusals were issued while the UK was withdrawing and the Taliban resuming power.

There are four key ways for Afghan people to come to the UK for asylum. This includes the ARAP (Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy) scheme, which replaces the Ex-Gratia scheme, the ARCS (Afghan citizens resettlement) scheme, family reunification, and people who travel to the UK themselves, often through dangerous routes, and then claim asylum on arrival (UNHCR 2022b). However, the schemes have very specific criteria and restricted numbers (GOV.UK 2022; GOV.UK 2022b), and an average of 200 people per year have moved through family reunification between 2011 and 2020 (Walsh and Sumption 2021). The House of Commons (2022) reports that around 5,500 Afghan people were evacuated during the withdrawal under Operation Pitting, along with more than 8,000 British nationals. The evacuation and Afghan schemes demonstrate the UK's close ties with Afghan displacement

further. Operation Pitting was the largest UK evacuation since WW2 (GOV.UK 2022e). Meanwhile, ARAP and ARCS were set up to coincide with the withdrawal (Sturge 2022).

In August 2021, the government announced OWW for people resettled under ARAP and ARCS. This includes pledges of funding and support, as well as the removal of some restrictions that other refugees face, including eligibility for settled status straight away (LGA 2022; Migration Watch UK 2021). However, the failures of OWW in action have been widely reported. Over 10,000 Afghans are stuck in limbo in temporary bridging hotels (Wilson 2022), where the Home Office has said it does not know how long it will take to move people (Home Office cited in Gentleman 2022). The government pledges of OWW come in stark contrast to the overarching 'hostile environment' policy, and overhaul of the asylum system and Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which other Afghans are facing. This will now be discussed, to provide information on the inequalities of the system for Afghan people.

2.2.2. The UK: an Inhumane Asylum System

Regarding the 'hostile environment' policy, Goodfellow states that "when Theresa May unveiled her flagship immigration package as home secretary, she didn't even attempt to hide its cruelty. She flaunted it. The aim was to create a 'really hostile environment for illegal immigrants,' she boasted. The plan was to make their lives unbearable" (Goodfellow 2019:2). However, not only 'illegal immigrants' have been caught in the web of these policies, so have British citizens without documentation (see the Windrush Scandal) and asylum seekers deemed illegal, when legally coming to seek refuge in the UK (ibid). Fast forward to now, and former Home Secretary Priti Patel's Nationality and Borders Act has been described as "the biggest legal assault on international refugee law ever seen in the UK" (Husain QC et al. 2021:2), by four barristers. Tens of thousands of people are stuck in the asylum system, many waiting years for their decision (Free Movement 2022). People face detention, deportation, and destitution in the UK asylum system, including children (Goodfellow 2019). Asylum seekers are not legally allowed to work or access public funds, apart from Asylum Support if eligible, which provides £40.85 per week (GOV.UK 2022d) and accommodation that is predominantly far away from their location and has been described as 'disgraceful', 'unsanitary' and 'unsafe' (Townsend and Ayres 2018). The Refugee Council (2021) and Helen Bamber Foundation (Dorling 2021) are among many that report the detriment to refugees physical and mental health from being in the UK asylum system.

Moreover, with the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, refugees arriving may be sent to Rwanda, and not have the chance for asylum in the UK at all. With this act, the UK is creating what the UNHCR (2021) calls a 'deeply' concerning, 'discriminatory' 'two-tier system'. If a refugee enters the country in what the government refers to as a 'legal' pathway, e.g., family reunification or a resettlement scheme, they can claim asylum in the UK and if successful be granted protection. However, all pathways that refugees enter the country are lawful because international human rights law grants anyone the right to seek asylum. The Nationality and Borders Act penalises refugees who have entered the country through the most common routes, e.g., without a visa through dangerous routes such as lorries or boats and claiming asylum upon arrival. It also criminalises people, with sentences of up to 4 years in prison for someone they deem to arrive 'illegally' (GOV.UK 2022f). Part of this penalisation is the deal introduced in June 2022, where refugees who have entered the UK through these common routes since January 2022 can be deported to Rwanda for processing and asylum. This means they will be in Rwanda while their application is processed, and if successful, they will be granted protection in Rwanda, not the UK. Rwanda is 4,000 miles from the UK and criticised for its human rights record (NPR 2022), including by the UK government as recently as last year during the UN 37th Universal Periodic Review (GOV.UK 2021).

The Home Office (GOV.UK 2022c) has begun publishing statistics on what it calls 'irregular' migration, where it reports that Afghan nationals were the highest number of people entering via small boats between January and March 2022, making 24% of all small boat entries. This is a steep increase of Afghans to prior statistics, where for all of 2021, Afghans were 4.6% of small boat entries (1,323). This rise comes following the US-NATO withdrawal and rerising of the Taliban, where Afghanistan has been left with one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world (Beasely cited in UN 2021).

The UK Foreign Affairs Committee (2022) inquiry reports that the Foreign Office has been deliberately evasive and misleading about the failures of the withdrawal, and civil servants felt the need to risk their jobs to come forward and whistle blow "to bring to light the appalling mismanagement of the crisis, and the misleading statements to Parliament that followed" (ibid). However, the fast-rising number of Afghans who are fleeing their home to take dangerous routes to safety, if they get to the UK, are being met with the UK's 'hostile environment' policy and new asylum overhaul, rather than OWW. Meanwhile, many Afghans under OWW are experiencing the failures discussed.

2.3. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented the context behind forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK. The first subchapter shows the conflictual history of UK-Afghan relations, and how British imperialist actions have attributed to the crisis in Afghanistan through centuries of invasion, war, occupation, withdrawal, and imperial interference. The second subchapter looks at the refugee crisis in the Afghan-UK context, including the UK's 'hostile environment' policy, Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and OWW. This demonstrates the structural barriers Afghans are facing in making a home in the UK, and inequalities in the asylum system for different Afghans. The following chapter will now present the theoretical framework, providing relevant scholarship, and the overarching theoretical framework for this thesis.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Home has been intricately studied in the context of migration. It is particularly important for refugee studies because the experience that all refugees share is being forced to leave their home. Therefore, the most far-reaching problem of the global refugee crisis is the number of people who lose their home and have to try and make new ones. This theoretical framework is split into three subchapters. The first subchapter presents scholarship and conceptualisations of home that are particularly relevant for this research. The second subchapter looks further into theories on forced migration and the importance of home, presenting scholarship on transnationalism and a person's roots. The final subchapter then introduces the overarching theoretical framework for this research, arguing that there are four potential states of being after (forced) migration: the 'double absence' (Sayad 2004), the 'double presence', the 'single absence' and the 'single presence'.

3.1. Researching Home

3.1.1. Defining Home

Home has been given many definitions, including the home as a physical shelter, home as a feeling, and home as a social relation made up of other people, objects, and a sense of belonging. Home is constructed, it is not predetermined or given (Mallett 2004; Taylor 2015; Boccagni 2017; Ratnam 2018). It is an idealised notion with positive connotations of intimacy, relaxation, belonging and loving relationships. However, it can also be a negative experience, and everything in between, with domestic abuse, marginalisation, exclusion, loss, trauma, and a lack of these positive aspects (Mallett 2004; Ratnam 2018). Societies approach home differently, where in many Western societies it is a social norm for children to leave the family home in early adulthood (Mallett 2004). However, in many other societies, including Afghanistan, adult children often live in their family home and live together for generations (Muller 2010; Evason 2019; Khan 2013). People make homes with many different people. However, numerous scholars present the importance of family and home, where the ideal home is seen as where family is (Mallet 2004; Hammer 2009; Rinne-Koski and Riukulehto 2016; Jones 2000), and the childhood home is understood as particularly important as a site of memory and the formation of identity, belonging, and social relationships (Ratnam 2018; Mallett 2004). The idealised family home offers insight into the potential detriment of home without family or loved ones, or of a family where there is trauma. The breadth of research on

home is too vast to give a complete overview. Therefore, I will now provide three conceptual frameworks that are relevant to this research.

3.1.2. Conceptual Frameworks on Home

Three conceptual frameworks that are particularly relevant for this research come from Taylor (2015), Boccagni (2017), and Sommerville (1992). Taylor's (2015) work on home and refugees is especially helpful, coming from a similar approach to this thesis. Through her ethnography with Cypriot refugees in north London, Taylor presents her conceptual framework of four elements of home: the 'spatial home', the 'temporal home', the 'material home', and the 'relational home'. She describes that the spatial home is the space your home is in, the environment, for example a city, countryside, town, or village. The temporal home is the time element of home, for example how the length of time away from home or in a new home affects your experience, perspectives, and memories of home. This accounts for recurring daily events and special occasions which are key to homemaking, such as family dinners or religious holidays. The material home is the sensory and embodied experience, referring to foods and smells in the home. Meanwhile, the relational home refers to the importance of relationships with people that centre around the home. This framework will be used to look at the multifaceted experiences of home for the interlocuters.

Another conceptual framework is Boccagni's (2017), theorising that home is centred around three aspects – security, familiarity, and control. To Boccagni (2017), security refers to the importance of safety, that home is a place for protection and integrity. Familiarity is understood both emotionally and cognitively. It refers to the comfort and intimacy of home, as well as stability and the time aspect of being there temporarily or continually, which is particularly relevant for refugees who are forced to leave. Finally, control refers to the autonomy and choice of deciding what your home will be and what happens inside it. Boccagni takes a normative approach of what the home should be – the ideal home versus actual experiences of home. However, this is highly relevant to look at what is at stake when someone has to lose theirs or does not have these elements.

The final conceptual framework is Sommerville's (1992) signifiers of home. Through his research on homelessness and what he terms 'rooflessness' or 'rootlessness', Sommerville posits that there are six to seven central signifiers of home, including "shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode and (possibly) paradise" (Sommerville 1992:7). He argues that 'shelter' is access to satisfactory 'material conditions', 'hearth' is "emotional and physical well-being"

(ibid), ‘heart’ is caring and loving relationships, ‘privacy’ is privacy and control, and ‘abode’ is a place to live and sleep. Each of these have been introduced in Watson and Austerberry’s 1986 ethnography on British women’s experiences of housing and homelessness. However, he additionally includes ‘roots’ and ‘paradise’. ‘Roots’ is “a sense of individual identity” (ibid), raising the connection between roots and identity, and ‘paradise’ is the “‘ideal home’ as distinct from the home of everyday life” (ibid). Homelessness then, is the lack or opposite of these elements. Sommerville’s conceptual framework is useful here to analyse what ‘signifiers’ or ‘building blocks’ (Hage 1997) of home are relevant for the interlocuters, and if the ones identified create a feeling of absence or presence. As you can see, each of the conceptualisations on home here are overlapping, together offering a comprehensive ideation of home.

3.1.3. The Importance of Memories and Time (Past, Present, and Future)

Many scholars address that home is a key site for memories, which is complicated for refugees who no longer have (physical) access to them (Ratnam 2018; Taylor 2015; Mallett 2004; Boccagni 2017; Hage 1997; Agnew 2005). Time is key to memories. The past, present, and future intertwine, where “much work on memory sees it not as a reflection of the past, but rather as a mechanism for dealing with the needs of the present and the future, by organising fragments of experience into frames of relevance” (Taylor 2009:14). Meanwhile, Agnew (2005) recognises two streams that memories can go down, to create idealised nostalgia, or trauma you do not want to return to. It has been found that emotional experiences can create particularly vivid memories (Heuer and Reisberg 1990). Leaving your home is often an emotional experience, especially through forced displacement, where traumatic memories can be extraordinarily persistent (Berntsen 2001).

Hage (1997) argues that people who migrate use nostalgia in a positive sense for homebuilding. Nostalgia is often seen negatively, as getting lost or stuck in memories of an idealised past, because of a present you are less happy with. This can be true for someone who is forced to migrate; however, nostalgia can be used positively as well. Hage gives the example of a “positive encounter with a person, a sound, a smell or a situation which offers an intimation of an imagined homely experience in the past: an experience of ‘back home’” (ibid:6). This can be seen through trying to find and cook foods from the homeland or build a community similar to the one you know. People who become refugees cannot get back to where they were, so may build new homes through drawing on what they already know. Hage argues that these nostalgic

encounters give a positive homely feeling and "It is only when faced with the impossibility of homebuilding that nostalgia can degenerate into a debilitating homesickness" (Hage 1997:5). I argue that this is a one-sided look at the migration experience. You can both feel at home where you are and feel homesick for somewhere else, as the following subchapter will discuss. Moreover, a positive encounter that reminds someone of the homeland may bring negative emotions when they have been forced to leave. I will use this argumentation to see if it is applicable to the experiences of Afghan people in the UK.

3.1.4. Sub-conclusion

This subchapter has explored theoretical frameworks on home, particularly looking at definitions and the meaning of home for different people and scholars. I have introduced three conceptualisations that are particularly relevant for this research, from Taylor (2015), Boccagni (2017), and Sommerville (1992). I have also discussed the importance of memories and time regarding the home and refugee experience, looking at how the past, present, and future intertwine. The next subchapter will now look further at theoretical frameworks on home and forced migration, discussing arguments on transnationalism and a person's roots. This recognises that home is complicated for refugees who are forced to leave, where home becomes multi-sited with the one you have lost and the new ones that try to be made.

3.2. Multi-sited Belongings: Transnationalism and a Person's Roots

In social sciences and migration studies there is increasing attention on the concept of transnationalism. This refers to the increasing movement of people, cultures and economies, across the world. It looks at the multifaceted ways that people try to stay connected across borders, which is particularly relevant for the interlocuters, who have been forced to leave Afghanistan and migrate to the UK. As will be discussed, central to discussions on transnationalism is the conversation on roots, which has been approached from many perspectives. On one side, we see arguments that forced migration from home is a permanent unrooting that leaves a person ruptured. Meanwhile, others argue that transnationalism means people flow from one country to another and are not rooted to one place anymore. However, both are a one-sided look at the refugee experience. I approach this research from the perspective that people can be rooted and fluid. Most people do have roots, they are not rootless. However, these roots can change, grow, and move. Someone can migrate and retain roots to their homeland despite being physically absent, as well as grow new roots in their new locations. However, the trauma of (forced) dislocation can feel like an unrooting, a loss of your

roots, where you have to leave them behind and find it difficult to grow new ones in an unfamiliar place. Moreover, refugees are structurally restricted from moving and growing new roots through hostile immigration policies and racism.

3.2.1. Roots and the Movement of People

Transnationalism has been defined by Schiller et al. as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Schiller et al. 1992:1). They developed their theory on transnationalism because they felt their previous work on migration became insufficient in the transnational world. They argue that "The word immigrant evokes images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted, the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture" (ibid). However, in today's transnational world, people are making homes in more than one place, keeping ties to their homeland but growing roots in new places. They term this 'transmigrants', who manage relations across borders, including with family, socially, politically, religiously, professionally, and more. This is useful to address the agency of people who migrate, who are constantly making decisions and taking actions to try and keep old roots alive whilst building new ones. However, as will be discussed, this runs the risk of neglecting the traumas of (forced) migration and the global structures policing certain people's movement. Malkki (1992) echoes Schiller et al.'s argument on transnationalism, and criticises the Western notion of displacement as a pathological unrooting, which relegates refugees as a problem outside "the national order of things" (Malkki 1992:25). On the contrary, increasingly people are on the move through displacement and migration, where they "in- vent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases… through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit" (Malkki 1992:24). Black British academic, Stuart Hall (2019), addresses that black British diasporas are not detached from their roots in their countries of heritage and origin. He cites Chamberlain's work, demonstrating the strong links Bajan Britons keep with Barbados. She argues that UK Bajans keep a strong Bajan identity and feeling of what culture and home means in Barbados, where extended family is a central network for keeping these links and memories alive (ibid).

3.2.2. Hegemony and the Trauma of (Forced) Migration

Whilst recognising the agency and successes of refugees in making new homes and keeping ties to their homelands, it is important not to neglect the adversity inflicted through (forced) migration and the structures of hegemony that people are operating in. Taylor (2015)

recognises that despite migration being commonplace, the world is still dominated by borders. Meanwhile, Kibreab urges "social scientists to not lose sight of the oppressive nature of current migration regimes" and "structural constraints that shape refugee experiences" (Kibreab cited in Jansen and Löfving 2008:4-5). For refugees, movement is forced, they do not share the privileges of people who migrate out of choice, and those termed the 'cosmopolitan elite'. Moreover, refugees and particularly non-European refugees face a global regime that is increasingly hostile, xenophobic, and exclusionary (Pellizzi cited in Malkki 1992).

I apply the lens of transnationalism similarly to Taylor (2015), who recognises it is important to challenge both 'sedentrist' and 'deterritorialised' approaches. Being removed from your homeland does not necessarily mean you are forever unrooted and in an existential crisis. However, one must not neglect the trauma of being unrooted from your homeland. Papadopoulos (2002) introduces the concepts of 'mosaic substratum' and 'nostalgic disorientation' to examine psychological trauma that can arise through losing your home. The former is the mosaic of the elements of home that make our identity, including belonging to a country, a certain language, a "space permeated by certain smells and tastes, etc" (Papadopoulos 2002:17). The latter is the unconscious effect of the loss of that home, the "disturbance of the mosaic substratum" (ibid), which "can create… panic, depression, apathy, suspiciousness, [and] splitting" (ibid). This splitting, being split across multiple places, will now be discussed, looking at culture, identity and belonging.

3.2.3. Culture, Identity and Belonging

Agnew (2005) addresses the difficulty migrants face, having to redefine and rediscover who they are in a new 'home', at the same time as experiencing racism, xenophobia, and social isolation. She recognises how people "may feel constantly torn between 'here' and 'there,' between their countries of origin and their countries of residence" (Agnew 2005:16). Taylor (2015) conceptualises this with her notion of multiple homes or no homes. Refugees can have multiple homes. However, this may lead them to feel like they have no home, excluded from their original home, and not feeling at home in the new place they live. Hage (1997) addresses the significance of culture in being able to feel at home, particularly for people who have migrated, in his case, from Lebanon to Australia. Food and other soulful practices are key sites for homemaking and retaining and growing roots. Eating homeland foods together and starting businesses to share them, like restaurants and shops, are central, where increasing multiculturalism improves the public and private chances to do this.

3.2.4. Sub-conclusion

This subchapter has looked at scholarship on transnationalism and a person's roots, to address the multifaceted and diverse experiences people face after (forced) migration from home. The next subchapter will synthesise this scholarship to propose an overarching theoretical framework for this research, looking at four potential states of being after (forced) migration: the 'double absence' (Sayad 2004), the 'double presence', the 'single absence' and the 'single presence'.

3.3. The Double Absence and the Double Presence

3.3.1. Abdelmalek Sayad and the Double Absence

A theory that is extremely useful here, to look at (forced) migration and whether people are able to feel at home, grow new roots and retain old ones, is Abdelmalek Sayad's (2004) theory on the 'double absence'. Through conducting ethnography with Algerian people who have migrated to France for work, Sayad argues that migration is a permanent rupture in someone's life that results in ongoing suffering and tension. The initial migration is the first rupture, which is often followed by others stemming from this. This is in line with the idea that migration is a permanent unrooting that rips you from your home and possibility for inner wellbeing. Sayad presents a science of immigration and emigration, where he argues that "immigration results in a presence, and emigration finds expression in an absence" (Sayad 2004:120). However, the basis of this double absence is being neither here nor there; being physically absent from the homeland, but symbolically absent from the new location as well, because you are living in adversity and marginality in your new location, and longing for and psychologically focused on your homeland. One finds themselves living split across two different worlds and thus feels absent from both.

Sayad raises the importance of looking at the context of certain migrations, and the history and conditions that lead people to experience this. For him, this is France's colonisation of Algeria. Here, it is the context addressed in the Chapter 2, including Afghanistan's crisis, attributed to by Britain's part-colonisation of Afghanistan, and centuries of invasion, occupation, withdrawal, and imperial interference. Sayad's theory is crucial for addressing the traumas of (forced) migration. However, this is a one-sided look. What also needs to be foregrounded is experiences where people have been able to feel present after migration, growing new roots

and retaining roots to their homeland and previous locations. This will be addressed in the next subchapter.

3.3.2. Growing New Roots and Retaining Old Ones: The Double Presence

Through Sayad's (2004) theorising on the 'double absence', he argues that migration is a rupture in someone's life, an ongoing suffering. Sayad recognises presence within this absence. However, here I identify two separate but overlapping and interlinked experiences: the 'double absence' and the 'double presence'. The double absence is a state of feeling neither here nor there. However, the double presence is a state of feeling both here and there. The refugee experience is diverse, multifaceted, and experienced differently by everyone. Someone may be able to feel present in their new location and in their homeland, through homemaking practices, roots, and connections they have grown and retained. However, (forced) dislocation can lead to a double absence, a traumatic unrooting, loss of roots, and structural oppression that restricts new roots from being grown. However, refugees are continuously using their agency to navigate their lives, try to build new homes and retain their feeling of home and roots in their homeland while they have to be gone.

Veikou and Siapera (2015) have addressed this in their conceptualisation of copresence. In their analysis of Sayad, they challenge his arguments through presenting ethnography on how migrants and refugees engage in multiple practices that lead them to feel present after they migrate. In line with theorists of transnationalism, they address that since Sayad's time of writing in the 1980s, digital technology has transformed the way people can feel present through staying connected with one another across borders and spaces. They argue that this can lead to a state of complex copresence in the place of a double absence: "While absence pointed to an impossibility of belonging, constant presence points to an ongoing construction and management of belonging to different groups, communities or networks" (ibid:124).

Quoting Derrida, Veikou and Siapera (2015) recognise that absence and presence are not in opposition to one another, they are simply different ways of being. What Veikou and Siapera demonstrate through their ethnography, is the theoretical importance in recognising the multifaceted forms of presence that migrants may experience: "This is not meant to move the emphasis from one end of the binary to the other, nor to imply that migration is now a positive experience. Rather, it shows a significant shift from understanding migration in terms of physical absence to understanding it involving the management of continuous mediated presence" (ibid:136). I argue that this feeling of absence can still be true. However, recognising

the potential for copresence is an important shift to acknowledge the diverse forms of presence people navigate and can experience after migration.

A lot of scholars looking at absence and presence focus on the emergence of digital technology and how this leads people, including migrants, to feel absent or present (Veikou and Siapera 2015; Gerger 2002; Lombard and Ditton 2006; Diminescu 2008; Lee 2004; Leurs 2019). However, I argue that there are multifaceted ways that migrants engage in homemaking practices to feel present. This was happening before digital technology was created. As Hage (1997) argues, feeling at home comes through the 'homebuilding' strategies of people who migrate, which is the construction of "affective building blocks (blocks of a homely feeling)" (Hage 1997:2). To be successful, he argues these blocks need to cultivate "four key feelings: security, familiarity, community and a sense or possibility of hope" (ibid). These blocks are the settlement strategies "used by migrants to make themselves feel at home where they actually are" (ibid:4). This is particularly useful for this research and the theoretical framework, to look at which 'building blocks' contribute to a feeling of absence, presence, roots, and home for the interlocuters.

3.3.3. Four Potential States of Being After (Forced) Migration

This subchapter has looked at Sayad's (2004) theory of the 'double absence' and developed the theory of the 'double presence', which has been approached through scholarship on 'copresence' (notably Veikou and Siapera 2015) and migrant homemaking before (notably Hage 1997) and recalibrated here. However, I argue that there are four potential states of being, which I will look at regarding Afghan refugees in the UK. This includes the double absence and the double presence, but also the single absence, and single presence. The single absence and presence come from the fact that someone may cut all ties to their homeland, due to trauma or other reasons. Therefore, they may be present in their new location only, or feel absent in their new location for the reasons addressed. It will be my focus to explore the multifaceted experiences and homemaking practices that UK Afghans embark on to try and feel present in their new location and homeland; to grow new roots, retain existing ones, and feel at home. I will also address what leads to feelings of absence, and if they are structurally restricted from homemaking in the UK.

3.4. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented scholarship on home, including conceptual frameworks of home that are particularly relevant for this research, and theorising on transnationalism and a person's roots, to look at the diverse experiences of (forced) migration. I have addresses both the agency used by people who become refugees to navigate their lives, as well as the structures of hegemony they are restricted by. The chapter has also introduced the overarching framework for this research, arguing that there are four potential states of being after (forced) migration: the 'double absence', the 'double presence', the 'single absence', and the 'single presence'. The next chapter will now look at existing qualitative studies on experiences of home for Afghans refugees in the UK.

Chapter 4: Literature Review

My research efforts have led me to believe, as reiterated by Gladwell (2021), that scholarship on Afghan refugees in the UK is not extensive. This chapter will firstly explore academic ethnography, then move onto first-hand accounts in news publications. This includes reporting on the lived experience of the UK 'hostile environment', Nationality and Borders Act 2022, and OWW.

4.1. Ethnography on UK Afghans

A key scholar on Afghan refugees in the UK is Khan (2013; 2013b; 2014; 2021), who conducted ethnography between 2009 and 2017 with Afghan people who migrated to Brighton. Drawing on ethnography from 2009 to 2011, and particularly four life story interviews with male taxi-driver Zmarai, Khan (2013) conceptualises that her interlocuters' experience 'immobility', feeling hopeless, down, and stuck. One describes that "life is good" (Sparghai cited in Khan 2013a:530). She lives in Brighton with her husband and children, visits family in Afghanistan annually, stays connected via Skype, and is financially well-off. This supports the double presence theory and scholarship arguing that video-calling helps people to stay connected to the homeland in the transnational world, thus feeling happy where they are (Veikou and Siapera 2015). It also varies with many other refugee experiences, where returning home to visit is not an option (UNHCR 2022c). Others have also achieved success, starting businesses in Brighton. However, most of Khan's (2013) interlocuters discuss their suffering. They describe racism from bosses and customers, pity and horror from Brits that they are Afghan, health problems, and inadequate housing and employment conditions, especially for people without status This is very demonstrative of Sayad's (2004) arguments on suffering, where Khan describes that any feelings of triumph are "lost in the soulless reality of migrant life" (ibid:527).

Fischer (2017) researches the social relations and identities of Afghan people in the UK. She raises the importance of having family in the UK, and social connections to other UK Afghans. Afghan woman Helai says that existing Pashtun communities in the UK support new Pashtuns, which helps integration. Like Hage (1997), Taylor (2015), and Ratnam (2018), Fischer addresses the importance of homeland foods and Afghan businesses like shops and supermarkets, which provide public spaces for everyday encounters with other UK Afghans. She states that some areas of London are good for this, where several Afghan businesses are already established. Like the British-Bajan people in Chamberlain's (cited in Hall 2019) study,

Fischer's interlocuters say they very much have an 'Afghan identity'. Doctoral student Muktar also discusses that an Afghan identity is put onto him by Britons, stating "no matter where we go, people look at me as an Afghan, you know?" (Muktar cited in Fischer 2017:30). Fischer argues that Mukhtar is positioned by "British society as generalised other. Fed by media images" (Fischer 2017:30). This is in line with Said's argumentation on Orientalism and Othering, where Middle Eastern and Asian people are demonised and inferiorised by Western societies and discourse, on the backdrop of (post)colonialism (Said 1993; Said 1979), the 'War on Terror', and rising Islamophobia (Morey and Yaqin 2011). Fischer and Khan's research is useful here because it provides ethnography on the lived experiences of Afghans in the UK, and theorising that may support or contrast to the experiences of the interlocuters.

Several studies on Afghan refugees in the UK focus on youth specifically (Meloni 2019), particularly people who arrived as 'unaccompanied children' and then turned 18 (Chase 2020; Gladwell and Elwyn 2012; Gladwell 2021). Chase (2020) explains many Afghan children are granted to stay in the UK on 'discretionary leave' rather than refugee status, which expires when you turn 18. Some are granted protection upon legal 'adulthood', but many experience years of limbo in the asylum process, and asylum rejections, living without status and thus facing destitution, criminality, detention, deportation, and re-migration. One of the interlocuters, Rayi, also came to the UK as an 'unaccompanied minor' and has since turned 18. I will examine how this is applicable to his experience in the analysis.

4.2. Published Stories on UK Afghans

There has been a multitude of news stories published on Afghan experiences in the UK. Many Afghans discuss that leaving family and loved ones is one of, if not the, hardest parts of losing home. Halaimzai describes how her "first night away from home was the longest night of my life" (Halaimzai 2021). She had slept beside her grandmother every night, and now she was without her, feeling lost and lonely. Both Hashemi (cited in Strick 2021) and Orfani (cited in Walker 2021) say they feel depressed having left the people they love and having to live without them. For pregnant Orfani, wife of UK army interpreter evacuated upon the withdrawal, this is not only from leaving Afghanistan, but being relocated to a remote part of Scotland, eight hours away from family and friends who were evacuated to Britain with her. Other members of her family are stuck in Afghanistan, so she is constantly anxious about what will happen to them. This echoes Firas, who worked at the UK Embassy in Afghanistan. He says "I can't concentrate on my new life. I'm too worried about the people I've left behind"

(Firas cited in Gentleman 2022). A few months after Firas said this his fear was realised; he was sent a video of his father being abducted (ibid). This demonstrates what UK Afghans are facing, that restrict their ability to build new homes in the UK.

Hashemi, who was CEO for the Afghan Chamber of Commerce, also needed to be evacuated. He says him, his wife, and children are all depressed "after losing our home and not knowing what will happen next" (Hashemi cited in Strick 2021). His 14-year-old son cries because he has no friends in the UK and the culture is unknown. Meanwhile, Hashemi describes a mix of experiences with British people. Some locals "look at us like we are refugees and we're not part of the community, which we are not" (ibid). Like Khan's interlocuters, he explains they have faced abuse on Facebook. However, he says kindness from other Britons has been 'wonderful'. A family invited them to a barbeque and offered the kids games and a bike ride. Additionally, after their story was shared by the Evening Standard, hundreds of families in the area contacted, offering children's karate lessons and to come around for tea (ibid). The experience of his family demonstrate how local people's behaviour can help UK Afghans feel at home, or present abuse and make them feel alienated.

Halaimzai (2021) discusses her mental distress after being forced to leave her home in Afghanistan, and how the past comes to feature prominently in the present through persistent memories. It was crucial for them to have hope to survive the journey, that the UK would be safe, and they would no longer have uncertainty. However, this is not the case. Her family have faced repeated racist harassment and attacks. Many people have shouted 'pakis' at them, put rubbish through their post box, and a man removed his belt and beat her mother outside their house. Halaimzai shouted and hit him to stop, so his friends chased her. The police released the attackers without charge, saying they "will grow out of this behaviour" (ibid). This shows the lack of safety for Halaimzai's family in the UK, which, unsurprisingly, leads to not feeling at home.

Demonstrating Hage (1997), Taylor (2015), Ratnam (2018), and Fischer's (2017) arguments on homeland foods and multiculturalism, Halaimzai (2021) addresses the significance of multiculturalism in London, where her family finally found south Asian spices, sweets, halal food, bulk vegetables and fruit, and Bollywood music again. Whereas Orfani's husband, Hakimi, says there is no halal food or mosque where they live, and he travels 2.5 hours to buy the food they need (Hakimi cited in Walker 2021). Meanwhile, Dr Nasmi (cited in Miller 2018) and Sayyad (cited in Miller 2018) discuss how much they like living in London because of the

diversity and multiculturalism. However, Sayyad also experienced his worst racist encounter from a London police officer. These accounts demonstrate the importance of being able to see and retain some of your culture in your new location to feel at home. They also demonstrate how important place is, where a certain area can lead to isolation, attacks, and not feeling at home, or seeing Afghan food and culture and thus being able to feel more at home.

4.3. Lived Experience of the UK Asylum System

There has been a breadth of reporting on Afghan lived experiences of the UK asylum system. As addressed in Chapter 2, while some Afghans are categorised under OWW, despite the failings within, others are facing the 'hostile environment' and Nationality and Borders Act. This 2022 act includes asylum seekers who arrived after January 2022 being at risk of deportation to Rwanda for processing and, if successful, asylum. This includes an Afghan man who came to the UK as a child in 2008. He explains that, after four years in the UK, he turned 18 and the Home Office issued him an asylum refusal. This led him to travel to France to claim asylum there. However, he was returned under the Dublin Regulation. His asylum claim was refused by the UK again and so he went back to France. However, "he was homeless with 'no home, no food, no nothing'" (anonymous cited in Bulman 2022). He arrived back in the UK in May 2022, after these rules were introduced. This means that despite him claiming asylum as a minor in 2008, he has been issued a 'notice of intent' that he may be deported to Rwanda, so he attempted suicide (ibid).

Firas and his brother demonstrate the difference of OWW versus the 'hostile environment'. Firas was evacuated. However, his brother Omar, journalist, and former Ministry of Foreign Affairs worker, migrated to the UK through dangerous routes on land and small boat. Firas has been given refugee status and indefinite leave to remain, as fast tracked through OWW; now receiving public funds (Universal Credit) and appointments with the Job Centre. However, Omar was put in immigration detention and is now stuck in the asylum system waiting to hear about his claim, unable to work or access public funds (Firas and Omar cited in Gentleman 2022).

As addressed in Chapter 2 on the failures of OWW, over 10,000 Afghans are stuck in temporary hotels, without information on when they will move. A key issue here is the temporality and continuous uprooting. The hotels are temporary emergency accommodation, and many are being moved from hotel to hotel before being rehoused, like Firas and his family (Gentleman 2022). Home practices like cooking are not possible in the hotels, which do not have kitchens

(Bulman 2022). This has led some Afghans to tell the Home Office they will see if they can find their own housing, but the Home Office replies saying they will remove them from the scheme if they do (anonymous cited in Bulman 2022).

Hussein, who was a UK army translator, is in a hotel with his wife and children. He says:

> "Occasionally his children cry from homesickness. 'We had a big house in Afghanistan, with a garden with orange trees, apple trees, a lawn… They would play outside all the time. Sometimes they're very sad in the hotel. They miss their toys, their grandparents, their bicycles. So I have to explain the situation again. You saw the shooting on the way here? Our neighbours would have killed us if we'd stayed. That's why we came'" (Hussein cited in Gentleman 2022).

This incorporates the importance of place, people, and safety for home. They have lost their house, garden, belongings, and grandparents, to live in a temporary hotel in England, but do not have a choice because of their safety. Many people have said they would rather go back home to Afghanistan than stay in the UK (Hashemi's son cited in Strick 2021; Townsend 2021). Meanwhile, a doctor relayed his patients experiences, where people have been medicated to deal with the distress (anonymous cited in Townsend 2021). It must be addressed that many of the experiences featured here come from people who worked in high status jobs connected to the UK in Afghanistan. This shows a need to platform other UK-Afghan voices as well.

4.4. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided existing research on experiences of home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK. It presents people's experiences of losing their home, trying to make new ones, and structural barriers restricting their ability to do so. In Chapter 6: Analysis, I will see if and how this is applicable to the interlocuters' experiences, and how their experiences can shine a light on new findings. The next chapter will now present the research methodology.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1. Studying People's Lives: The Narrative Approach

This chapter presents the research methodology. I have conducted a mixed methods approach, gathering primary and secondary data. The centre of my research is primary research, platforming the life experiences of seven Afghan people in the UK who I conducted virtual semi-structured interviews with. However, to provide a deeper look at what home means for UK Afghans, I have gathered secondary data of lived experiences that have already been published, by ethnographers and news outlets. As addressed in Chapter 4, academic research on Afghan refugees in the UK is limited. My primary data provides much needed, in-depth narratives from seven people, and I investigate this and the secondary data from an academic perspective, offering insight into the meaning of home in the context of forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK.

Many scholars address the importance of studying people's lives, to shine a light on individual stories, as well as the societal issues their experiences represent (Boylorn 2012; Lehmann 2006). This thesis looks at the personal experiences of the people in this research, thereby presenting their stories, but also the wider issues including the refugee crisis, UK asylum, British and Afghan home-life, and Britain's relationship and role in the Afghan human rights crisis. This, like much qualitative research (Hammarberg et al. 2016), is not representative of all Afghan people in the UK. However, it platforms rich micro-narratives of the people included.

5.1.1. Virtual Semi-structured Interviews

5.1.1.1. Semi-structured Interviewing

There are a total of seven interviews, one with each interlocuter, and due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviewing (Spradley 2016), they ranged from 45 minutes to 3 and a half hours. Because I am focusing on the micro-experiences of refugees, qualitative interviewing is the methodology to use. As addressed by Zhang and Wildemuth, "interviews are a widely used tool to access people's experiences and their inner perceptions, attitudes and feelings of reality" (Zhang and Wildemuth 2017:239). Semi-structured interviews are the best choice, because of the thesis topic, time limit of the interlocuters' availability, and the power it gives the interviewee to guide the conversation (Spradley 2016). Rather than researching someone's life story, where unstructured interviews would be a great choice (Zhang and Wildemuth 2017), I

am researching the topic of home, which is a specific and abstract concept. Therefore, it was important to have a set of preestablished questions to guide the conversation (see appendix 2: Interview Guide). However, I used open-ended questions that allowed the interviewee to take the conversation where they wanted. Additionally, I gave time and room for the interlocuter to diverge from the questions. This is better ethically and for the research because it allows them to talk about what they think is important, and these tangents can give great insight (Ayres 2012; Spradley 2016). A successful interview "is a conversation" (Slayton 2018:5), where active listening (Ayres 2012) and empathy (Hedican 2012) are central. I conducted all my conversations with empathy and active listening at the forefront, which was key to building rapport and having an "ease of exchanges" (Morgan and Guevara 2012:2). While cultivating rapport and empathy, it is key to retain objectivity (Hedican 2012). I have done this through staying true to the facts of the topic and interlocuters stories, whilst respecting their emotions and views in relation to this.

5.1.1.3. Virtual Interviewing

All the interviews were conducted virtually, rather than face-to-face. I offered the interlocuters the choice of which platform they prefer, resulting in one Zoom video-call, one Microsoft Teams video-call, and five WhatsApp audio calls. I found Microsoft Teams the best option because it can record and transcribe the meeting. However, this flexibility gave the interlocuters the option of what works best for them. Virtual interviewing has been increasingly used since the introduction of virtual communication methods, from the telephone, and significantly the internet and platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp, which enable people to communicate across the globe (Janhorban et al. 2014). However, its use has increased since COVID-19, where virtual communication became more necessary (Gruber et al. 2020).

Janhorban et al. address that "the online interview has overcome time and financial constraints, geographical dispersion, and physical mobility boundaries, which have adversely affected onsite interviews" (Janhorban et al. 2014:1). This was true here, where I was in Denmark and the interlocuters, Britain. Due to the financial and time constraints of this thesis, virtual interviewing was necessary. Moreover, virtual interviewing removed the risk of increasing COVID-19 infection rates. As addressed by Gruber et al. "Research designs require flexibility, and adjustments… do not always have to lead exclusively to disadvantages" (Gruber at al. 2020). I found virtual interviewing successful. It has been argued that interviewees speak less in telephone interviews (Irvine 2011). I cannot assess how it would have improved in person.

However, each of the conversations were dominated by the interlocuter speaking. You have less ability to read the room and pick up on non-verbal communication and social cues such as body language (Gruber et al. 2020). However, this was improved by video-calling for the two in question, to read facial expressions (Sullivan cited in Janhorban et al. 2021). Moreover, the audio calls were still successful. Chiumento et al. (cited in Gruber et al. 2020) address that virtual interviewing can restrict relationship-building, which is crucial for qualitative research. However, I found there was good rapport in each interview, where we had in-depth conversations, and I received a great deal of intricate and important data that was on topic. Ethics were prioritised throughout this process, as discussed in subchapter 5.3., through digital communication instead (Deakin and Wakefield 2013).

5.1.2. Secondary Data on Lived Experiences

I also gathered secondary data through researching on the internet and in academic journals and books. This provides a wider study, through presenting lived experiences of UK Afghans that have already been published as well. Devine (2003) recognises the benefits of using secondary data, because it enables me to have an increased sample size that I would not have accessed otherwise, and to generate intellectual advancement, through creating new knowledge by analysing data that is already out there, in relation to my own. However, key limitations come from the fact I did not collect the data myself. Therefore, I cannot be sure of its quality or research processes, including ethics around confidentiality (Devine 2003; Heaton 1998). To minimise this, I have used peer reviewed academic journals and publications from predominantly well-known British news outlets with satisfactory factual ratings, such as the Guardian, the Independent, iNews, and the Standard (Audit Bureau of Circulations cited in Mayhew 2018; MBFC 2022; MBFC 2022b; MBFC 2022c; MBFC 2022d). However, it is not possible to ensure the quality of the data and research practices, because I was not on the research team.

5.1.3. Thematic Analysis

I have conducted a thematic analysis, coding the data within three themes that were central throughout the interviews: 1. ‘people as home’, 2. ‘safety as home’, and 3. ‘culture as home’. There has been an interactive process between the theory and data, where the data guided my choice of theory, literature, and thematic analysis. However, through this process, the theory, literature, and themes chosen then also inform how the data is presented, and the arguments developed. Thematic analysis is a process of identifying repeated themes or patterns “that

answer a research question" (Kiger and Varpio 2020:1). It is not simply a way to describe what you found, but to interpret its meaning and what it shows (ibid). I have used this because "it is a powerful method for analyzing data that allows researchers to summarize, highlight key features of, and interpret a wide range of data sets" (ibid:8). Meanwhile, I have identified clear themes where there is rich and consistent data to demonstrate the arguments. Braun and Clarke (cited in Kiger and Varpio 2020) advise this is how to succeed in thematic analysis.

5.1.4. Introducing the Interlocuters

For heightened anonymity, I am not going to give an individual introduction of each interlocuter but provide information together. Unintentionally, they are all adult men, ranging from their early 20s to late 30s. They have all come to the UK in the last ten years, where many are exceptional cases in the fact they have been granted refugee status and come through so-called 'safe routes'. One flew to the UK on his United Nations laissez-passer and claimed asylum on arrival; one flew on a student visa still valid and claimed asylum on arrival; one flew on a family reunification visa; and two were evacuated during the 2021 withdrawal. Meanwhile, two came through 'dangerous routes' alone by vehicle, foot, and small boats, with human smugglers. The prementioned five came through so-called safe routes. However, many were not safe, due to the danger faced getting to the plane, and the 2021 evacuation, including crushing crowds and maltreatment from soldiers. Moreover, six out of seven have refugee status. The person who is a client at HMSC is stuck in the asylum system, demonstrating that you find people in different situations dependent on the recruitment methods you use. Here, I have demonstrated awareness of how these factors influence the interlocuters' experiences in my analysis, and supplemented my research with secondary data, to increase the diversity of situations presented.

Regarding their UK housing situations, two are non-street homeless in London and Southeast England; three are private renting in London, Southwest England, and Wales; and two have been housed in social housing by the Home Office, in London and Brighton, through OWW. They subvert the misconceived narrative of 'helpless' refugees that is often perpetuated in mainstream discourse, including academic research (Malkki 1995). They include three former UN workers and a former engineer in Afghanistan, a shop manager, and a 20-year-old university student. Meanwhile, the person without refugee status cannot legally work and came as a child. This is not to say that people with less esteemed educational and professional experience are helpless. It is to say that displacement due to the refugee crisis impacts people

from all walks of life, and this research aims to show the interviewees in their wholeness as people; people who have been required to become refugees because of global conflict.

I gained participation from each person through various means. I connected with one person through staff at my previous internship at HMSC, because he is a client there. Meanwhile, there is one person where I will not share my recruitment method for anonymity. However, I connected with the other five through snowball sampling, where existing interlocuters connect you with people they know (Oregon State University 2020). The fact that I only connected with one person via an NGO, and five through the snowball effect, has been beneficial for this research because of the power dynamics it created. When you recruit via an NGO, you risk a stronger power imbalance (Espinoza 2020), for example the interlocuter feels they need to 'give back' or prove their case. This was minimised for the person from HMSC, because it was made clear this was for my university research, not the NGO, and I power-shared in the ways discussed. However, I found that connecting through snowball sampling increased the ability to have a conversation as two equals. Of course, there is always the dynamics to navigate of 'researcher', 'participant'. However, I found this was minimised, and the conversations came with relative ease. Moreover, snowball sampling has been found to increase the chance of participation (Espinoza 2020), where 6 out of 7 of the people I asked agreed to take part.

5.2. A Participatory Approach

I have used a 'participatory approach', where the interlocuters fed into the research process. So often refugees are researched, the subject not the partner. However, I argue that through having lived experience, they are the experts, and so the best people to make decisions on what the research should look like. Espinoza (2020) makes this point as well. Therefore, the move towards a more participatory approach in academia is much needed and very welcome (Ozkul 2020). However, it is equally important to not pressure the people in your research, who may not have the time or desire to partake in a participatory approach. I asked the interlocuters if they would be interested (see Appendix 1: Information Guide for more information). Two of the interlocuters agreed, through reviewing the interview guide before the interviews began. They both told me the questions were sufficient, which demonstrates the success of the interview guide, or uncertainty on their content to feedback. Moreover, one reviewed his transcript after the interview. In the interview, he told me I should not use everything he shared. Therefore, I made the ethical choice to suggest the reviewing process. However, the others explained they were busy and did not have time. A more extensive participatory approach for

future research could be beneficial, for example partnering with the interlocuters and developing the research together. Or becoming an assistant for refugee-led research. As addressed by Ozkul, "participatory researchers would benefit from understanding participants' own ways of conceptualising and investigating a phenomenon" (Ozkul 2020:229). However, the interlocuters' availability and time constraints of this thesis meant this was the preferred approach. Moreover, due to this research being for my master's degree, there were practical and ethical constraints of partnering with interlocuters, who would be doing the work but not receiving this qualification.

I aimed to power-share and offer the possibility for participation throughout our conversations. I sent the question sheet beforehand. I argue this makes for better results and ethics through increased comfort and ability to prepare. I had planned to do this; however, this was confirmed through my participatory approach without me asking. Four of the interlocuters requested that I send the question sheet beforehand. Meanwhile, one of the participatory approach advisers requested this for everyone, and expertly explained why this is important in research, particularly with refugees:

> *"Do you know the mistrust and insecurity we refugees, we asylum seekers experience? We go through a lot of being judged, being questioned, difficult, difficult situations.... So sometimes there's the issue of insecurity and mistrust a refugee has because of their experience, and they don't want to experience another problem by trying to help someone with their research. Additionally, if they know the questions, they can articulate themselves properly, because English is not their first language".*

Mistrust and insecurity are particularly true in the UK, where refugees go through extensive measures of interrogation and having to prove their case to try and receive asylum and support (Goodfellow 2019). Therefore, it is better ethically and for the research to send interviewees the question sheet beforehand, especially if they request this. Additionally, at the top of the question sheet, I wrote "Here are the questions I will be asking you. If there is a question you do not want to answer you do not need to answer this" (Appendix 2:1), followed by "I want to hear what is important to you in relation to home – so if anything is not covered in these questions, please discuss this" (ibid). At the end of the interview, I asked question "9. Is there anything else you would like to talk about that hasn't been covered by these questions?" (ibid:2). This allowed people to discuss anything that was left unsaid they deemed important, where in one interview we carried on talking for half an hour in response to this question.

5.3. Ethics and Self-positionality

5.3.1. Ethics

Ethics are key to qualitative research, particularly when interviewing people about sensitive and traumatic topics (SRA 2021; SOAS 2022). I have approached this thesis with ethics at the forefront of the research process. This includes during the recruitment of participants, when conducting the interviews, and in my analysis and writing process. Whilst recruiting participants, I found it beneficial to speak to people on the phone rather than message or email only, to hear each other's voices and take the opportunity to try and build some rapport before the interview and answer their questions. I then used message and email to reaffirm and provide more extensive information. This approach increased accessibility and the level of detail I could provide, which is key to research ethics (SRA 2021). I wanted to be transparent and open from the start, so I provided an information guide and consent form, describing the research, aims, procedures, and what their participation would involve (Appendix 1). This is part of 'informed consent' (SRA 2021) and the values of 'openness' and 'honesty' for research integrity (SOAS 2022). I also circulated the questions beforehand, as discussed in subchapter 5.2. I explained that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any moment without explanation. This helps with 'power imbalances', to make clear they are not "obliged or required to take part" (SRA 2021:7). One person withdrew before the interview because of exams. However, the other seven continued.

It was crucial to gain consent from each person before the interviews began (SRA 2021; SOAS 2022). They were given the choice of signing the consent form or giving verbal or written consent over phone or message, which is sufficient (SRA 2021). They all chose to give consent over the phone or message, rather than their official signature. This includes consent for their participation, for me recording the interview, and whether they would like to be anonymised. I recorded the interviews to ensure I had an accurate memory of what they said and not my interpretation of it, to present their story by quoting them verbatim. Some requested to be anonymised and some had no preference, so everyone has been anonymised to protect their privacy and 'avoid harm' (SRA 2021), including changing their names, and removing information that can identify them specifically. I also secured all data stored electronically with passwords and destroyed non-digital note-taking that included personal information. I offered choice where I could, for example what platform to use for the interview and if they prefer video or audio calling. Moreover, I asked if there was anything that would make them more comfortable in the interview, such as someone of their choice being present for support. This

demonstrates SOAS's (2022) ethics values of 'care' and 'respect', through prioritising their needs, and counterbalancing possible power imbalances (SRA 2021) by offering choice.

During and after the interviews, I continued to prioritise ethics and the interlocuters' comfort. This includes stating they did not need to answer a question if they did not want to, offering breaks or stopping when they discussed traumatic topics that upset them, and judging when it was not the right time to ask a specific question. An example of this is when one of the interlocuters told me he does not like to remember Afghanistan because of the trauma it brings him. This was shortly before question "6. What reminds you of home? Has this changed over time?". I took the ethical choice to skip this, to 'avoid harm' (SRA 2021). Moreover, for reasons of anonymity I have not included the transcripts in the appendices. Approaching this thesis from an ethical standpoint helped to build rapport and make the interviewees feel comfortable to share, which demonstrates its not only better ethically but for the research as well.

5.3.2. Self-positionality and Motivation

My motivation for this thesis comes from working with refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers on housing, welfare, and immigration issues, at Haringey Migrant Support Centre, and Akwaaba social centre, in London, UK. It also comes from my lived experience of losing homes, being homeless, and migrating country because of this. However, I am not a refugee. This means I have distance and closeness to the field. Therefore, I have been self-reflective throughout the research process, to ensure, as all researchers need to (Chenail 2011), that my own biases do not distort the research. As addressed by Hickson, reflexivity is recognising how our perceptions influence what we look for, and "being aware of the context, framework and our own knowledge as we analyse and interpret our experiences, interactions and responses" (Hickson 2011:832). I have done this by using reflective thinking throughout (ibid), and journalling (Adrendt and Nuru 2018; Chenail 2011), to ensure I am guided by the data and not my own preconceptions.

The lived experience I do have has been beneficial through creating heightened understanding and relatability of some of the issues, which has increased my ability to build rapport with the interlocuters, and my expertise on the area. I have power-shared by telling parts of my story where appropriate (Espinoza 2020). An example of this, is when an interlocuter discussed his experience in the UK homelessness system with the council, and being denied social housing, because he was deemed 'non-priority'. I shared that this also happened to me, and the mood and power relations of the conversation shifted. It was not simply 'Western researcher'

questioning ‘refugee subject’ relaying their trauma, but a more equal conversation where we had personal experience of this situation. This was a very successful interview, where we built good rapport, I received in depth data, and at the end he told me “*I loved talking with you… so credit to you Emerald and thank you again*”. This presents that the interview was not purely extraction, but more of a mutual exchange (Ozkul 2020). This demonstrates the importance of closeness rather than distance to the field. There is a long-standing assumption in academia, and particularly anthropology, that the further the distance from the field, the better for the research, because closeness creates biases (Beresford 2005). However, I and other researchers argue the opposite (Beresford 2005; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021; Faulkner et al. 2019). All researchers hold biases and must be self-reflective. Meanwhile, Faulkner et al.’s study found that interlocuters were able to be “more open in the interviews” (Faulkner et al. 2019:16) and positive about the interviewing process, when they were interviewed by people with lived experience. They argue that researchers with lived experience “have better understanding of the issues” (ibid:15) and “are better placed to listen without prejudice” (ibid), where one of the interlocuters said “I just felt so much more comfortable and less alien” (ibid). As discussed, I am not a refugee, so I do not have this closeness to the field. However, the closeness I do have was beneficial for the reasons discussed.

5.4. Limitations

Like all research there are limitations to this thesis. Some have already been addressed, such as recruiting through an NGO and using secondary data. Here I will address the limitations of my recruitment methods further, of conducting only one interview with each person, and the lack of gender diversity among the interlocuters. Firstly, snowball sampling led me to find people who have similarities in the fact they all have refugee status, all bar one came through ‘safe routes’, and they predominantly have highly esteemed educational and professional backgrounds. It can be okay and even beneficial to find people in similar situations, to narrow your study. However, awareness of this and how it can affect your research needs to be reflected on. Moreover, I did not use these traits to narrow my study. Instead, through finding one interlocuter through HMSC, and supplementing with secondary research, I have diversified my data. Meanwhile, I have reflected on how this can affect my research in the analysis.

Meanwhile, because I conducted one interview with each person, and had limited contact beforehand, there was a time constraint on the ability to build rapport. However, it is still possible to develop good rapport in this time, through your demeaner and communication in

the interview and beforehand (Morgan and Guevara 2012). I believe this was successful, as discussed previously. Finally, regarding diversity, everyone I interviewed was unintentionally male. This can guide the data, through the recognition that often gender effects people's experiences, and particularly regarding home (Pink 2004). It could be beneficial in future research to have greater sociodemographic diversity among the interlocuters, or interview only women, to see how this differs. However, these were the interlocuters that were available for me to speak to. I enquired to HMSC and the interlocuters to see if they knew any women, but I was not connected with anyone. HMSC contacted one woman, but she did not want to take part. This raises questions on the challenges of accessing Afghan women to speak to in the UK.

5.5. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided the research methodology. I firstly introduce the importance of studying people's lives through a narrative approach, and my mixed methodology of using virtual semi-structured interviewing, to gather primary data, and researching on the internet and in journals and books, to gather secondary data on lived experiences that have already been published. Thereafter, I introduce the interlocuters and discuss my recruitment methods. Subsequently, I address the participatory approach used in this research. Following this, I address ethics and my motivations and self-positionality, including how lived experience benefits research. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this thesis. The next chapter will now present the findings and analysis.

Chapter 6: Analysis

This chapter provides the analysis of this thesis. I show that there are three central elements of home for the UK Afghans in this research, including subchapter 1, 'people as home', subchapter 2, 'safety as home', and subchapter 3, 'culture as home'. I demonstrate that the presence of these elements can enable the ability to feel at home, grow new roots, and feel more present where you are after forced migration. However, the absence and loss of these elements leads to double absences that restrict the ability to do so.

6.1. People as Home

This subchapter will address that the most important part of home for the UK Afghans in this research is 'people as home'. You are home when you are with your family, friends, communities, and social networks such as academic and professional circles. This is a central factor in experiences of a double absence or a double presence, where people demonstrate that if these people are absent, they experience a double absence, and if these people are present, some are able to feel a double or single presence, or at least feel more at home in the UK. Moreover, people experiencing a double absence explained that if their family and friends were here in the UK, they would be able to feel at home. This chapter is split into two subchapters: 6.1.1. Family, and 6.1.2. Friends and Community.

6.1.1. Family

The first subsection will look at family and home. What these findings demonstrate, is that for most of the interlocuters, and other UK Afghans discussed, family is the most important aspect of home. Depending on whether family is present in the UK, or absent in Afghanistan, this leads to a double presence, where they feel at home in the UK while still connected to Afghanistan, or a double absence, where they do not feel at home in the UK and cannot be in Afghanistan.

As addressed in Chapter 4, the importance of family and home is a well-known connection (Rinne-Koski and Riukulehto 2016; Hammer 2009; Taylor 2015; Mallett 2004). Across the world people make homes with different people. However, the idea of the family home is so established that definitions of home include the home as "a family or other group living in a house or other place" (Mallett 2004:62), where it is seen as symbolising "the family relationships and life courses enacted within those spaces" (ibid:74). Different societies approach family and home differently, where in many Western households it is a social norm

for adult children to move out of the family home and live alone or with others (Mallett 2004). Whereas, in Afghanistan, generations often live together, with parents, grandparents, adult children, grandchildren, and more (Muller 2010; Evason 2019; Khan 2013). Dahaa, Aarash, Rayi, Bashir, Amooz and Bahlul all discuss the importance of living with their family to feel at home. In Afghanistan, they lived with immediate family, parents, and siblings. Meanwhile, all but Rayi lived with extended family, including grandparents, uncles, cousins, and their families. This is very different to their living situations in the UK. Aarash, Dahaa and Rayi came to the UK alone, and their families are still in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Bashir, Amooz and Bahlul are in the UK with their immediate family. 20-year-old Bahlul is with his parents and siblings, and Bashir and Amooz, their wives, and children. However, they all long for their family, immediate and extended, wishing to be reunited. Tabish is the only person I spoke to who did not live with his family in Afghanistan, because he had to flee his family home age 16 and be on the move in hiding in Afghanistan since. He tells me the last time he felt at home in Afghanistan is in his family home, further demonstrating the importance of family to feel at home.

The findings in this subchapter demonstrate the importance of family reunification (UNHCR 2001), which is not accessible enough in the UK (Borelli et al. 2021) for non-European refugees. The UK government policy allows non-European refugees to apply for partners[1] and children under 18-years-old only (GOV.UK 2022g). However, for Ukrainian refugees, this was extended to unmarried partners, parents, grandparents, adult children, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, mother and fathers-in-law, and grandparents-in-law (GOV.UK 2022h). Meanwhile, asylum seekers cannot apply for family reunification at all, it is only when granted refugee or humanitarian protection that someone can apply (GOV.UK 2022g; GOV.UK 2022h). This demonstrates inequalities in the refugee system, and the hegemonic structures and policies policing certain people's movement while allowing others (Kibreab cited in Jansen and Löfving 2008; Taylor 2015). If the same extension was granted to all refugees, the people I spoke to would have the legal right to bring their extended family to the UK, which they explain would enable them to feel at home here. However, they cannot.

The first subsection looks at the perspective that home is directly where family is, and how this leads Afghan people to feel at home in the UK or not.

[1] Married or in a civil partnership.

6.1.1.1. Home is where family is

Several of the interlocuters say that home is wherever family is, demonstrating the seminal connection between family and home for them. I ask Aarash if he would rather be in the UK, Afghanistan, or another country, and he tells me:

> *"Wherever my mum's hug is, I want to be there… the UK is my second home and I want to make it [my home]. It will be my first if my family's here. If my family's not here, then my first home will always be my family, it doesn't matter what country they live in. Family is everything".*

Bahlul echoes this saying:

> *"The UK is my second home because we don't have another home right now. So yes, it does feel like home. Because as long as I'm with my family, and with my parents, that's home for me. It doesn't matter wherever, if I'm in the UK, Afghanistan, or any other country… Family's always number one, so as long as I'm with my family, I mean, it doesn't really matter".*

Aarash and Bahlul present Gilman's point that "a home is only a home as long as a family is in it—otherwise it is 'only a house'" (Gilman cited in Jones 2000:184). This is not true for everyone, but it is to them.

Aarash says that the UK is his home now. However, he tells me it does not feel like home, because "*As I say, my home is my mother, my home is my father. My home is my family, my home is my friends, whom I grow up with*". He experiences a double absence through being away from Afghanistan and not at home in the UK, because he is separated from his family and loved ones. Contrastingly, Bahlul does feel at home in the UK, because he is with his immediate family. Through his family being his home, he was able to carry these roots from Afghanistan to the UK. Bahlul came to the UK through family reunification as a child with his mother and siblings, to be reunited with his father. However, Aarash had to flee alone as an adult. If family reunification laws were the same for Afghan refugees as Ukrainian refugees, Aarash would have the right to bring his family here to the UK. However, because he is not yet partnered with children, under current laws he does not have the legal ability to bring any of his family here. This means he is alone, and he experiences this loneliness and longs for someone to make him feel at home:

"4 walls can't be called home. A rooftop on my head really isn't called home. Home is when you have someone, and when you finish work, you are coming home, and on your way, you see some good oranges and you say, 'oh I will buy this because there is someone who will eat it with me'. For someone that you are coming home to, and you wish after your tired day, the whole day of work, you wish that you would see someone who really feels home, who really feels worth buying oranges for, and you bring it, and you just eat it with a smile with the person, or with the people. So, loneliness is the worst thing in life, I would never ever wish it for anybody. And loneliness is definitely calling me home. I'm definitely not feeling at home".

"Sometimes we pray. Sometimes we ask for something, if I ask, I say please God I want someone to be my home".

Note that Aarash says he wants a person to be his home, not who makes him feel at home. For him, home is people, not the physical structure. This presents Taylor's concept of the 'relational home', and her point that "We live 'home' on a daily basis through a series of interactions, negotiations, intimacies and exchanges with close kin, extended family" (Taylor 2015:118). Home is made up of ordinary everyday activities with the people around you (Taylor 2015; Mallet 2004), such as buying these oranges. In his imaginings of home, these oranges and the experience of home are given meaning because of the people he wants to share them with. In Sayad's (2004:142) theorising on the double absence, he recognises loneliness as a key factor of the trauma created by the migration experience. Aarash is separated from his family through forced migration, and thus experiences a double absence because he cannot feel at home without them.

Family is also the most important aspect of home for Dahaa, Amooz and Rayi, who all feel a double absence because they are away from their family. I ask Amooz if there is anything that makes him feel at home in the UK and he tells me:

"*The only thing that would, is if I have my whole family here and I don't miss them, then sometimes I will feel at home here".*

I asked Dahaa what makes his former house in Afghanistan feel like home, and he replies:

"Your family. It's the family. It's the people that makes a place beautiful. It's the people around you that makes your house a home. Yes, for me, the most important people, the most important thing, is my family…"

This again exemplifies Gilman's point above that, for some, a house is only a home when there is family in it. The definition of home is the intimate social relations you have with the people within it (Mallett 2004; Taylor 2015; Boccagni 2017; Ratnam 2018).

Dahaa leads on from this saying:

> *"… I have been away from them for a very long time now. It's very difficult. It has made me half the man that I used to be, honestly speaking. Too much, too long of a tension. Every single time I receive a phone call I'm afraid that something terrible has happened to them. And it has been for too long now. It has affected my thinking, my ability to work, my ability to function, my ability to sleep, to eat, everything. I'm going out with my friends, but my brain is there. I'm studying, my brain is there. I'm working, my brain is there. Because the things that I see in social media and the news, I know very well that it can happen to anyone. There is no exception to it. It's not that okay, it will not happen to my sister, my brother, my father, or my family. It can happen to anyone. And that universality, that makes me scared"*.

Dahaa cannot be psychologically present in the UK, because his family are still in Afghanistan. His experience is best captured by Sayad's (2004) argument that migration is an initial rupture that is followed by successive ruptures emanating from this first one. Dahaa's forced migration away from his family was the first rupture, but he continues to experience new ruptures because from constant fear that something will happen to them. This exemplifies the trauma of the refugee experience and what leads a double absence, when you are separated from family and have to leave them behind in danger. Like Aarash, Dahaa is a single man without children. So, under current family reunification laws, he does not have the legal right to bring any of his family to the UK. If the laws were equal to Ukrainian refugees, he would have the right to bring his siblings, father, and family he is so worried about.

Many Afghans struggle to make a home in the UK because they are in constant fear of what will happen to the people they had to leave behind. This includes Firas, who says "I can't concentrate on my new life. I'm too worried about the people I've left behind" (Firas cited in Gentleman 2022). His fears were realised when his father was abducted from where he was hiding (ibid). Orfani (cited in Walker 2021) is also constantly anxious about her siblings and father, which attributes to her severe depression from moving to remote Scotland.

All the interlocuters talk about fears for their families, and Dahaa and Rayi say they regret leaving in the first place. After the rerising of Taliban power in 2021, Rayi tells me:

"The Talib, they took over everything. Everything is messed up now. I'm more worried about my family, I don't know where they are. I feel like it's stupid I'm living here. I don't know how my family is… time goes, you know. Life doesn't mean anything like this".

Rayi left Afghanistan when he was 13, because after the US and UK invaded, the Taliban came to his school and home to force him to recruit. He did not want to kill European soldiers, so he travelled to Europe alone through "*agents*"/human smugglers. He is now in his 20s, still stuck in the asylum system, yet to be given refugee protection. He presents a lived experience account of the effects of the British invasion, where he tells me "*I came because of them, the UK army*". However, here his experience is explored in terms of having to leave his family and live in the UK without them. Regarding the 2001 invasion, he tells me:

"They [the UK] were just there for making issues. If they were not there, why would I be here? I could live there like you guys live here, with your parents, in your own homeland. I'm here just because of them. If they were not there, I wouldn't be here, I would be with my family, I would be in my homeland... I lost my family. I lost my dad. I lost my life. I lost my everything. Because of them".

I asked him about leaving Afghanistan, and he said:

"Yes, that was a big mistake. If I knew I was going to have a life like this in the UK I wouldn't be coming here. I would accept to die one day there rather than live like this, dying every day here. I'm far from my family. I don't have no one here. I'm just by myself".

"I've wasted 10 years here. I could have spent those 10 years with my family. Can you imagine, I was 13 years old… I haven't seen any of my family since I left, I'm not even in contact with them. I don't know where they are".

As demonstrated, Rayi is experiencing a severe double absence, where he is unable to exist in the UK, and not able to go back to Afghanistan. He does not have any contact with his family, he left them when he was 13. Meanwhile, like the others, he lives in fear of what will happen to them. He repeatedly talks about his family and always comes back to his loss and longings for them.

Like with Dahaa above, Rayi's account demonstrates the continuous rupturing the refugee experience can have. Rayi has been in the UK for the longest amount of time to any of the

interlocuters, and an important period of his development from the age of 13 to 22, where he has lived without his family or refugee status for nearly a decade. For Rayi, his forced migration cannot be justified to himself, because he says his life is much worse than before, and he has been removed from his family and does not know how to reach them. Sayad describes this point of a migration journey as being where:

> "There is no more credible alternative that might provide a solution, and no way out of the impasse in which he is trapped. The despair or, to be more accurate, the loss of hope that is cruelly experienced at every moment, is a sort of 'internal' coming and going that no one can resolve, a coming and going between what was possible yesterday and is no longer possible today, between what was once no more than possible and what has now become irrevocable. So what is left? Only the breakdown of the life perspective… Only the paradoxical situation of the living dead or the already-dead living, as immigrants themselves put it when they come close to an extreme situation that leads them to the discovery of their 'in-existence' and their (social) inability to situate themselves within a 'perspective' that might give meaning to their lives" (Sayad 2004:143).

Sayad presents a dark argument on the misery of migration; however, this is apt in addressing the suffering Rayi experiences. Living in this state of adversity for so long leaves Rayi with 'what could have beens'. What would his life have been like if he stayed in Afghanistan? Another important question that will be addressed in the next subchapter, what would his life have been like if he was granted refugee protection in the UK? He feels his life has no meaning, saying "*Life doesn't mean anything to be honest, like this*", and describes himself as the living dead, "*I would accept to die one day there rather than live like this, dying every day here*". Sayad describes this point as a "desperate attempt to reconnect the threads that existed before the rupture, to put the broken pieces back together that supports life, sustains life" (ibid). However, Rayi is at a point where his present life has been traumatic for so long that he has lost all hope, he is unable to return to the past and is completely stuck. He cannot change his life in the UK unless he is granted refugee status, and he does not know how to reconnect with his family to have this integral part of his life that he lost in Afghanistan.

This subsection has introduced the importance of family to feel at home for Afghans in the UK. What it has shown is that if family members are present in the UK, it can enable a double presence, because for Bahlul, his family are his home and roots, and thus he has carried them

from Afghanistan to the UK with him. However, a double absence is felt by others because family members are separated and absent after forced migration. This demonstrates Taylor's (2015) point of the 'relational home', that separation from loved ones can be one of the biggest traumas of the refugee experience, where families are separated and have to live without one another, worried about people in the homeland. The next subsection will continue to examine this, looking specifically at memories and imaginings of family.

6.1.1.2. Imaginings and Memories of Family

Imaginings and memories of family came up throughout my conversations with the interlocuters, and when I asked what reminds them of home, this was discussed by everyone. Dahaa explained:

> *"What reminds me of home? When I see people happy here. It reminds me that I was happy once. I see families in the parks, which reminds me that I had a family and we used to go out on Fridays. We would go to, there are some spots in the city where I was living. Yeah, I mean, I see people happy with their family, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers".*

I asked him if these memories have changed over time and he replies:

> *"No, it's just like yesterday. It's so fresh. Seriously. It's just, it's, I I'm thinking I'm holding too much to it, and they say sometimes letting things go is good, and yes maybe it's true. But I'm trying. I'm trying so much, but I can't. I'm probably happier with those memories and the hope that one day I will have that life again. It's just, it's very insane, it's sometimes, it's scary that I remember very tiny details.*

Again, he cannot feel present in the UK because he is surviving through living in the past of his memories, and imaginings of the future where he is with his family again.

Aarash echoes this sentiment, telling me:

> *"Sometimes people remind you of your home, sometimes situations remind you of your home, like when you go to a restaurant and you see a whole family sitting and they're enjoying and then you just look and you say, I wish, and empty feelings come, you know. And sometimes you see some of my customers, they're brothers. They're coming to my shop, and they're mocking each other, they're troubling each other… It reminds you of your friendship with your brother and with your friends back in Afghanistan.*

Unlike Dahaa, Aarash discusses how memory fades, and his wish to never forget these memories:

> *"So yes, it reminds you, but it definitely changes. It fades away. That's the biggest problem with memories. With all these things, that it fades away. It doesn't stay... And I wish some of the feelings will never ever be replaced in my mind, in my in my memory, in there [touches chest]".*

Dahaa and Aarash exemplify the heightened importance of memories of home when you have become a refugee and you cannot be with the people you care about. The memories are extremely vivid for Dahaa, as memories of emotional experiences can be (Heuer and Reisberg 1990), and Aarash does not want to forget them. Both Aarash and Dahaa's experiences refute Hage's (1997) argument that migrants use nostalgia in a positive way, to feel at home where they are. Hage argues that these instances of nostalgia bring a positive homely feeling that people use to rebuild this sense of home in their new location, and "It is only when faced with the impossibility of homebuilding that nostalgia can degenerate into a debilitating homesickness" (Hage 1997:5). For Dahaa and Aarash, this nostalgia brings pain, because they cannot remake these memories with their family in the UK. This shows nostalgia is not a positive homemaking practice for them. However, perhaps it also solidifies Hage's point, demonstrating that homebuilding is not possible for them if their family is not there.

As Dahaa and Aarash demonstrate, memories of home and family are particularly emotive, and they have become particularly vivid for Dahaa now he is not with them in the present. I conceptualise these as 'embodied memories'. There are memories that are recollections of your past. However, there are memories that you feel are still very much part of your present. These are 'embodied memories' because they still live with you in this way. This presents Hirsch and Smith's argument that "The past is always with us, and it defines our present; it … explains how we came to be ourselves and to inhabit what we call 'our homes'" (Hirsch and Smith cited in Agnew 2005:3). Hirsch and Smith and Taylor (2015) argue that the past is used to navigate the present and the future, and thus the past, present, and future are all intertwined. The interlocuters past in Afghanistan is still part of their present. It lives with them to keep this connection to their homeland, their families, and the lives they had there. This can create a double absence, because people are physically in the UK, but their mind is often wandering to Afghanistan, to memories, to hopes of return, to worries and longings for their family.

This subsection has demonstrated that family is the most important part of home for many of the interlocuters, and other UK Afghans discussed. Home is where family is, and it is difficult to impossible to feel at home if they are not there. Therefore, family is the primary 'building block' (Hage 1997) of home for them. This is a central factor that leads people to experience a double absence or a double presence, where if their family is in Afghanistan, they feel a double absence through being physically here in the UK, but mentally in Afghanistan, thinking about their family. Correspondingly, Bahlul is here with his immediate family through family reunification, and he explains the UK feels like home because home is where his family is. Memories are of heightened importance for refugees who are forced to be absent from their family and homeland, acting as a key link for retaining their roots and connections to their lost home. Moreover, inequalities in the UK refugee system are demonstrated here, where Ukrainian refugees can bring extended family through family reunification laws, but other refugees can only apply for registered partners and non-adult children. The interlocuters explain that if their family lived in the UK, they would be able to feel at home here. If family reunification laws were the same for Afghan refugees as Ukrainian refugees, they would have the legal ability to make this application. However, with current laws the interlocuters cannot bring any family members that are still in Afghanistan. The next subchapter will now examine 'people as home' further, through looking at the importance of friends, community, and other social networks.

6.1.2. Friends and Community

This subchapter will look more at the concept of 'people as home', addressing that friends, community, and other social networks are also key 'building blocks' (Hage 1997) of home for Afghan people in the UK. The interlocuters and other UK Afghans demonstrate that having friends in the UK, either from Afghanistan who have also migrated, or new friends they have made or want to make, are central to feeling at home. Meanwhile, missing and thinking about friends in Afghanistan is a key reason for not feeling at home and experiencing a double absence.

6.1.2.1. Losing Friends and Social Networks

This subsection will firstly look at the loss of friends and social networks in Afghanistan, and how this leads to feelings of homesickness and uprootedness, where a double absence arises. Dahaa describes this, talking about his group of friends back home, and the times they spent together:

> *"I had a group of best friends, not one, you know a group of best friends from school time, from the community, and then from university and the workplace. So, every Friday… we would always go to one of the locations by the river, by a big garden… By the mountains, and we would have picnics every single Friday. We would play volleyball, football. I was playing cricket. We would go on a long drive. I mean, it was proper life".*

Becoming a refugee has taken Dahaa away from his homeland, where he built his life, his childhood, and formed many important connections and friendships, over a long period of time in different parts of his life.

He talks about this more, and his difficulty building new social connections in London:

> *"There was a combination of things, not plain life like I'm living now. Monday to Friday at work, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, waiting for Monday to go back again… It was a range of activities, going to my sisters' houses, the ones who are married. My aunt's houses, my cousins. Going to weddings, going to engagements, going to ceremonies, funerals. Being part of the community. I don't feel I'm part of the community here because nobody is even talking to me. And when I go to social events, they say jokes I don't understand. I'm laughing, but I actually didn't understand. I can't understand the humour, even though I've lived here for the past seven years, almost a decade, I still can't. I'm trying to establish connection, I'm failing to do so. And most of the time, the parties are in places where you are really not comfortable. It's too loud and … they start to talk about work. Like, why did we come here? You're discussing a project?"*

His new life and environment in London is very different. He is missing his friends, family, community, and social life in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, he is finding is hard to establish new connections because the people, culture and environment are different. The humour is different, social norms in public are different, the environment has changed from the mountains to loud inside spaces, and people at social occasions are talking about work or do not to speak to him. He longs for his old life, feeling a double absence because he cannot enjoy his new life in the UK. Taylor (2015) discusses this loss of social networks in her concept the 'relational home'. She reiterates that "Home is often, in many meaningful ways, defined by other people, and the quality of these relationships can determine whether or not someone feels 'at home'" (ibid:119). Dahaa does not feel at home because the quality of his social connections in the UK in no way compares to his friendships in Afghanistan. He sees his former social life as "*proper*

life" and now he is living "*plain life*". It also brings in her concepts of the 'spatial home', 'material home', and 'temporal home', where the spatial home looks at the environment and places he is socialising in, and the material home looks at the sensory experience of this. Meanwhile, the 'temporal home' recognises this time element of home, where the longer he is away from his friends in Afghanistan and not finding connections in the UK, the more difficult it is.

This loss of social networks is relayed by several of the interlocuters. Bashir and Amooz echo one another, discussing the grief of leaving friends and networks in Afghanistan, and the importance of having social networks in the UK to build a life and feel at home here. When I ask Bashir what home means to him, he tells me: *"Friends, of course, this is something that really gives you a feeling of ownership"*. He is making new friendships in the UK, which is discussed below. However, he still thinks of his friends in Afghanistan:

> *"I have started to adapt to my new environment here in the UK, but it's very hard to forget about home because this is where I was raised, where I lived, where I made lots of friends, my social networks. I established my career there and all those memories are still here with me".*

Amooz echoes this, saying:

> *"Home, you pass your childhood, you have feelings there. You have your own cultures there, you have your own, like, everything there. Friends there, childhood friends. They were younger, now they become older. So now when you meet them you have a special feeling. So, we left the home and now we are homeless. While I'm in the UK I will be homeless. I will have houses, but not the home like I had in Afghanistan".*

Like Dahaa, Bashir and Amooz are grieving the loss of these networks, and Bashir again shows the significance of memories. Similarly, Hashemi (cited in Strick 2021) finds his teenage son crying because he misses his friends in Afghanistan. This loss includes formal and informal circles (Cernea cited in Taylor 2015), where professional friends are important as well. Amooz discusses this in terms of his career:

> *"So, the big issue for me is my career. I developed a very, very good career in Afghanistan. I had good relationships in all the areas among UN organisations, among government people, among the authorities. Very, very educated friends I left back in Afghanistan. We had a good group of writers. We were writing books for people there. We were writing poetry books. We were writing story books. We were always struggling*

to do something for our people, and we did a lot of charity work in Afghanistan. So, we had a community of well-developed people and well-educated people. I left all my group of friends… So, I really, really miss all of them. I really miss my friends, my school friends, my university friends, and especially my master's friends".

Like Dahaa, he demonstrates the trauma of leaving your homeland where you have developed many different friendships and communities over time. This affects not only personal life but professional life as well. Amooz experiences a double absence where he is not at home in the UK, and part of this is missing his personal and professional friends in Afghanistan. Taylor (2015) explains this loss of social networks by applying Bourdieu's theory on social capital. Bourdieu argues that daily life operates through three sources of capital – social, cultural, and economic. Within this, the "volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise" (Bourdieu cited in Taylor 2015:130). Amooz, Bashir and Dahaa all had a large amount of social capital in Afghanistan that they had built throughout their lives via family, different friendships, education, and work. However, they are now in the UK and have lost this, experiencing social poverty because they have to start again.

6.1.2.2. Building New Social Networks in the UK

Despite this loss of social capital, the interlocuters discuss their determination to make new connections in the UK. This demonstrates their resilience and the actions taken to try and establish roots in the UK and feel more at home, presenting Schiller et al.'s (1992) point that 'transmigrants' develop a multitude of relationships that span borders socially, professionally, religiously, and more. Amooz says that he feels he's reached a "*zero point*" in his career, but his friend recently inspired him to start again:

"*One of my friends motivated me to start some sort of academic life in the UK. Then you can become settled very soon. If you start an academic life you can find friends in the UK and familiarise with their culture, you can make friends with women, men, older people, teachers. So, when you find these friends, you can mentally adjust more to this life... So now I'm a bit more motivated to try and begin some sort of academic life in the UK, but I don't know where to start. It's very difficult… How will I find it? Who will support me financially? ... Currently we don't have any assurance, any support, so this is the big issue*".

Amooz already has bachelor and master's degrees and no financial support to start an academic life again. However, he is driven to do this anyway to meet new people and build a life in the UK.

Similarly, Bashir is determined to make new networks for himself:

> *"I'm trying to increase my networking and increase my relationships with the local citizens. I think the more I do this, the better I understand the culture, the better I get acquainted to the environment, to the traditions, to everything. So, this is something that really helps me in feeling more and more home".*

I respond with, "so it's a lot about people, the people around you?", and he says "*Absolutely, I think it's the number one thing, and that's been so motivating so far*". I also ask him if he feels at home in the UK, and he tells me:

> *"Yes, it's a friendly environment. I've met a couple of friends. I'm going to some social events, some sport events, and regularly making very good friends… I feel like this is now my second home. Not only because I got all I needed for living, accommodation, and all other facilities, but mainly because I was welcomed very warmly by the locals, by the government. And even when I arrived here to my house, my neighbours without knowing them, they came to me, they welcomed me very warmly. And they just give me a sense of ownership, kind of like I didn't feel I was in a strange place. So that really gave me a feeling of being home."*

Bashir's positive experience of the UK exemplifies the importance of welcoming people and communities to be able to feel at home and feel present after forced migration. It also shows a positive example of OWW, and the significance of welcoming government schemes, where Bashir is an exception to most cases. He was evacuated under the withdrawal and resettled under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), where his family have been moved out of a hotel to a house in London and fast-tracked for indefinite leave to remain under OWW.

The resilience of Dahaa, Bashir and Amooz to keep pushing to try and make new social networks demonstrates the actions people take after migration to try and grow new roots and feel present where they are (Veikou and Siapera 2015). These are the 'settlement strategies' of homemaking (Hage 1997), where people have their agency constricted by the refugee experience, but still use what agency they have to navigate their lives (Veikou and Siapera 2015).

This is further demonstrated by Tabish, who has become part of his local community in the UK. A large part of why he can feel at home is because he feels part of his community and the society, through knowing the local area and his neighbours. For him, the most important part of home is simply having safety and a place of his own, which will be discussed more in 6.2. Safety as Home. However, he tells me:

> *"The other thing is the community, you know, people, stuff like that. That also really makes me feel like I have a place. Because the place I work at is near to town. Lots of neighbours come in, they tell me 'Oh you're my neighbour', I like that. They're the main things that make me feel that I'm home".*
>
> *"I've been living here for nearly 4 years. I know my neighbours; I know everyone in society here. I know next door, my shop next to my house. I know the people from there. They are friendly. I feel happy with them here. As a society, as a community, you know, the people around here, the neighbours, they know me. Where I work, they come into me, they see me, I see them".*

This again demonstrates Tabish's resilience to build a new life and home in the UK with local people, and the importance of welcoming communities in the UK. Many scholars on home recognise the importance of community (Hage 1997; Taylor 2015; Boccagni 2017; Sommerville 1992; Ratnam 2018). Hage (1997) argues that for building blocks of home to be successful, they need to cultivate the feeling of community, as well as "security, familiarity… and a sense or possibility of hope" (Hage 1997:2)". He says this "feeling of community is… crucial for feeling at home. Above all, it involves living in a space where one recognises people as 'one's own' and where one feels recognised by them as such" (ibid:3). The relationships Tabish has built in his neighbourhood offer this community feeling for him, as well as the familiarity and security of knowing the people around him. In Taylor's research on the 'relational home' she also cites this argument from Hage, as well as Bauman who states that community as a term is linked to the idea of a comforting place where "there are no strangers" (Bauman cited in Taylor 2015:120). This reiterates Boccagni's notions of 'security' and 'familiarity' as being central to home, where normative ideas of a 'good' home are a familiar place where you know who is there. Neighbourliness in the area is a key part of this (ibid). Tabish feels at home because he is among neighbours who he knows and who know him. They can recognise each other as 'one's own' because they are part of the same local community. Similarly, Hashemi's family discussed in Chapter 4 have been made to feel more at home by local people socialising with them, going around for tea and barbeques, and offering support.

Contrastingly, they have been made to feel alienated and not at home by local people staring at them "like we are refugees and we're not part of the community, which we are not" (Hashemi cited in Strick 2021).

Hashemi, Tabish and Bashir address their positive experience with local British people. However, Amooz and Dahaa discuss negative experiences and feeling a lack of community that comes as a stark contrast to the social sense of community they had in Afghanistan. Amooz tells me "*This house does not feel like a real home to me, because the neighbours here don't want to talk to you or meet you*". This contrasts to his neighbourhood in Afghanistan where people would meet each day to talk and support each other. Meanwhile, Dahaa reiterates this, saying:

> "*When I was in Afghanistan, every morning I would come out of the house, and everyone is greeting 'Hi, hello, how is everything?' But here everyone is so angry, and you don't really know why… Nobody talks to anyone. If you look at someone twice then they use a cursing word and say, 'why are you looking at me?'".*

Dahaa and Amooz miss their sense of neighbourliness in Afghanistan and are instead met with hostility and the absence of such. This again presents the importance of community, where Buckle argues that "our experiences of home are different based on our relationships with … our neighbours, and wider networks that construct a community" (Buckle cited in Ratnam 2018:4). Amooz and Dahaa do not have this community feeling, so they cannot feel at home. This leads them to feel a double absence through not being in Afghanistan, and not having a UK community to form new connections with.

The experiences discussed in this subsection demonstrate the multiple practices people embark on to try and feel present and at home after forced migration (Veikou and Siapera 2015; Hage 1997). Tabish has become part of his local community through engaging with his neighbours. Bashir is networking and going to social events and sports events to meet local people. Dahaa continues to go to social events and try to form connections, despite the obstacles he's faced and not enjoying his time there. Meanwhile, Amooz wants to start university in the UK, despite already having a bachelors and master's degree and no financial support to do this. Both Tabish and Bashir have already formed these social connections and explain they feel at home here, demonstrating their presence. Meanwhile, Dahaa is struggling to do so, and Amooz is yet to do so, and they both do not feel at home here, demonstrating a double absence. Therefore, I argue that if people who become refugees are enabled to form good friendships and

communities in the UK, this can lead to a double or single presence rather than a double absence.

6.1.3. Sub-conclusion

This subchapter has demonstrated the importance of people as home, including family as well as friends, communities, and other social networks. Many of the interlocuters and other UK Afghans explain that family is home to them. They are able to feel at home in the UK because their family is here with them, or their family are still in Afghanistan, and this means the UK will not be home unless they are able to come here. Meanwhile, they discuss the loss of friends, communities and social networks in Afghanistan, and the importance of having or making friends and social networks in the UK to be able to build a life here. The interlocuters demonstrate how they continuously use their agency to engage in activities to build new networks and friendships in the UK, despite the trauma they have been inflicted with. This demonstrates the ways people try or enable themselves to feel present in their new location, to grow new roots, and build a new home. The people experiencing a double absence attribute this to their family not being here, and the loss of their friends, communities, and social networks. They also explain that if their family was in the UK, they would feel at home here. Meanwhile, Bahlul and Bashir experience a double presence, and Tabish experiences a single presence. Bahlul explains that wherever he is in the world, he is home if his family is there, and Bashir and Tabish explain the importance of their new friends, neighbours, and social networks for feeling at home. Therefore, I argue that having people that feel like home in the UK is a primary 'building block' (Hage 1997) that enables UK Afghans to feel present here, whether they are still connected to Afghanistan. However, if they do not, this leads to a double absence. This chapter demonstrates the importance of family reunification, and the inequality of the UK refugee system, where Ukrainian refugees can apply for extended family, however, non-European refugees cannot. If the Ukrainian extension applied to all refugees, the interlocuters would have the legal right to bring their family here. However, under current laws they cannot bring any of their family members still in Afghanistan. The next subchapter will now look at the importance of 'safety as home'.

6.2. Safety as Home

This subchapter discusses what I conceptualise as (physical and psychological) 'safety as home'. This addresses the importance of safety for feeling at home, growing new roots in the UK, and retaining roots in Afghanistan, where feeling safe can enable a double or single presence, whereas a lack of safety can lead to a double absence or a severing of roots in Afghanistan.

6.2.1. Safety in the UK

Firstly, I will discuss the lack of safety in Afghanistan, and how this leads some Afghans to be glad to be homemaking in the UK, because at least they are safe now. It is important to address here that five of the interlocuters were under direct risk in Afghanistan because they or their parents worked with Western people during the 20-year war. This is the same for many of the people discussed in chapter 4. Meanwhile, as addressed, Rayi had to leave because of forced recruitment to the Taliban after the 2001 invasion. This highlights the role Britain has played in making their home unsafe for them in Afghanistan.

Regarding the UK being a safe place, the person this is most true for is Tabish, who is the only interlocuter to experience a single presence. He has severed his roots with Afghanistan because of the trauma he experienced there, and the UK is now his home. Tabish tells me he had to leave Afghanistan because of a 'security issue' he cannot give details on, which I did not ask questions on for privacy and ethical reasons. Living in Wales, I ask him if this feels like home, and he tells me:

> *"Obviously, yes, you know, it's my home. When I come from work, I have my own place. Chilling. Obviously, you miss your parents, stuff like that. But in general, yeah, that's my home. I feel like home, I'm living a peaceful life. When you finish work, you come home, you're peaceful, your mindset is like, you just focus on your life, normal life. You're not worrying about security, someone trying to kill you, or someone kidnapped you".*
>
> *"At that time [in Afghanistan], I would only think about myself, how to get safe. I just wanted to be living like a normal person. But now day by day I feel good here".*

Tabish finally has the safety of home, where he can choose what happens inside, rather than being in hiding in other people's homes, not knowing what will happen and if people will break in and kidnap him. This demonstrates Boccagni (2017) and Sommerville's (1992) notions of

'security', 'privacy' and 'control' as central to home, where ideas of a 'good' home is somewhere you feel protected and have choice of what happens inside (Boccagni 2017). Tabish finally having his own flat after being on the move and in hiding in Afghanistan is what really makes him feel at home. However, peace is the other key part of this. He discusses this throughout our conversation, telling me the "*main thing is being peaceful*". The one tie he has left to Afghanistan is his parents, but he does not want to remember or think about it otherwise:

> *"I had a mental health issue. Now I completely, I don't remember most stuff about Afghanistan".*
>
> *"I try to, most of the stuff I don't remember about that, from back home. I don't want to remember, I try to never ever think about that, you know. When I'm sleeping, just sometimes, maybe some stuff is coming in my mind. But I try to change my mind by thinking about something else. If there is some time I remember, I can't sleep in the night. I don't want to remember anything from there. Most of the stuff I forgot about. But I sometimes still have a little bit, it happens".*

His experience demonstrates how trauma can restrict access to your past and memories, and the psychological action he takes to guide his mind away from this. Tabish's experience in Afghanistan was so traumatic that he has detached himself from his former home for the safety of his mental health. He cannot think about it or delve into memories because of the turmoil this will bring him. Tabish demonstrates Agnew's (2005) argument that memories can go down two streams, to create idealised nostalgia or trauma you do not want to return to. Tabish does not long for his lost home or want to go back. Apart from missing his parents, he relates it only to suffering, where his memories are so emotional and vivid (Heuer and Reisberg 1990) he has to block them out. Although like with Halaimzai (2021) in Chapter 4, they try to come back, where traumatic memories can be persistent (Berntsen 2001).

Tabish tells me his life in the UK was hard at first, stuck in the asylum system and adapting to being in a "*different world*". He was not allowed to work and was surviving on Asylum Support of £35 a week, where he tells me:

> "*I had mental health issues, you know, it was very stressful for a couple of years… But once you get paper [status], you're working, and your mindset is changed and you're not thinking, you're not stressed too much. You go to work and make money and you're living like a normal person, you know, whatever you want to do you can do it".*

Tabish demonstrates the importance of refugee protection, where leaving Afghanistan and gaining refugee status in the UK is what gave him psychological safety, being able to finally have peace and start his new life. Whether or not the forced migration ruptured him, as argued by Sayad (2004), and so called 'sedentrist' thinkers (Malkki 1992), the trauma he experienced in Afghanistan and the UK asylum system created ruptures, and being able to be safe, settle and make a home in the UK is what allowed him to finally live what he calls a 'normal life' again. Tabish demonstrates the possibility of a single presence because he has purposely severed his roots in Afghanistan and rooted himself to the UK for the sake of his psychological safety, glad to be here and making a home for himself. This is a reminder that the refugee experience is not a migration of choice, people are fleeing for their safety. For some, like Tabish, the migration is predominantly positive in the end because he can finally start his life again.

Bashir and Amooz also talk about the lack of safety in Afghanistan and why this led them and other Afghans to flee their homes to the UK. For Bashir, he felt such relief when he finally arrived, because at least he was safe:

> *"By the time I landed in Heathrow this was the moment of relief because I realised, at least if I have left everything behind, I'm in a peaceful environment and there is no threat".*

> *"This was the hardest journey of my life, but at the same time it was rewarding because at the end we got some peace, protection, support, and everything".*

Meanwhile, Amooz explains that Afghans are leaving their 'beautiful' homes because they need freedom, which the Taliban prohibits and restricts:

> *"For all my life I spent there [in Afghanistan] I will never feel homeless, but life will be very hard. There are a lot of limitations and everything. Human beings need freedom, freedom of their voice, freedom of their habits, freedom of their enjoyment, freedom of their life, their lifestyle. So, all these freedoms are God given to humans. But the current government of Afghanistan, where I mean the Taliban, they don't allow, they just obstruct people to live as we want… So, because of that… people are preferring to leave their homes, beautiful homes, to have freedom, to have their own choice of life, you know".*

What this highlights, is that safety is part of home, but it is often more important than home. So many people flee as refugees because this is the only option to live, no matter how painful the loss of home is. If you lose your life, you will lose your home anyway. As explained by Hussein (cited in Gentleman 2022) in Chapter 4, when his children cry from homesickness and ask to go back, he tells them we had to leave because we would have been killed otherwise. As addressed by Amooz, freedom is a key part of this in safety as home, which again presents the importance of refugee protection.

6.2.2. Unsafety in the UK

However, this sense of safety in the UK is not true for all Afghan people. For many, whether they are physically safe, they are not psychologically safe. As explained in the previous subchapter, Rayi came to the UK as an 'unaccompanied minor'. However, he has been stuck in the asylum system for 10 years, receiving repeated asylum refusals and thus not being able to work, receive public funds, and being homeless as a result. This has made the UK a psychologically and structurally unsafe place for him that cannot feel like home, which leads him to experience a double absence because he is away from Afghanistan and psychologically and symbolically absent from the UK as well (Sayad 2004). He continuously tells me it is because of the Home Office, where he has been made to feel useless and guilty for being here, and he wishes he never left Afghanistan because his life is so miserable. When I ask him if he is allowed to work, he tells me:

> *"No, I don't have anything. No National Insurance number that I can use. This is why I'm living at my friends. I feel useless, you know, I feel like I'm in prison. I don't feel free, you know. Like I'm saying, it's a complicated life. To be honest, it destroys lots of young generation's lives, the UK. Like me, there is more than 1000 people. I have mental problems because of this status. It's all because of them [the Home Office]. I've been to school here, college, I did catering stuff. It's all gone, I'm like useless, you know. I can't get anything. I used to work on a fake ID".*

This demonstrates the detriment of the 'hostile environment' on Rayi's life, where like the other people and unaccompanied minors discussed in Chapter 4, he has been forced into homelessness and illegal working to survive. He does not have freedom in the UK. As addressed by Kibreab (cited in Jansen and Löfving 2008) and Taylor (2015), this is a reminder of the structures of hegemony that police certain people's movement. Transnational arguments that people can flow from one country to another in the modern world neglect the impact of

borders and policies that restrict refugees from being able to make homes in new places, with structural oppression that restrict new roots from being grown.

Rayi lost his home and made the traumatic journey to get security. However, he did not get this, and he says life was made even worse, which leaves him completely miserable. Rayi highlights the importance of the context behind certain migration experiences, as raised by Sayad (2004), where his suffering and double absence comes from the position of ongoing marginality and adversity he is put in by the structures of the UK asylum system. Hage argues that feeling secure is "one of the most basic feelings we aim to foster in our homely space" (Hage 1997:2). Meanwhile Sommerville recognises this as 'hearth' – which is "emotional and physical well-being" (Sommerville 1992:7). Rayi is not secure, and his wellbeing suffers for it. This is what I conceptualise as (physical and psychological) 'safety as home'. Afghan people migrate to the UK to find safety. However, many experience a lack of safety in the UK as well, which, unsurprisingly, leads to not feeling at home. This is demonstrated by many of the Afghans stuck in hotels, discussed in Chapter 4, who are desperate to leave because of the psychological turmoil this causes them. Some need medication to deal with the distress (anonymous cited in Townsend 2021), and many, like Rayi, say they would rather risk being in Afghanistan (Hashemi's son cited in Strick 2021; Townsend 2021).

The importance of 'safety as home' is also demonstrated by Halaimzai (2021) and her family, who have faced numerous racist attacks from British people, and a lack of protection and justice from the British police, where the attackers were released without charge. She explains this "triggered in all of us the low-level panic we'd felt for years about how unsafe we were" (ibid), where this ongoing panic creates anxiety that "erodes your sense of self" (ibid). This lack of safety when you have lost home and made this journey to find it causes great inner turmoil, restricting the ability to feel at home. This creates a double absence and feeling of unrootedness, through not being in Afghanistan, and not being able to grow roots in the UK either.

6.2.3. Peace

Dahaa also demonstrates that the pain of forced dislocation from home makes the UK a psychologically unsafe place for him, which cannot feel like home. Like with Tabish, peace is home for Dahaa. However, he has no inner peace in the UK. I ask him "what does home mean to you?" and he tells me:

> *"Home is where peace is. Not just physical peace, inner peace. And I'm not at peace. I'm telling you; I sleep very late. I think all night, every day. There's a huge conflict*

going on in my brain. It's consuming me. It's consuming my energy. It's consuming me as a person… It has really made me weak, this constant, it has been now too long".

He demonstrates the importance of not only physical safety but psychological safety, where you can be physically safe in the UK, but psychologically not. He talks about this more and how he is always living in the past in his mind because he is so unhappy in his present. He then tells me:

"*I've lived a very good life and I always keep dreaming about that. I have seen this quote and it's really scaring me. It says people who live in the past will never have a future, and this thing has just stuck to my brain and into the walls of my heart that I'm afraid that I would just, I would never have a peaceful life. Inside me there's always tension going, there's always conflicts going*".

This is very in line with the argument that (forced) migration can be an unrooting that removes your possibility for inner peace (Sayad 2004). Dahaa demonstrates the psychological time of the refugee experience, and how the past, present, and future intertwine, where memories of the past are used as "a mechanism for dealing with the needs of the present and the future" (Taylor 2009:14). Much advice on mental health and mindfulness addresses the benefits of being more in the present to improve psychological wellbeing (Kiken et al. 2018; Mental Health Foundation 2022; NHS 2022; Tolle 2001). However, as Dahaa explains in the previous subchapter, he feels like he is happier with these memories because they are so much better than the reality he is experiencing now. He is living in memories of the past because they offer refuge. Time with his family, time in his home, time in his homeland. That time is not now, so he lives in the past to ease the pain of his double absence.

6.2.4. Choice

Choice is also a key part of psychological 'safety as home'. The refugee experience is often defined by a lack of choice; forced to leave home, relocated somewhere you did not choose, and constrained by anti-refugee policies and regimes that police refugee movement. What the experiences of UK Afghans show, is that a lack of choice can create psychological unsafety and a feeling of not being at home. They also present inequalities in the British asylum system, where some people have more access to choice than others, and how having elements of choice can improve the refugee experience.

The importance of choice and home is addressed by Boccagni (2017) and Sommerville (1992). Boccagni's conceptualises that 'control' is one of the three central elements to home – 'security', 'familiarity', and 'control'. Correspondingly, Sommerville (1992) recognises this through 'privacy' in his six to seven signifiers of home, which he describes as privacy and control. Boccagni (2017) argues that having "control over one's life circumstances" (Boccagni 2017:23) is central to homing, demonstrating how homing takes place "at an individual level" (ibid), and how societal and external factors shape this (ibid). Meanwhile, Sociologists of health, Ross and Mirowsky (2003), discuss that having a feeling of personal control is extremely important for mental wellbeing, where the absence of this creates powerlessness that can be demoralising and cause great psychological distress. They address that this lack of control can be created by social causes, where "some [social] conditions rob people of control over their lives" (ibid:441). This is true for the refugee experience, as will be further discussed.

The importance of choice for psychological safety and feeling at home is demonstrated by Dahaa, through his metaphor of the 'golden cage'. He tells me that whist he was in the asylum system waiting for his refugee status, there was a year where he could not legally work. To fill his time, he went to a charity in London each day, where he relayed a conversation he had with a man there:

> *"One day there was this guy, I would never forget him. He was around 90 years old. He asked me, 'how do you feel about the UK? How are you feeling now you are in the developed world?' [laughs]. I was like erm, okay. I want to tell you, I don't want to offend you, with all the respect. But I said, you know gold? He said 'yes, of course I know gold'. So, I said you make cage out of gold, and you put me inside it. It's made of gold, very precious, but I'm in a cage. That's how I'm feeling. The UK is a very good place, I really like it to visit. You know, I really like the religious freedom. I really like that you have different types of activities and different people from all over the world, and you're very welcoming. Thank you so much. But for me it feels like being in a prison, in a cage which is made of gold, and I should appreciate that I'm in a golden cage".*

Dahaa demonstrates the psychological turmoil created by his lack of choice. It does not matter if he likes the UK, his choice is Afghanistan, and he is not at home. Like Rayi, he uses the word prison to capture his feeling of being captive and stuck. This concept of the golden cage also demonstrates the gratefulness expected from refugees (Harrell-Bond 2002), to be grateful to the UK for the traumatic situation they are in, which as shown in Chapter 2, the UK has

accountability for. Through being physically absent from Afghanistan, and psychologically absent from the UK, Dahaa experiences a double absence because this was not his choice. He had a different life that he wanted, and this has been ripped away from him where he stuck in his current existence.

The UK Afghans discussed in Chapter 4 also show the turmoil created by their lack of choice. Orfani is depressed because her and her husband have been relocated to a remote part of Scotland, eight hours from family and friends evacuated to the UK with them. Meanwhile Hashemi and family have found out they are being relocated to Perth, Scotland, when he was hoping for London because of his professional career as a lawyer. Furthermore, thousands of people in hotels are waiting to find out where they will be relocated, stuck living in temporary limbo in the hotel rooms. Meanwhile, all the interlocuters discuss the lack of choice in their forced dislocation from home. What all of these experiences show is that although everyone uses their agency to navigate their lives, the life trajectories of UK Afghans have been constrained by a lack of choice, and this leads to psychological unsafety in the UK which restricts the ability to feel at home, grow new roots, and feel present where they are.

However, their experiences also show that some people have more access to choice than others when becoming a refugee. People who become refugees are from all walks of life, and the global structures that privilege some movement over others (Kibreab cited in Jansen and Löfving 2008; Taylor 2015) are true for refugees as well. Bashir and his family were evacuated from Afghanistan upon the UK withdrawal. However, the reason they came to the UK is because he achieved a prestigious British university scholarship, prior to becoming a refugee. Therefore, he was granted access to the UK as an academic, however, then became a refugee. Moreover, because of the scholarship, his family was eligible for resettlement under the Afghan Resettlement Scheme and OWW.

Rightly so, there is scholarship on transnationalism that positions the movement of refugees and cosmopolitan elites in opposition to one another, because one is the movement of privilege and choice, whereas the other is forced dislocation from home (Al-Ali cited in Taylor 2015). However, what happens when a cosmopolitan elite becomes a refugee? I have defined Bashir as a 'cosmopolitan elite' because he tells me he was already a professional and academic transnational, prior to becoming a refugee:

> *"Being a UN staff member, I travelled almost everywhere in the world, and had opportunities to stay in so many other places. I had that opportunity to travel, but more*

importantly, I was exposed to other places, and I had the grounds for justifying my stay in other countries. But the UK has always been my first priority".

Bashir's migration from Afghanistan was forced, it was not his choice. However, he had an element of choice in where he could go. He tells me:

"*I had so many other opportunities, like on the day of my departure [from Afghanistan], I received a call from previous colleagues in the US and they facilitated my departure there as well. But I still preferred the UK*".

Because of his professional and academic position, and the UK-US eligibility criteria on evacuees, Bashir could choose the UK. Moreover, he is already an international person, where he has always had legal legitimacy to be in the country he is in, including the UK where he has refugee status and indefinite leave to remain through OWW. This forced migration is clearly very different to his previous travels. However, this contrasts to other refugees stuck in the UK asylum system, who are restricted and prohibited from travelling, or staying in Britain unless they are granted status (Gherson 2021).

Bashir experiences a double presence, telling me that the UK is his second home, and he really feels at home here, but is still connected to Afghanistan, his first home. He laughs as he tells me he was motivated to come to the UK because of his longstanding interest in the country, taking a positive outlook on homemaking despite the traumas he is facing. This leads me to argue that this element of choice, with the already developed internationalism and legal security of refugee status, attribute to Bashir's experience of a double presence and positive outlook on the UK. He is more psychologically safe in the UK than someone who did not choose to be here or does have the legal security to stay. This is a reminder that becoming a refugee happens to people from all walks of life, despite what the dominant narratives of refugees as a dehumanised mass 'underclass' would like us to believe (Barmaki 2012). It also shines a light on the restrictive nature of asylum regimes, which allow some movement whilst prohibiting others. I want to stress the fact that Bashir's migration was not a migration of choice, it was forced, and he explains how painful and traumatic it has been, where "*unfortunately it was the only decision and the only option*". However, these elements of choice have been beneficial, highlighting the positives of people being given choice within the refugee experience. What the experience of Bashir shows is the varying levels of choice for different people who become refugees, based on their own social status and educational and professional background, as well as UK asylum policies that create strict eligibility criteria that privilege some over others.

6.2.5. Sub-conclusion

This subchapter has looked at what I conceptualise as (physical and psychological) 'safety as home'. People have had to leave their homes in Afghanistan because they are unsafe, which demonstrates that safety is key to home, but it is also often more important. So many people lose their homes to save their lives, where if you lose your life, you lose your home anyway. Feeling safe in the UK leads some to be glad to be homemaking here, where people experience a double or single presence, or at least feel more at home. However, others are still unsafe physically, psychologically, and structurally in the UK, and this prohibits their ability to feel at home, grow new roots, and leads to feelings of a double absence. The reasons for this include adversity and marginality created by the UK asylum system and failures of OWW, racist harassment and attacks from UK people, and inner turmoil after forced dislocation from home. Tabish presents the possibility of a single presence after forced migration, because he has severed his ties with Afghanistan and rooted himself to the UK only for his safety, relating Afghanistan to suffering now and not wanting to remember it. The experiences discussed show that 'building blocks' (Hage 1997) of 'safety as home' include physical and inner peace, freedom, security, hope, and choice. Dahaa describes the lack of choice in the refugee experience through his concept of the 'golden cage'. Meanwhile, the experience of Bashir, who is a cosmopolitan elite and has become a refugee, shows the varying levels of choice for different people who become refugees. This variation in choice demonstrates inequalities in British and global immigration systems, which privilege some movement over others, for refugees as well. It also shows the benefits of having elements of choice within the refugee experience, which can improve the ability to feel at home and feel present after forced migration. The final subchapter will now look at 'culture as home'.

6.3. Culture as Home

This subchapter will discuss the concept of 'culture as home'. I demonstrate that being able to see and retain some of your culture after migration is key to homemaking, growing and retaining roots, and feeling present where you are, for Afghan people in the UK. Correspondingly, being located somewhere where your culture or ethnicity is absent, or discriminated against, leads to feelings of absence that hinder the ability to feel at home and grow new roots in the UK.

6.3.1. Afghan Culture in the UK

The first subsection is going to look at the importance of Afghan culture in the UK to feel at home and grow new roots whilst retaining existing ones. UK Afghans demonstrate that key building blocks of home include Afghan food, mosques, and celebrations of special holidays like Ramadan and Eid. These traditions allow Afghan identity and culture to be lived out post migration, publicly and privately, thereby allowing people to retain these parts of themselves now they have to be absent from Afghanistan. People discuss that multicultural places like London are preferred because there is more cultural diversity and Afghan communities are already present. This further demonstrates the importance of being able to see and retain some of your culture to feel at home where you are.

6.3.1.1. Food

I will firstly discuss the importance of Afghan food for homemaking. Many scholars address the significance of homeland foods for feeling at home. Hage's (1997) interlocuters discuss this after migration from Lebanon to Australia. Nayla finds Lebanese cucumbers, which are different to Australian ones, and thus bring such a sense of home. Meanwhile, Taylor's interlocuters reiterate this after forced migration from Cyprus to North London, where food is used to keep "alive the lost home" (Taylor 2015:20), igniting the memory and senses through smells and tastes relived (ibid). Egyptian man, Tareq, living in Greece further presents this, saying "where one's food is, it's there where s/he belongs" (Veikou and Siapera 2015:130). This is also true for Afghan people in the UK. As addressed in Chapter 4, Halaimzai talks about her family's joy when they arrived at Green Street market in London, and finally found south Asian spices, sweets, halal food, and bulk vegetables and fruit again. Contrastingly, Orfani's husband Hakimi lives in remote Scotland, where he has to travel 2.5 hours to buy halal food, and this attributes to why he is desperate to leave. Fischer's (2017) interlocuters in Brighton discuss this further, where she argues that areas of London are good places because Afghan

businesses are already established. This shows the success of multiculturalism in this regard, where Halaimzai asserts that "London's sizeable south Asian community had carved its own place in the city" (Halaimzai 2021). There is already a south Asian community established, including Afghan, so there is a place for culture to be lived out and for communities to come together.

The interlocuters discuss how Afghan food brings them a feeling of home in the UK. Bahlul wants to be in London because it has the three things that make him feel at home: "*good people and communities, Afghan food, and Afghan communities*". He tells me in London "*you can find any type of food there*". I ask him to talk more about this, and he says:

> "*My mum's food is my favourite. Whatever she makes, you know, and sometimes we go out, to Afghan restaurants. It reminds me of Afghanistan as well. Because they have some nice restaurants, especially in London... we have special food.*

Eating his mum's food in the house and special Afghan dishes in restaurants really brings a feeling of home. Meanwhile, Amooz also wants to be in the UK for halal food and restaurants, telling me "*There are halal foods everywhere, there are halal restaurants everywhere, because there is a big Muslim community here in the UK*". He discusses the pain of being in the temporary hotel because of the food there, like discussed by other Afghans in Chapter 4, and how things improved after they left:

> *"The other thing was the food. When we were in the hotel, we thought that all UK food is like the hotel. But at home we can cook, we find everything like in Afghanistan. All the vegetables, the meat, everything. So, we started having our own food again, making our own food at home. So, this is another change we can feel a little bit".*

Apart from the necessity of halal food, and difficulties of hotel food, this brings to the forefront the importance of 'familiarity' in Boccagni's (2017) three central elements of home, and Hage's (1997) four key feelings of home. Boccagni asserts that this is emotional familiarity, of "intimacy and comfort" (Boccagni 2017:7). It is also mental familiarity; what we are used to, our routines that offer stability in our lives. As explained by Bahlul, it is particularly his mother's food that is his favourite, that homely, maternal feeling of intimacy and comfort. It is also the food of his country, what he has grown up with and has been part of his daily routine. This is attached to his sense of belonging and how he keeps connections with home now he has to be gone. This is the same for Amooz's family, where sourcing and cooking their own food in the house improves their ability to feel at home. This demonstrates Hage's (1997) argument

that nostalgia can be used in a positive way for people who migrate. He argues that "positive encounter[s] with a person, a sound, a smell or a situation" (Hage 1997:6) bring memories that are used to recreate that homely feeling (ibid), where people migrate with home comforts, traditions, and identities that are already habitual (Ratnam 2018). As demonstrated, cooking, eating, and sharing food with others is a key part of this. Whereas many sentimental belongings have to be left behind when you become a refugee, Afghan dishes offer this sentimental value, recreating something dear to you at home.

However, Dahaa explains that food is not enough to feel at home. When I ask him what makes him feel at home, he says:

> "*It's a range of activities. It's not just one or two, and most of them are interrelated. I would get very good food where I am now, probably, but that doesn't make home. So, if I can arrange it [in order], it's the people, the activity, and the community. I think these are the key three that make you feel at home*".

Dahaa can go to his favourite Afghan restaurant that he talks about happily, that is the activity. However, he is not with the people he loves there. So, this is not home. This presents the significance of food as a relational activity, as addressed by Hage (1997), Taylor (2015) and Fischer (2017). It is not only the food, but the activities, businesses, and opportunities for socialising this brings.

The importance of food brings together Taylor's (2015) conceptualisations of the 'temporal home', 'material home', and 'relational home'. The 'material home' considers the sensory and embodied experience of the tastes and smells of home. Meanwhile, the 'temporal home', the time element of home, recognises routines and special events like the daily activity of making food, visiting restaurants and especially the celebration of food during holidays like Eid. The 'relational home' then looks at the people you share this food with, eating with family and friends at home and in restaurants, and connecting with Afghan communities in these locations. All these elements create 'food as home' and are why it is such an important building block of homemaking for Afghan people in the UK.

6.3.1.2. Religious Traditions

Religious traditions and institutions are also key building blocks of 'culture as home'. Amooz and Aarash discuss that holidays like Ramadan and Eid highlight feelings of homesickness and longing to be at home. Amooz misses his family and yearns to be in Afghanistan even more

during this time. Meanwhile, Aarash goes to another Afghan family in the UK who act as his replacement family, further demonstrating the importance of friends and communities in the UK. Bahlul too explains that celebrations of Eid and going to the mosque are why he feels more at home in London than where he is in Southwest England:

> *"In London, there's like, Asian community, in simple words. It's some cultural things as well, you know, if there's Eid, or right now we have Ramadan, it's a completely different vibe in London to here. When we go to the mosque to pray and when we're meeting people"*.

He has a "*little mosque*" where he is in Southwest England. "*However, sometimes it's too full, there's no space so we have to wait outside, [and]… we miss prayer as well*". Amooz says the same, telling me he wanted to come to London over other places in Europe because there are large Asian and Muslim populations, where Afghan people can *"continue their lives, their culture, their religions. In every 100 or 200 metres or half a mile there are mosques in London for everyone".*

London is reported as the most diverse region in Wales and England by the most recent census data from the Office of National Statistics in 2011. It reports there are the most Black, Asian, and ethnic minority residents (40 percent). Meanwhile, 36 percent of Asian people in the UK live in London, compared to 2.5 percent in Southwest England (GOV.UK 2018), and 60 percent of Afghans live in London, compared to 1.4 percent in Southwest England (Office for National Statistics 2013). However, this does not account for people who have migrated since 2011, including during the 2021 withdrawal. What is does show though is London's diversity, particularly compared to where Bahlul is living now. Correspondingly, the most UK mosques are in London (582), which is 25 percent of all British mosques (Mosque Directory 2022), and there are some of the biggest celebrations of Eid reported, including an annual event in Trafalgar Square, Westminster, introduced by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who is Muslim himself (Stoddart 2022; Ummahsonic 2016).

Asian and Afghan communities are long established in some areas of Britain, particularly London (Visram 2021), where Bahlul explains the difference it makes to be able to join this and keep his culture alive post migration:

> *"[Where we are in Southwest England] we don't have any Afghans or Asians, but still our neighbourhood is, you know, they are, we have some really good neighbours. They're all white people from different countries. Sorry it sounds a bit racial based. But yes, some good*

people. But again, our culture and everything is different. Compared to London, or compared to back home, the community, everything is different… But there are two communities we have in London, one smaller one, and one big one, different types of people from Afghanistan. They have meetings and we have WhatsApp chats as well. If there's anything, like if someone dies, or there's a wedding or something like that, you know, everyone is invited. This is how Afghans are [laughs]. Our weddings and everything are big, so, you know, everyone is together".

Having Afghan groups in the UK brings this sense of community where culture can be shared and celebrated, and Bahlul does not have to feel so different to the people around him. He has made it very clear he feels more at home in London to where he is now, and these are the reasons why.

This presents Schiller et al.'s (1992) argument of the actions 'transmigrants' take to develop social fields that connect their homeland and new homes. By building Afghan communities in the UK, Bahlul gets to continue this part of himself, enabling him to feel more rooted and at home in the UK. Meanwhile, the WhatsApp groups demonstrate not only how people connect with others back home after migration (Veikou and Siapera 2015) but maintain new social networks in the UK as well. Like with the Pashtun communities that Helai says support new Afghans in the UK (Helai cited in Fischer 2017), these Afghan communities in London help Bahlul to establish roots here and feel more at home. He refutes Sayad's (2004) argument that migration is a permanent suffering and unrooting, telling me he feels at home here, but Afghanistan is his first home. This presents a double presence, where Afghan food, traditions, and new communities all attribute to this. However, this is not true for everyone. The next subchapter will look further at experiences and perceptions of racism and xenophobia, and how this hinders the ability to feel safe and at home.

6.3.2. Racism and Xenophobia

This subsection will look at Afghan experiences and views on racism and xenophobia in Britain. What this demonstrates is that if you live somewhere where your culture and ethnicity is present, you are more able to feel at home and grow and retain roots. However, if your culture or ethnicity is absent or discriminated against, this restricts the ability to, and leads to feelings of absence.

As discussed by Halaimzai in Chapter 4, her family found food and music in London they had greatly missed, but are located in majority white West Ham and Plaidstow, where they have been victim to numerous racist attacks and harassment. This has restricted their ability to feel at home because they are unsafe and living in panic. Similarly, Fischer's (2017) interlocuters in Brighton describe racist harassment from customers and bosses at work. This is part of what makes them feel depressed, panicked, frustrated, insecure, and paranoid, where in line with Sayad's (2004) 'double absence', Fischer (2017) argues that it feels like a soulless existence full of suffering. Bahlul has also experienced racism that limited him from feeling at home in the UK, and this is one of the reasons why he wants to be in London which is more diverse. I ask him if he would rather be in the UK, Afghanistan, or somewhere else, and he tells me:

> *"At the moment I would say in the UK. I love London especially and I would like to be in London, 100 percent. It's my second home now and it started feeling like home. Generally, I know it's a bit depressing, I'm sorry, but I would rather be in London compared to other places".*

I go on to ask him if there is anything that stops him from feeling at home in the UK, and he tells me:

> *"Not particularly, but sometimes it's just, um. You know, good and bad people are everywhere. I'm not going to say racism. There's still some racism, you know, different areas and different people. So yeah, I'm not going to go in too deep with that, but yes. Sometimes it's just, the people. Where you work and where you study".*

As presented, he is hesitant to discuss the racism he has experienced. To try and enable him to feel comfortable I reply with "yes, there is a lot of racism in the UK" and he says "*Well, yes there is, yes. But what can you do? Nothing*". This brings to attention Agnew's (2005) point that non-white migrants often have to navigate their identity and new homes, at the same time as experiencing xenophobia, racism, and social isolation. This is a central challenge and source of adversity inflicted by forced migration, and how this manifests in the UK for Afghan people. The structures of dominance and ideology shaping this include the 'War on Terror' and rising Islamophobia in Britain (Morey and Yaqin 2011), where research by the University of Birmingham in 2022 found that "Muslims are the UK's second 'least liked' group, after Gypsy and Irish Travellers" (Jones and Unsworth 2022:7). Moreover, in Britain, Islam is often associated with Arab and South Asian people generally, no matter what religion they are; and

the UK has a long history of racism to South Asian and Arab people, particularly with 'paki-bashing'[2] (ibid) that Halaimzai's family have been victim to.

Both Amooz and Bahlul tell me they want to be in London because it is multicultural and they see it as having less racism than other places, which echoes Sayyad and Dr Nashimi discussed in Chapter 4. Bahlul feels at home in London. Meanwhile, Dr Nasimi says he has "never felt sad about being here" (Dr Nasimi cited in Miller 2018), and Sayyad says, "I love this city" (Sayyad cited in Miller 2018). Amooz does not feel at home in London because it is not Afghanistan, but he would rather be here than somewhere else in the Western world. Therefore, I argue that multiculturalism and freedom from discrimination are key building blocks of home for Afghans in the UK. Whereas experiences of discrimination and the absence of Afghan culture are restrictions to being able to grow new roots and feel at home, which lead to feelings of absence. The next subsection will now look at identity and belonging in more detail, and experiences where forced migration has led to 'splitting' and identity crises.

6.3.3. Identity and Belonging

Many scholars recognise the link between identity, belonging, and home. One of Sommerville's signifiers of home is 'roots', which he conceptualises as "a sense of individual identity" (Sommerville 1992:7). Meanwhile, Ratnam (2018), Hage (1997), and Taylor (2015) foreground that feeling a sense of belonging is key to being able to feel at home, being in the comfort of what you know and not an outsider. The previous subsection demonstrates the ways the people in this thesis keep their Afghan identity alive in the UK post migration. This echoes the UK Afghans in Fischer's (2017) research, and the Bajan-Britons discussed by Chamberlain (cited in Hall 2019). Their identity, culture, and home were already built in Afghanistan, and now they have to be gone they find new ways to live this out in the UK.

As discussed, Bahlul and Amooz's desire to be in London's multiculturalism comes from their want to see and retain elements of their Afghan identity and culture. To able to be more themselves and have this sense of familiarity. However, forced migration does take you away from what you know and into another place, unable to return home. This can lead to identity crises. Bashir says his identity is in jeopardy because the Taliban regime means he can no longer be a "proud Afghan". Meanwhile, Dahaa is experiencing an identity crisis:

[2] Racist attacks to Pakistani and South Asian people in Britain.

"It has become so long that now, I don't know if you know about this term... I didn't know what it meant until now I am experiencing it for the past couple of years. It's called the identity crisis. Because it's just like I just don't belong to anywhere now. I lived in Wales, I lived in another part of England, I live in London. It's just like I don't, I don't feel belonging to any of the places that I go".

Dahaa's prolonged forced migration from home has created a double absence where he feels he does not belong to anywhere anymore. This brings to attention the scholarship on splitting and the effects of being torn between two or more places (Agnew 2005). Forced migration can lead you to have multiple homes and identities. However, it can also lead to feeling like you have no home (Taylor 2015) and an identity crisis. Psychology specialist, Cherry, defines an identity crisis as "a developmental event that involves a person questioning their sense of self or place in the world" (Cherry 2022). Dahaa has been away from home for so long and unable to establish a connection with the UK that he feels his roots are no longer in either place, and this creates a complete lack of belonging. This is described further by psychology and refugee specialist, Papadopoulos (2002), by his concepts of 'mosaic substratum' and 'nostalgic disorientation'. The 'mosaic substratum' is the mosaic, or 'building blocks' (Hage 1997), of home that construct our identity. This includes belonging to a country, culture, language and "space permeated by certain smells and tastes, etc" (Papadopoulos 2002:17). If we lose this home, it can lead to 'nostalgic disorientation', where this assault to the 'mosaic substratum' can cause great psychological suffering (ibid) and hopelessness (Mwamzandi 2019).

This section has looked further at the importance of identity and belonging for 'culture as home'. The sub-conclusion will now summarise this subchapter.

6.3.5. Sub-conclusion

This subchapter has looked at the significance of 'culture as home'. The first section discusses the importance of being able to see and retain Afghan culture in the UK to feel at home, where people talk about preferring multicultural places like London, because they can live out their Afghan identity post migration. Food and traditions are key 'building blocks' (Hage 1997) of home, including eating, sourcing, and cooking Afghan food at home and in public places like restaurants and shops, as well as going to the mosque, celebrating holidays like Ramadan and Eid, and essentially, having an Afghan community to share this with. The next subsection looks at experiences and views on racism and xenophobia in Britain, and how experiences of discrimination create unsafety that restricts the ability to feel at home and feel present. Again,

diverse places like London are preferred because it is perceived there is less racism and more ability to be yourself. This demonstrates that multiculturalism, freedom from discrimination, and Afghan and South Asian communities are key 'building blocks' of home for UK Afghans. Thereafter, I look at the importance of identity and belonging, and how forced migration can lead to identity crisis. This subchapter again demonstrates that if these 'building blocks' of home are present, people are able to experience a double presence, or at least prefer to be there than other places in the Western world. Meanwhile, a lack of these building blocks leads people to not feel at home, experiencing a double absence. The final chapter will now present the conclusion, summarising the main points within this thesis.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Through conducting seven qualitative interviews with Afghan people in the UK, and gathering secondary data of lived experiences of UK Afghans that have already been published, this thesis has answered the research question '*how do people experience home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK?'* Within this, it has also answered the three working questions 1. *How do Afghan people in the UK experience home?* 2. *Do they have roots in Afghanistan, the UK, both, or neither?* and 3. *Do they experience a 'double absence', a 'double presence', a 'single absence', or a 'single presence'? What attributes to this?* What I demonstrate is that there are three central elements to home for the UK Afghans in this research. The most important is 'people as home', where you are at home if the people you care about are there, and for some, home directly means people. The primary building block here is family, as well as friends, community, and other social and professional networks. The second element is 'safety as home', where physical and psychological safety are key building blocks of home, and peace, freedom, choice, security, and hope are part of this. The third central element is 'culture as home', where being able to see and retain some of your culture is key to be able to feel at home, where food, traditions such as going to the mosque and celebrating special holidays like Ramadan and Eid, and having Afghan communities to share this with, are key building blocks of home. Moreover, freedom from discrimination and a sense of identity and belonging are central, where multicultural places are preferred, for a diversity of people, and existing Afghan and South Asian communities for roots to be planted in.

I explain what happens to experiences of home after forced migration from Afghanistan to the UK, thorough employing a theoretical framework arguing that there are four potential states of being after forced migration: the 'double absence' (Sayad 2004), 'double presence', 'single absence', and 'single presence'. The 'double absence' is Sayad's (2004) theory that migration is an ongoing suffering, where being split between places leads you to feel neither here nor there. You are absent from the homeland, but psychologically and symbolically absent from your new location as well, through living in adversity and marginality, and inner turmoil after dislocation from home. The findings demonstrate that this is true for many UK Afghans in this research. However, this is a one-sided look at migration, and other UK Afghans present the possibility of a double or single presence after forced migration. The double presence shows how people are able to feel both here and there; at home in their new location, whilst still connected to their homeland. Meanwhile, the 'single absence' and 'single presence' account for the possibility that someone might sever all ties with their homeland, and thus feel present

only in their new location, or absent for the reasons discussed. The introduction of these concepts were guided by the data, where one of the interlocuters shows a single presence to be true. He has severed his roots to Afghanistan because of the trauma he experienced, and the UK is now his home.

Through the analysis, I demonstrate that the building blocks of people, safety, and culture as home are what lead people to feel absent or present after forced migration. If these building blocks are present, it can enable people to feel at home, grow and retain roots, and feel present where they are; where some experience a double or single presence, or at least feel more at home in the UK. Correspondingly, if these building blocks are absent, it can restrict and prohibit the ability to feel at home and grow new roots, which leads to a double absence. Within this I analyse the significance of time and memories of home, where the past, present, and future intertwine. Memories of the past and imaginings of the future are used to navigate the present; to home-build, or to offer refuge from the pain of a double absence, through memories of the homeland and imaginings of returning. I introduce my concept of 'embodied memories', where there are memories that are images of the past. However, embodied memories are particularly powerful and feel like they still live with you in the present. I also introduce Dahaa's concept of the 'golden cage', offering a metaphor of his refugee experience. He may like the UK and be grateful for refuge here. However, he did not choose this, and he is stuck here, so it feels like a prison, a golden cage. Furthermore, I look at the structural constraints that restrict and prohibit Afghan people from homemaking and establishing roots in the UK, such as the adversity, marginality and limbo created by the UK asylum system and failures of OWW.

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9. Appendices