# Collapsible Homes: On Conceptions of Home and Home Making Practices in the Liminal Space of the AZC in the Netherlands.

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## On Conceptions of Home and Home Making Practices in the Liminal Space of the AZC in the Netherlands.

Master Thesis
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**University of Leiden**
January 2023

## Table of contents

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of the interviewees: Ref'at, Rebal, Maha, Ahmed, Sadeq, and Samer, who generously shared their stories and experiences with me. Without their willingness to participate in this research, it would not have been possible. I am truly grateful for their time and effort.

I am grateful to all my professors and lecturers for enlightening me with their knowledge and guidance. I am also deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Judith Naef, for her invaluable advice, patience, and encouragement throughout my research. Working with Dr. Naef gave me the space to humanize the work process and to trust in my own natural curiosity and intuition as a researcher. Lastly, I am immensely grateful to my family and friends for their love and support.

# INTRODUCTION

One in every 77 people on earth is forcibly displaced[1]. People displacement is not just a phenomenon. It is a feature of this era and it would be short-sighted to consider that it only influences the lives of one person for every 77 people. In a mobilized world, being "rootless, displaced between worlds, [and] living between a lost past and a fluid present"[2], is the most descriptive image for the journeying modern consciousness. As a result of mobility, significant shifts have been undergoing in understanding, envisioning, and defining many concepts like identity, home, and belonging.

The effect of fluidity and mobility has led to what Nigel Rapport & Andrew Dawson describe as a "dramatic change"[3] in the way we understand and define home. This thesis studies the notion of home in the unusual setting created by people displacement; aiming to understand the effect of displacement on home as a notion and home making as a practice.

The scholarly interest in the notion of home and the process of home making in a mobilized world has notably grown. This interest, however, has been directed towards the two ends of the story—the home that is departed and the home making in the land of destination. So, on the one hand, some studies focus on home in the pre-migration stage, where migrants make their decisions and decide on their future destination. The other focuses on the post-migration phase and mostly approach it from the social and economic impacts of migration on host communities.[4] At the same time, a whole journey that could last lifelong exists in-between

[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Mid-Year Trends," UNHCR (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency), accessed December 22, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends.html.

[2] Jan Willem Duyvendak, "A Homesick World?," in *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Europe and the United States* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 7-25.

[3] Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, "Home and Movement: A Polemic," *Migrants of Identity*, July 2021, pp. 19-38, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003136149-3.

[4] Russell King and Aija Lulle , "Research on Migration: Facing Realities and Maximising Opportunities," *Directorate-General for Research and Innovation - European Commission*, 2016, pp. 1-155, https://doi.org/10.2777/414370.

those two ends. Millions of people, like refugees and asylum seekers, find themselves trapped in "temporary" situations. Considering that the asylum seeking and refugee studies are generally little theorised.[5] Home and home making during this asylum seeking limbo phase is, by extensions, found to be an understudied topic. And this is where the interest of this research is directed.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2020, 26 million refugees were under the organization's protection[6]. These millions are stuck in liminal situation between the countries they left and the lands of a destination they aim to arrive at. And the fact that the refugee's stay in the camps is temporary could be misleading. This temporariness, the "ontological temporariness" as Susan Gal describes,[7] may last for months, years, decades, and sometimes lifetimes if we consider the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria, for example.

This research project would like to examine the meaning of home and feeling at home in the conditions of the in-betweenness. It explores the impact of undefined temporariness on home making and feeling at home in asylum seekers centres in the Netherlands. With a focus on the Arabs and Arabic speaking asylum seekers, this research will study the aforementioned axes by getting close to the details of the asylum seekers' daily lives in the refugee camps, waiting for their residency permits in the Netherlands. It asks the questions

- How do asylum seekers living in the refugee camps make their sense of home?
- What are the practices and strategies they adopt to feel at home (if possible)?

To effectively engage with the aforementioned axes and answer the research questions, this project uses a qualitative method based on in-depth semi-structured interviews[8] with six Arabs or Arabic-speaking asylum seekers from different Arab countries to explore how asylum

[5] King and Lulle, "Research on Migration", 43.
[6] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refugee Statistics," UNHCR (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency), accessed January 4, 2022, https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/.
[7] SUSAN GAL, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction," *Differences* 13, no. 1 (January 2002): pp. 77-95, https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-13-1-77.
[8] Alan Morris, "Developing the Interview Guide," in *A Practical Introduction to in-Depth Interviewing* (London: SAGE, 2015), pp. 1-14.

seekers create a sense of home in Asielzoekerscentra (AZCs) or equivalent shelters in the Netherlands. This is a relatively small research sample, limited to Arab-speaking refugees in the Netherlands. It would be interesting to expand both the quantitative scope and diversity of respondents and shelters in future research to gain more reliable results. Despite the modest scope, the critical analysis of my fieldwork data has delivered interesting insights into asylum seekers' perception of home, and the practices of home making. Focusing on a particular group allowed a better critical engagement with the social and cultural related practices, making a better sense of their meanings, and contextually analyzing them.

Through this inquiry, insights can be gained on the asylum seekers' perception of home, the similarities and differences between these understandings, and the factors that shape these perceptions from each individual's experience. The conversations focus on the interviewees' daily lives in the AZC, exploring how living in the AZC and the procedure of asylum seeking affect their sense stability, security, identity and belonging on both private and collective levels. Then, the interviews move to ways through which the asylum seekers develop their practices of home making as a response to the conditions under which they live. The findings of the semi-structured interviews and field visit observations are critically analyzed with a conceptual framework built upon home making on the one hand and liminality on the other.

As my interviewees explained, home is a complex web of feelings based mainly on the (emotional, social, and material) sense of security. As well as the social, political, and economic justice. It is experienced and practiced in different domains, from the most private to the public. These domains (private and public) are interconnected. Loss of a sense of safety in one's dwelling can erode a person's sense of security and belonging to their homeland. Conversely, not feeling at home in one's country can affect them even in their bedroom and on their pillow. In other words, the feeling of being, or not being, at home on a private level is directly affected by feeling, or not feeling, at home on a collective level, and vice versa.

The practices of home making by asylum seekers in the AZC were largely shaped by their past experiences of home. They attempt to recall the feelings of safety, stability, identity, and belonging by restoring a home or a miniature of home through various practices, routines, rituals, and material objects. These practices could be cultural, social, religious, or political in nature.

This research project, however, cannot confirm that a sense of home is attainable for asylum seekers during their stay in the AZC, regardless of the stay duration. This is due to the contradictory nature of home compared to the AZC. The analysis reveals the contradictions between all what home means and represents in terms of space, phase, and identity vis a vis the AZC as a liminal space, phase, or identity. The AZC as a space and a phase is designed to be and to feel temporary, no matter how long the stay is. It is not designed to be welcoming or encouraging people to stay unless they really need to. Therefore, the spatial design, the rules, and the asylum-seeking procedures with its uncertain waiting time span are all factors that undermine the sense of safety, stability, belonging, hence home.

As a researcher, having personally gone through the procedure of asylum seeking and living in the AZC, provided me with a firsthand experience with the topic I study. It gave me, added to speaking the same language, an insight on the sample I approach and interview. It also gave me a contextualized knowledge about the procedure, the AZC, and its rules and conditions. Collecting the primary material might, however, have recalled some emotions from my previous experience, but being aware of my positionality and critically engaging with the primary material enabled me to conduct an equitable work.

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter explores and analyses how the interviewed asylum seekers conceptualize home: how they define it, what affects this definition, and what this adds to our understanding of home as a notion in general. The second chapter discusses the living the state of limbo in the AZC. It looks at experiencing liminality as a space, phase and identity as well. The third chapter engages with the different strategies developed by the interviewees to create their sense of home and the practices of home making. It explores the different domains (private – semi-public – public) in which the asylum seeker practices the home making process and whether each domain influences this process.

## POSITIONALITY

As a researcher with a refugee background, this research project brought back both good and bad memories and emotions for me. I could see the anxiety and tiredness in the eyes of my respondents, which was not something I investigated, but something I know intimately from experience. It made me revisit some of my own memories and sympathize with their experiences, but I tried to critically engage with them without victimizing either myself or my interviewees.

While this was sometimes difficult, my positionality also benefitted my research. Both because of my language skills and because I understand the experience my interviewees are going through. For an “outsider” reader, it may seem at first glance that my being a refugee would also allow better access to a group that can be suspicious towards institutional initiatives. However, this is not entirely accurate. Asylum seekers are often sensitive about their situation, and they may feel as if they are being watched, observed, and studied by those around them, which can be uncomfortable and make them alert. Making the situation worse would be if "one of them" returned back to them with papers and pen, asking them the questions that "white people" ask. To avoid this, I presented the project in a way that encouraged a sense of solidarity. My interviewees were eager to assist "one of them" in obtaining her degree, rather than feeling as though they were being studied. One of my interviewees even offered to smuggle me into the camp to improve my observations and research.

I used the Egyptian dialect when conducting interviews, except with the Iraqi interviewee as the Gulf dialect is more familiar to him. The Egyptian dialect is easy to understand and beloved by all Arabs, and carries an impression of simplicity, while Gulf dialect is subconsciously associated with wealth and power. Using this dialect can help break down psychological barriers when communicating. Language and dialects are true factors in forming positionalities. Therefore, it would also be interesting for future researchers with other linguistic and cultural capital to do a similar project among asylum seekers from different parts of the world and compare the findings with those in this thesis.

## LIMITATION

This study was limited in several ways. First, the sample size was relatively small, which should be considered when applying the findings on a wider range. Second, the study was conducted in a single geographic area, which may not be generalizable to all regions. Third, the interviewees belong to one geographical region (the Arab world) which should be considered when applying the findings on a wider range.

# 1. CONCEPTUALIZING HOME BY ASYLUM SEEKERS

This chapter studies how asylum seekers signify “home”. Drawing on Susan Gal’s fractal approach to the public/private distinction, and Jan Willem Duyvendak’s three components of ‘home’, it shows how ideas about the nation and the security it is supposed to provide affect the ability to ‘feel at home’ in the actual place of dwelling.

When I chose to study the concept of home and feeling at home in liminal spaces, I interviewed Arabs and Arabic-speaking asylum seekers in the refugee camps (Asielzoekerscentra, or AZCs) in the Netherlands. The fact that Arabic has no single word that equals the multi-meaning word "home" in English posed a challenge. To address this, I translated the word to two main meanings ( وطن - منزل) (*Manzil* - *Watan*), the literal meanings of home as homeland and dwelling. Then, I explained them to the interviewees. Before I give them the freedom to define the concept for themselves and to go beyond the literal meaning of “home” to what feels “home.”

When approaching the concept of home making through its literal Arabic translation, the focus of the conversation with the interviewees shifted to the material aspect of it. Home from a material or a spatial perspective is defined as physical structure(s) or place(s) that are often associated with certain feelings or meanings. Upon reviewing the answers of the interviewees, it appeared that these physical structures formed a group of spheres/circles, with some surrounding and containing the other. These spheres range from the most private (e.g. bedrooms) to the most public (e.g. nation).

To understand the relationship between these spheres/circles of home and how one affects the other, I found the fractal approach of the private/public dichotomy introduced by Susan Gal very helpful.[9] Fractality is a concept that refers to the idea that certain patterns and

[9] SUSAN GAL, “A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,”. 77-95.

structures can be seen at different scales (home in our case). It is a way of understanding how complex systems are organized and how they interact with and affect each other. Susan Gal argues that our sense of privacy only has a relative meaning to the public sphere, in such a way that my house is private relative to the street, but within my house, my bedroom is private compared to the salon, and my street is more private than the rest of city.

This project argues that home should be seen as a relative concept, similar to Gal's understanding of the public/private distinction. In other words, it should be seen as physical spheres/circles, some surrounding and containing the other, widened and narrowed, not only according to space, but from the most private to the most public. This fractal, according to Gal, is fluid as its borders of distinction are not strictly fixed and in constant change.[10] Fractality provides, not only a better understanding of the concept of home, but also a detection of the relationship between these hypothetical scaled circles and the effect of one on the other. (Figure1)

I believe that the lens of fractality can be applied to the other approaches of home (psychological and social). This project divides the domains of home on a spatial level, but it engages as well with the psychological and social approaches to home and feeling at home. It investigates how refugees invest places with meaning and feeling, arguing that the asylum-seeker's relationship with the Netherlands as a country greatly influences their feeling of home in their bedrooms. And that the sense of home, as I suggest in this research project, cannot occur entirely in isolation from the feeling of home on the broader spatial domain as neighbourhood, city, or

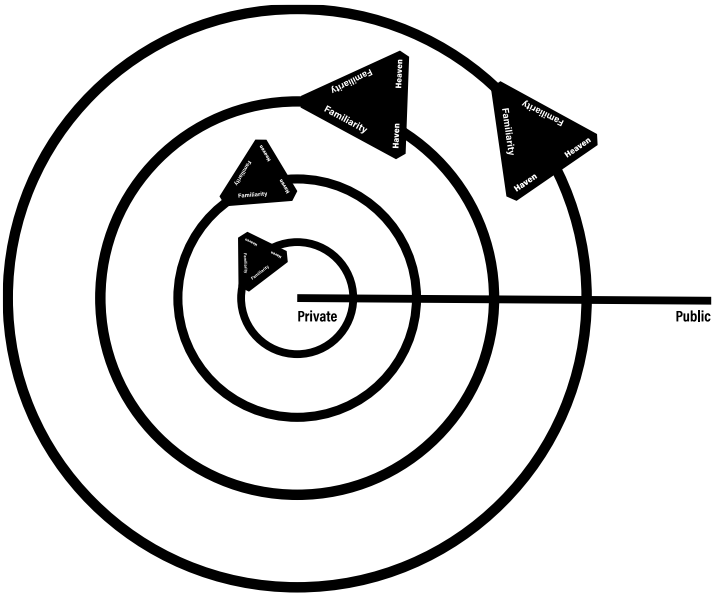

*Figure 1- Home Through Fractality Lens*

[10] SUSAN GAL, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,". 77-95.

country. Before moving to asylum seekers' conceptualizations of home and analyzing their answers through the aforementioned fractal lens, the concept of home will be given space for discussion and explanation.

## HOME & FEELING AT HOME

Home is a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept. For many years, scholars have been debating about it's meaning(s). It signifies not only a physical place, it is a space where certain practices, routines and activities take place.[11] It is a "source of identity, belonging from the past, a goal for personal and social development, an abstract state of being, and a legal concept."[12] Home is an individual subjective experience that carries emotional, social and material significance, as well as a collective representation of the values and goals that societies strive for, such as those related to gender, class, and culture.[13] In other words, home is both a reflection of one's individual identity as well as a way to develop a sense of belonging to a certain culture or society.[14]

The definition of home is approached from different dimensions; social, material, psychological, and even political. From a material perspective, home can refer to the emotional connection to a place, often tied to its ability to provide "security, warmth, and cosiness."[15] The psychological dimension of home is associated with the "sense of stability, happiness, privacy, control, identity, and self-esteem."[16] In comparison, the social dimension of home refers to the

[11] Jeanne Moore, "Polarity or Integration? Towards a Fuller Understanding of Home and Homelessness," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* , 2007, p. 145.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Cameron Parsell, "Home Is Where the House Is: The Meaning of Home for People Sleeping Rough," *Housing Studies* 27, no. 2 (2012): p. 159, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2012.632621.
[14] Jeanne Moore, "Polarity or Integration?," p. 145.
[15] Jinwei Hao, Jin Zhu, and Sian Thompson, "Surviving in the Post-Repatriation Era: Home-Making Strategies of Homeless People in Post-Socialist China," *Housing Studies* 37, no. 2 (January 2021): p. 296, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2020.1867082.
[16] Ibid.

solidarity, support and interactions between relatives, companions, neighbors, and colleagues.[17] From a political perspective, home can be seen as a tool used by governments and other powerful entities to control people's behavior, shape their sense of identity and belonging, and create a sense of security and stability.[18]

Although these multiple approaches to define "home" have aimed to draw what could be seen as a 360° picture of the concept, the concept itself is developing and relatively changing due to multiple reasons or factors. One of the main factors and most relevant to this research topic is the mobility of people. Mobility was, and still is, confusing not only to moving/displaced people but also to the "native societies" experiencing its consequences.[19] In their research, Rapport and Dawson stated that "Exile, emigration, banishment, labour migrancy, tourism, urbanization, and counter-urbanization are the central motifs of modern culture while being rootless, displaced between worlds, living between a lost past and a fluid present, are perhaps the most fitting metaphors for the journeying modern consciousness"[20]. Home by extension has changed both as an idea and a practice. The millions of moving people every day, and the hundreds of airports, thousands of hotels, trains, refugee camps, boats, Airbnb and booking.com, social media, virtual reality, and metaverse. All these manifestations of fluidity are affecting the concept of home. Therefore, Jan Willem Duyvendak titled the first chapter of his book "*The Politics of Home*" with a statement followed by a question mark, "A Homesick World?" [21]

This fluidity and mobility created a new reality where nomadic people are required to redefine/recreate homes away from their homes and settled people are expected to absorb this reality and interact with it. In short, the question of home meaning and home making meaning is no longer a question of nomadic / displaced people. It is also a question of interest/concern for the receiving societies.

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[17] Hao, Zhu, and Thompson, "Surviving in the Post-Repatriation Era", p. 296.

[18] Hazel Easthope, "A Place Called Home," pp. 128-138.

[19] Paolo Boccagni and Jan Willem Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public. on the Scales and Stakes of Framing, Feeling, and Claiming Extra-Domestic Space as 'Home,'" *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 6, pp. 1-14 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12886.

[20] Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, "Home and Movement: A Polemic," *Migrants of Identity*, July 2021, pp. 19-38, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003136149-3.

[21] Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p. 7.

The dialectic relationship between settled and nomadic people is not only concerned with home as a physical space, but also with the sense of belonging and identity that is constructed and sustained to fulfill certain interests of a particular group, which may come at the cost of other groups. This dynamic is closely intertwined with politics and political discourse.[22] Therefore, home has been occupying a space in the discourses of politicians, policymakers, and electoral programs of parties in countries that want to "integrate" the immigrants and make them part of the fabric of society. In the Netherlands political debate for example, the word 'home' has been mentioned 15 times in the electoral programme of the centre right liberal VVD ruling party. Asylum seeking and seekers occupied a whole section with a detailed proposed strategy that engages with cultural, social, and economic matters related.[23]

In *Politics of Home*, Duyvendak states that homes have been politicized. He further explains "the risks of this politicization [and] alternative home making strategies that aim to transcend the 'logic of identities' where one group's ability to feel at home comes at the expense of other groups."[24] He examines how home is used to create a sense of belonging and identity to a certain group of people, and how it is used to exclude other groups. He also sheds a light on how home is used to create a sense of community and solidarity, and how it is also used to oppress and control people.[25]

After the scholarly attempts to define home from psychological, social, and political perspectives, Duyvendak goes beyond developing another definition of home and suggests a basic classification of the elements that make people feel at home. These elements (Familiarity, Haven, Heaven) do not define home but make it. By familiarity, Duyvendak means knowing the place and "it is the precondition for the other two" [26] elements. Haven, according to Duyvendak, is related to the "feelings of safety, security, and privacy, which most often relate to the micro level of the house."[27] While Heaven is more outward-oriented. It is where an individual "feels

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[22] Paolo Boccagni and Jan Willem Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public", pp. 1-14.
[23] VVD, 'Nieuwe keuzes in een nieuwe tijd: Verkiezingsprogramma 2021-2025' see: http://www.vvd.nl/content/uploads/2021/02/Verkiezingsprogramma-VVD-2021-2025.pdf
[24] Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home"*p. 5.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home"*p. 39.
[27] Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home"*p. 38.

publicly free and independent, [it] embodies shared histories, material and/or symbolic place with one's own people and activities."[28] These three elements provide a usfull tool to approach and analyze the meaning of home and the practices of home making by the asylum seekers in the AZC throughout this project.

[28] Ibid.

## ASYLUM SEEKERS' PERCEPTION OF HOME

This chapter approaches the notion of home by borrowing the fractal lens of the dichotomy of private/public introduced by Susan Gal. It examines how each scale of the pattern mutually affects the other (from bigger to smaller, from public space to private space), and how the pillars of home suggested by Duyvendak (Familiarity, Haven, Heaven) may provide a criterion of distinction. In other words, this chapter looks at how the feeling of being, or not being, at home on a private level is directly affected by feeling, or not feeling, at home on a collective level, and vice versa.

As mentioned earlier, six Arab and Arab speaking asylum seekers were interviewed in this research project. The aim is to figure out how they create a sense of home, if it is even possible, in the refugee camps/shelters as liminal spaces. Considering that the process of home making requires a preconception of home, and that the practices of home making are to a great extent driven by "individual's ideal understanding of the concept [of home] or by their personal beliefs about what constitutes a home" [29], the interviewees were asked to define/verbally illustrate what home means to them.

Interestingly, the two literal meanings of home (*Manzil* & *Watan*), according to the interviewees' answers, were very much related to each other. So, a private circle of *Manzil* would not entirely feel home if it does not exist in a public/wide circle of *Watan* that feels home. The process of home making and feeling at home, which will be explained in the third chapter, is twofold: Firstly, it happens simultaneously, with one level impacting the other. Secondly, it does not work in a vacuum; the context has its own impact.

A second reading of the primary material reveals a deeper connection between the interviewees' perception or definition of home and their previous experience of it. It appears that

[29] Joanne Neale, "Homelessness and Theory Reconsidered," *Housing Studies* 12, no. 1 (1997): pp. 47-61, https://doi.org/10.1080/02673039708720882.

the way interviewees define home is largely shaped by their past experiences, rather than their future expectations. Meaning, that all what home was and/or was not supposed to be, is reflected in the answers. A dialogue written by the Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani in "Returning to Haifa" eloquently formulates this meaning: "Do you know what the homeland is, Safiyya? The homeland is where none of this can happen ."[30] Here, home is defined by what it is not supposed to be, more than what it is supposed to be.

For Ahmed al-Ghurair, a Syrian pharmacist asylum seeker in the Netherlands, home is found in social then financial security. Family in Al-Ghurair's case represents the private circle of Home, while the wider circle of Home as a Homeland manifests in the financial security. A-Ghurair's states that his relationship with homeland is not based on geography, but rather on security, particularly financial security. While explaining the logic behind his perspective, he seeks legitimacy in a quote by Imam Ali Ibn Abi-Talib (prophet Mohammed's cousin): "*Wealth converts a strange land into homeland and poverty turns a homeland into a strange land*." [31]

> Let me give you an example. Syrians in Turkey are two groups. Poor workers, who suffer from discrimination, bullying, and pressure. And business owners who face none of this, and are given facilities, loans, and citizenship. The second group won't experience the feeling of homelessness. This feeling is left for the poor workers.

Al-Ghurair, therefore, emphasizes the idea that the wide circle of home as homeland is not necessarily assigned to a certain geographical location. Instead, it is simply where the private circle of home as family can exist in a context of safety and financial security.

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[30] Ghassan Kanafani, *Return to Haifa*, 1st ed. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 186.

[31] Mohamed Abu Jawhar, " المقالة العدالة الاجتماعية في نهج الامام أمير المؤمنين علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام," العدالة الاجتماعية في نهج الامام أمير المؤمنين علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام ( Al-Hawza), accessed December 26, 2022, https://hawzah.net/ar/Article/View/90927/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%86%D9%87%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85.

Another emphasis on the aforementioned idea can be found in the answers given by Ref'at Ahmed, a Syrian Kurdish asylum seeker, who explains that having a nationality of a country does not necessarily mean having a home or a feeling of being at home. Home, in Ahmed's interview is defined in the "Kanafanian" way. Meaning that the feeling of homelessness in Syria makes Syria the antithesis of what the home should be. And thus, gives a preliminary conception of what the homeland should be.

> What is home... We [Kurds] have no homeland. We do have Syrian nationality, but as a citizen, there is always a limit to your rights. In the army, for example, a Kurdish will never exceed the rank of colonel, no matter how competent he is. You want, but they don't want you to be [an equal citizen]. This means you have no home.

Ref'at's experience of living in a predominantly Kurdish province provided him with a sense of familiarity with the language and culture, as well as a feeling of safety and security from his family and extended family. However, the fact that he was a Syrian national created a contradiction with being Kurdish, which disrupted his feeling of home in Syria and even in the Kurdish northern region. In other words, the fact that Syria does not feel home, echoed to Ahmed's feeling at home in the northern region of Syria that (or although it) is almost fully Kurdish. This meant that even in a place that was almost entirely Kurdish, he still could not feel at home. This fractal nature of affect can be seen as waves that move in circles after a stone is dropped in a quiet lake, with the circles starting from the outside and moving inward. This means that not feeling at home in the nation can have a negative effect on one's capacity to feel at home in the region, city, and family home.

The two Palestinian interviewees, Maha Ayoub and Rebal al-Khatib, showed a very interesting similarity in the ambiguity of the image of home, the struggle to find a description of it, and ending up using the term "return" in their own definitions. Home on all levels, to both Palestinian interviewees, is where one returns to, no matter how far or long they go away. The

term “return” is a key notion in the Palestinian historical narrative and struggle for their cause. [32] Once again, the previous experience cast a shade on how the current view of home is shaped. This effect did not only apply to their views of home as homeland, the return as a term was also used in their definition or perception of home as a dwelling or a property. Maha describes:

> Home is the place where me and my family feel safe and in peace. […] Here, I never feel home. You know, when someone leaves their home for any reason, they would miss it. They would feel that they want to go back, to return to their own place. I have never felt this way towards the AZC. […] Here, if I want to buy anything for the apartment, I must first think, where am I going to put it, as the apartment is not mine (shared and temporary) in addition to the rules of living in the AZC. The idea of temporariness itself is really affecting my mental health. I always say, I might receive my decision from the IND, or they might move me to another AZC, or they also might decide to deport me and my kids. I do not know. It leaves me in unstable mood. I do not feel that I am in a home. All what makes a place “home” does not exist here.

In addition to the point mentioned earlier regarding the repetitive use of “return”, the same pattern of the fractal/cascaded effect of feeling at Home, or on the contrary, feeling homeless appears clearly in the way she describes her relationship with the Netherlands, the AZC, then her shared apartment in the AZC. The wide circle of home in Maha’s case is related to her status in the Netherlands. The fact that this circle is shaky, temporary, and not secured as a home yet, is reflected, directly and indirectly, in the smallest circle/detail of Maha’s personal circle of home as a unit or a property. It is reflected on her pillow, kitchen tools, food choices, dressing choices, and even her decisions regarding her children’s education. In other words, feeling at Home in the Netherlands (or not) is, undoubtedly, affecting her feeling of at home in her room in the AZC.

A similar pattern in a different context confirms the suggested relativity of feeling at home, and how a wider public circle can affect the sense of home on a smaller, more private level. Re’bal, a second-generation Palestinian refugee born and raised in Abu Dhabi with a

[32] Ron Kuzar, “The Term Return in the Palestinian Discourse on the Right of Return,” *Discourse &Amp; Society* 19, no. 5 (2008): pp. 629-644, https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508092246.

refugee travel document issued from Lebanon, experienced a deep feeling of not being at home. This feeling was inherited from his family history and the collective memory of Palestinians, which disrupted his sense of home, stability, and security in Abu Dhabi, resonating in various aspects and the tiny details of his and his family's life.

> Unfortunately, until now I don't know what home means. I have never felt at home. When I was a little child, I remember my parents saying about our apartment in Abu Dhabi: "this is not our permanent apartment, so we don't want to buy lots of stuff or spend lots of money on improving it." They kept delaying buying these things, hoping that one day we will return to what should be our home. Where is this home, and when are we going to go to this home, I never knew. And it didn't happen. […] But if I have to give you a general definition for Home on both levels: I see it as the place you always come back to.

Although Rebal and his family were, to a certain extent, settled in the UAE, something was missing. If we were to give it a name, it would possibly be what Duyvendak name it as the sense of "Heaven". Heaven in this context refers to the "public place where one can collectively be, express and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent."[33] It also refers, as previously mentioned, to the place where an individual shares culture and history with the collective. This outward oriented feeling of home on a public level was simply shaping how Rebal's family house in Abu Dhabi look like, the way it's furnished, and what kind of feelings and bond he was allowed to develop or have towards it as a "temporary" place. A temporary place that he lived in for almost 30 years.

For Rebal, being an asylum seeker in the Netherlands is just another, and more intense, round of being a refugee. The feeling of instability and insecurity and temporariness he faces in the AZC is just a more vivid picture of what Rebal has seen all his life. With different sets or contexts, the 2 phases of his life led to similar results because the same pattern was reproduced in a different context. This example is another evidence of the suggested fractal nature of the

[33] Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home"*p. 38.

duality of Homeness and Homelessness, the way by which each single scale of the pattern mutually affecting the other (bigger to smaller = public space to private space), and how the pillars of Home suggested by Duyvendak may provide a of criterion of distinction. In other words, the feeling of being at home on a private level is directly affected by the feeling of being at home on a collective level, and vice versa.

While most of the previously mentioned examples represent the effect of the wider/more public circle of Home and feeling at home on the narrower/more private circle of Home and feeling at home. The case of Ahmed al-Oqaili is an example of how the effect can happen the other way around. Sadeq Al-Oqaili is an Iraqi asylum seeker with a unique case. Al-Oqaili was a settled refugee/permit stay holder in the Netherlands, before the Dutch authorities decided that the city, he comes from in Iraq has become safe and that he needs to be deported to his country. By refusing the government's decision, al-Oqaili lost his right to stay in the AZC and managed to find a shelter for the "homeless" people where he lives now.

> "A home بيت is what makes someplace a Homeland وطن. If you have no home بيت, no job, and no medical care in your homeland, then you have no homeland. […] I wish I had never left Iraq. But it is too late to go back."

Home, or a relative feeling of it, was given to al-Oqaili and taken back from him. Therefore, losing his house and becoming homeless led to losing this relative feeling of being at home that he developed towards the Netherlands. Al-Oqaili's words are full of bitterness and anger towards the Netherlands or the system to be more specific. By taking him out of his home, the sense of security and safety, which is a major part of feeling at home, was taken away from Al-Oqaili. The loss of security in his dwelling caused him to lose the feeling of safety and security in the Netherlands as a whole.

For Samer Khalaf, an electrician and asylum seeker from Syria, home's image is fluctuating between nostalgia which manifests in the good memories of Damascus and hope of safety and a better future which is represented by the Netherlands. Khalaf was the only interviewee who

mentions the Netherlands while explaining his perceptions of Home. "*I moved here [the Netherlands], and I want to make it a home.*" A question of 2 words about Syria ".. and Syria?" by the interviewer led, however, to an entirely different logic in approaching the concept of Home and the Netherlands in this context.

> Syria? Where is Syria? Is there any Syria left? They kicked us out of it because it is not ours. Syria is not ours, nor our children's. […] The house is gone. My brothers and I have worked so hard and suffered to build it. They demolished it in a blink of an eye. – Although I did not participate in any political activity since the Syrian revolution began- Not only my family's house, the whole neighborhood was either demolished or locked access to. No one can access it. They put their hands on the whole neighborhood since 2017.

Khalaf mixes the talk about home as منزل and Home as وطن together. Similar to Ahmed al-Oqaili, losing his house and accessibility to his neighborhood, meant to him that Syria is not Syria anymore; at least not the Syria that he belongs to, and feels Home to him and his family. Losing the safety and security in his private and semi-public circle of Home had a disruptive role in his feeling of Home on a wider/more public level.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, this chapter aims to get insight into how the interviewees conceptualize home, in order to make sense of their home making practices in the coming chapters. For the interviewed asylum seekers, home is found to be associated with social security, which encompasses family, family relationships, and friendships, as well as financial security, which is symbolized by the stability of their finances. Some of them also associate home with a sense of justice, political rights, and full citizenship. Others have a more ambiguous definition of home, but even this ambiguity has meaning and significance that influences their beliefs, emotions, and actions. Despite the diversity of definitions, all perceptions and definitions are rooted in their past experiences of home. Furthermore, all definitions can be classified under the framework suggested by Duyvendak.

Although home and the feeling of home are understood and practiced on different scales, from the more private to the public, they are not separate from one another. Loss of a sense of safety in one's dwelling can undermine a person's sense of security and belonging to their homeland. And vice versa, not feeling at home in one's country can reverberate even into their bedroom on their pillow. In other words, social exclusion or displacement at the socio-political level of *watan*, or Duyvendak's "heaven", as well as material insecurity at the scale of *watan*, or Duyvendak's "haven", makes it impossible to truly feel at home in the *manzil*, or Duyvendak's "haven". Thus, the various domains of home are interconnected.

The coming chapters investigate the ways by which asylum seekers create their "homes" and feeling at home in the AZC. Considering that their process of home making involves inventing "homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases[34]", it would be very important to study first the context where these processes primarily take place. The next chapter investigates the conditions of living in the AZC, the effects and impacts it has on its inhabitants and on the practices of home making.

[34] Liisa Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): pp. 24-44, https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00030.

# 2. LIVED LIMINALITY

During my visit to AZC Emmen, I was walking with my interviewee when I noted: “I see a kids school here!” في عندكم مدرسة بالكامب. He sarcastically responded: "آه ناقص بس يحطولنا آلبرت هاين عشان ما نطلع أبدا" “yes! the only missing thing is Albert Heijn, they should have put one so that we would never leave the AZC.” He said it and the scene around me made a different sense. The fact that all these facilities (school, clinic, playground) exist within the boundaries of the AZC fence can be interpreted in two ways. The first is to provide the needs, and the second is to provide them in isolation from the facilities used by the local population as much as possible.

It didn't take long, until I found out that the COA of Zoutkamp AZC, in fact, had decided to open “een winkeltje met tabak en simkaarten” or a little tobacco and simcards shop for the residents of the AZC so that they minimize as possible their need to leave the AZC.[35] The decision was taken after a few complaints from local residents about some of the AZC residents' behavior while shopping in the local shops. Mayor Henk Jan Bolding (CDA) of the municipality of Het Hogeland, which includes Zoutkamp states "We have made agreements with the COA that people [meaning asylum seekers] are discouraged as much as possible from leaving the site [AZC]."[36]

In her article titled ‘Living Liminality’: Everyday Experiences of Asylum Seekers in the ‘Direct Provision’ System in Ireland, Zoë O’Reilly studies how the imposed liminality affects asylum seekers’ daily lives in refugee camps, border zones, and detention centres in and beyond Europe. O’Reilly argues that these liminal spaces are created by the politics of exclusion, or what she calls “the architectures of exclusion created by states to contain or exclude the ‘other’.” [37] Her scientific analysis is, interestingly, in line with Rebal's thought about Albert Heijn in the AZC.[38]

[35] Ratiba Basir, “Onrust in Zoutkamp Vanwege Het Tijdelijke Azc: 'Desnoods Gooien We Het Dorp Op Slot',” NRC (NRC, October 25, 2022), https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/10/20/desnoods-gooien-we-het-dorp-op-slot-a4145860.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Zoë O’Reilly, “Living Liminality” pp. 823.
[38] Zoë O’Reilly, “Living Liminality” pp. 821-842.

In line with O'Reilly's work, this thesis regards AZCs as liminal spaces and the asylum seeking procedure as a liminal phase. Which deeply affect the condition of asylum seekers, their emotional well being, their sense of self and their ability to relate past, present and future. Before exploring the lived liminality through AZC daily life scenes, the coming few pages will explain first what liminality means and how it can provide us a useful tool to understand the experience of living the AZC in a better way.

## LIMINALITY

*Liminality is the space between the "not anymore" and the "not yet."*

Liminality is a concept used in anthropology and sociology to describe the transitional state between two distinct social or cultural phases. It is a period of ambiguity and uncertainty, where the individual is no longer part of the old order, but is not yet fully accepted into the new order.

In Anthropological discourse, "liminality" as a term was introduced by Scottish cultural anthropologist Victor Turner in the '60s of the 20th century. It was derived from the work of the French ethnologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep on the tribal rites in Africa in his book *Les rites de passage*, published in 1909.[39] Rites of passage are ceremonies that mark a person's transition from one stage of life to another. These ceremonies often involve a period of liminality, where individuals are in a state of transition between one social status and another. During this period, individuals are expected to take on new roles, responsibilities, and identities.[40] Initiation ceremonies, for example, are often used to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. During this time, individuals are expected to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, such as finding a job and starting a family. Similarly, funerals are used to mark the transition from life to death. In all of these cases, liminality is used to describe the period of transition between two distinct social statuses.

[39] Stephen Bigger, "Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance," *Journal of Beliefs &Amp; Values* 30, no. 2 (2009): pp. 209-212, https://doi.org/10.1080/13617670903175238.
[40] Ibid.

Victor Turner argued that liminality is a key concept for understanding culture and society. He argued that liminality is a crucial part of the process of social change and that it is a necessary part of the process of cultural transformation. Liminality, according to Turner, is a state of potentiality and creativity, and that it can be a source of new ideas and new forms of social organization.[41] Liminality" also began to spread its influence across various academic disciplines, referring to places, people, and processes far removed from tribal rituals.[42]

Liminal spaces, like detention centers, refugee camps, airports/airplanes, or hotel rooms, are spaces with unique characteristics. They are the places of ambiguity, in-betweenness, and temporariness. Which can cause feelings of confusion, uncertainty, and instability, as individuals struggle to adjust to their new environment. However, liminality can also lead to a sense of freedom and creativity. Liminal spaces and phases create a different environment with different conditions and connections from regular, where -in many cases- different responses, feelings, and behaviors may take place. Therefore, liminal spaces and phases, as transitional ones, provide researchers with a "laboratory" in which they can examine and re-examine various concepts and notions.

For example, Jen Bagelman and Josephine Gitome studied the embodied experience of birthing across borders, specifically in liminal spaces. The researchers explain that studying birthing in liminal spaces gives insight into the heterogenous reproductive lives in the context of displacement and precarious citizenship.[43] In the same context, studying home and home making in the displacement gives a broader view of home, by examining the notion in an unusual context. It also gives an indicator of the impact of liminality on how displaced people conceptualize home and choose their home making strategies.

Fewer academic works have investigated the duality of home and liminal spaces, and whether or not a feeling at home is possible in such spaces. One of the very interesting studies

[41] Victor W. Turner, "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge, 2017).
[42] Stephen Bigger, "Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance," *Journal of Beliefs &Amp; Values* 30, no. 2 (2009): pp. 209-212, https://doi.org/10.1080/13617670903175238.
[43] Jen Bagelman and Josephine Gitome, "Birthing across Borders: 'Contracting' Reproductive Geographies," *Dialogues in Human Geography* 11, no. 3 (2020): pp. 352-373, https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820620965825.

in this regard was by a group of researchers from different universities in Canada and New Zealand. The study's title (Liminal Homes: Older People, Loss of Capacities, and the Present Future of Living Space) may appear confusing, as home and liminality are contradictory concepts. However, the study provides an interesting analysis of the meaning of home for older people who have to move into another living space because of their declining health or limited financial sources. The struggles these people go through to remain in their homes turn these homes into liminal ones. These threatened homes turn out to be fragile and losable instead of safe, warm and secure. Liminality, in this case, is not a physical space, nor only a phase; it is a set of circumstances that challenges the feeling of home and makes the latter lose its meaning.[44]

The conditions of asylum seekers in the refugee camps have been described as one of liminality. As the refugee camps are places of transition and transformation. In these camps, people are often of those who were forced to leave their homes and communities, and are in a state of limbo, waiting for a resolution to their situation. They are in a space between their old lives and a new, uncertain future. This liminal phase can be a time of great challenge, but also of growth and learning, as individuals and communities come together to find new ways of living and being.

These conditions, according to Turner's definition of liminality, could be a source of creativity and suffering at the same time.[45] In terms of creativity, a study by Moos Pozzo and Halleh Ghorashi from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam highlights the multilingual creativity of young refugees in the Netherlands. The study argues that the state of liminality and diversity in the context of the AZCs enhanced the innovative abilities of young asylum seekers to communicate with each other through several languages. It looks at how the liminal space of a refugee camp can be used to create a sense of belonging and connection among refugees, through the use of multilingual co-creations.[46]

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[44] Annette Leibing, Nancy Guberman, and Janine Wiles, "Liminal Homes: Older People, Loss of Capacities, and the Present Future of Living Spaces," *Journal of Aging Studies* 37 (2016): pp. 10-19, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2015.12.002.
[45] Stephen Bigger, "Victor Turner, Liminality, and Cultural Performance," *Journal of Beliefs &Amp; Values* 30, no. 2 (2009): pp. 209-212, https://doi.org/10.1080/13617670903175238.
[46] Moos Pozzo and Halleh Ghorashi, "How Liminality Enhances Conviviality through Multilingual Co-Creations: Young Refugees in the Netherlands," *Current Sociology* 70, no. 5 (2021): pp. 682-702, https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120932933.

Many socio-anthropological studies, however, emphasize the adverse effects of this type of environment on individuals. Refugees in the camps are considered to be occupying a space outside the natural order of things.[47] A study by Zoë O'Reilly focuses on the everyday experience of the asylum seekers in the refugee camps. To describe this experience, she forms the term "ontological liminality."[48] By this term, the researcher denotes the state of "fear, insecurity, invisibility and a highly controlled existence [that] is lived and internalized"[49] by the asylum seekers in Ireland. The study argues that the system creates a liminal space for asylum seekers, where they are in a state of limbo, waiting for their applications to be processed and their future to be determined. O'Reilly looks at how this liminality affects the lives of asylum seekers, and how they cope with the uncertainty and lack of control over their lives. She first states that the refugee camps are created by the politics of exclusion or what she calls "the architectures of exclusion created by states to contain or exclude the 'other'."[50]

O'Reilly's structures of exclusion were also mentioned by Paolo Boccagni in *Making Homes(s) in Displacement.*[51] Boccagni argues that those structures demonstrate an "institutional aim of deterrence" [52] and represent the expectation of a temporary and "conditional stay."[53] These structures are designed to be uninviting and unwelcoming, sending a clear message that those seeking refuge are not encouraged to stay. The expectation of temporary and conditional residence, during processing the asylum seeking requests, justifies "the use of sub-standard housing for what is considered a sub-standard population."[54] Which creates a "permanent state of exception" [55], where asylum seekers are relegated to a lower status than the rest of the population, and their legal rights and access to resources are limited. This system of exclusion is

[47] Ville R. Hartonen et al., "A Stage of Limbo: A Meta-Synthesis of Refugees' Liminality," *Applied Psychology* 71, no. 3 (2021): pp. 1132-1167, https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12349.
[48] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 835.
[49] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 823.
[50] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 821.
[51] Paolo Boccagni, "At Home in the Centre?," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice* (S.l., Belgium: LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022), pp. 139-154.
[52] Boccagni, "At Home in the Centre?", 143.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

further reinforced by the physical structures used to house asylum seekers, which serve as a reminder of their precarious and uncertain status.[56]

This doesn't mean that asylum seekers passively accept these living conditions. They negotiate them and confront them daily, forming various kinds of "attachment, engagement and belonging in the places and communities in which they live."[57] Living the liminality, therefore, could be by "submitting" to its terms and conditions and trying to survive, or resisting it through a number of strategies and practices that would make this place function, even for a while, against its nature. Or by doing both. The act of resistance manifests in the strategies and practices of home making, which will be discussed in detail in the coming chapter. Liminality in daily life scenes is what will be explored and analyzed in following few pages.

The conditions of liminality -in the context of AZC- are made by the structure of the space, its rules, the procedure of the asylum seeking, and the authorities behind it. According to Zoë O'Reilly, liminality is experienced by the asylum seekers in terms of: time, space, and political or legal status.[58] This chapter explores what it is like to live in an AZC. It examines how the lived liminality of asylum seekers in the AZC impacts their daily lives in terms of time, space, and political or legal status, resulting in a state of isolation or exclusion. Each of the three sections will address an aspect of space, time, and status, respectively.

By analyzing the observations and the semi-structured interview materials, it was found that liminality is manifested in behaviors associated with feelings of instability, insecurity, anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion regarding the self, the present, and the future. Furthermore, it was found to be not only space- related, but also a time-related notion. The feeling of liminality, therefore, is carried by asylum seekers even when they temporarily leave the physical space of the AZC. The analysis shows that liminality, as a lived experience, develops to form a sort of identity or at least influences asylum seekers' identity and how they identify themselves inside and outside the AZC.

[56] Ibid.
[57] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 836.
[58] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 822.

## THE SPATIAL DESIGN OF THE AZC AND THE PANOPTICON

The Asielzoekerscentra (AZCs) in the Netherlands typically consist of several buildings and open spaces, surrounded by a metal fence, gate, and security guards. The buildings contain indoor facilities, such as bedrooms, bathrooms, classrooms for teaching the Dutch language and other pre-integration courses, a sports and activities hall, a small clinic that operates for a few hours a day, and the offices of the staff of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA). The open spaces are usually playgrounds for children, green areas, and outdoor seating.

The architecture of the space undeniably has an effect on how the inhabitants perceive, act, and feel towards it. This starts with the AZC's location; whether it is surrounded by the residential buildings of its village or city, or isolated in a more remote area, the fence that encircles the AZC, the rules enforced by the gate and security guards for entering/exiting the AZC or receiving visitors, and the interior design and furniture. For example, based on my personal experience, the windows in the bedrooms were not allowed to be fully opened, especially in the second or third floor rooms. The justification that was informally shared among the inhabitants was to reduce the number of suicide attempts among asylum seekers.

During the procedure -which extends for an unknown period of time-, asylum seekers are moved from AZC to another, one city to another, and room to another, sharing in each AZC its facilities like: kitchens, toilets, baths, dining tables, and bedrooms with others. All spaces are highly controlled and accessed by COA staff, including bedrooms and toilets, and except for those (bedrooms & toilets) almost all other areas are equipped with surveillance cameras.

During one of my visits to BOOST, an Amsterdam-based organization that provides support to refugees and asylum seekers, where I met one of my interviewees. A conversation between two Syrian asylum seekers at ended to my hearing. One said, *“COA knows everything we do. They have files for each of us where they write down all that they see and know*.” While the accuracy of this statement may not necessarily be high, it is not the most important issue. What is important is the deep sense of surveillance experienced by the AZC residents. This feeling

of being watched and monitored is not only due to the presence of security cameras or the access COA staff have to their personal information, but also the feeling of being watched and having notes taken about them.

Foucault's concept of the panopticon is suitable for understanding this deep feeling of being watched by a certain authority found in the conversation above. In *Discipline and Punish; The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault discusses an actual prison design: the panopticon designed by Jeremy Bentham. The panopticon is based on the idea of a circular building surrounding a central tower. The tower is equipped with large windows that look into the cells of the outer building. Each cell is wide enough to have two windows: one facing the tower, and the other facing the outside. This allows light to travel through the cell from one end to the other. Panopticon is structureda type of institutional architecture that enables a a single guard to watch all residents of a building without them being able to know if they are being observed or not. It is also taken further by Foucault's analysis to become a metaphor for the power structures in society, where people are constantly monitored and controlled by an invisible authority. The concept of the panopticon has been used to describe the effects of surveillance and discipline in modern society.[59]

AZC, even if was not designed typically in Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, still function in much the same way. The residents are under constant feeling of observation, and a sense of being watched and controlled by a visible and invisible power or authority. Surveillance cameras, regular COA staff observation walks, room check visits, and rumors of COA-selected collaborators among the AZC residents all play the role of Foucault's watchtower in the panopticon. The idea behind all of these policies and procedures is less about actually watching the asylum seekers, and more about making them feel watched. (Figure 2.a & 2.b)

This constant feeling of being watched "induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." [60] It creates a form of

[59] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Classics, 2020) pp. 195-227.
[60] Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Classics, 2020) pp. 195-227.

discipline, adherence to the rules, and serves the "authority's" goal of imposing order and control in the AZC. This sense of discipline follows asylum seekers into their bedrooms and takes away from them the sense of privacy or control they may have on their “supposedly” private spaces.

*Figure2.a- AZC Emmen*

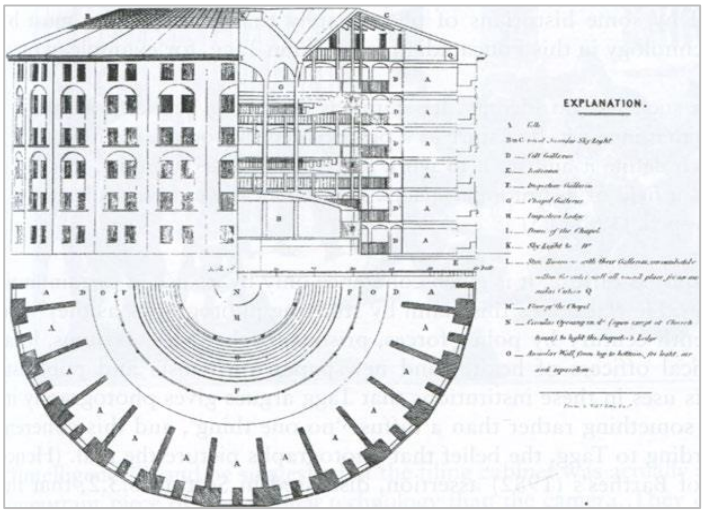


*Figure 2.b - The Panopticon Design*

When I asked my interviewees a question about the feeling of home in the AZC, the question was certainly difficult, if not provocative. It caused confusion before the answers flowed, explaining how and why the AZC, as a physical space, is far from what home means. The lack of privacy and the highly controlled existence were the main arguments made by the interviewees in this regard.

> AZC as Home? Are you serious? Never. Do you know what AZC means? It means a sound of fire siren: “weee weee weee weee” suddenly rings all over the AZC in the very early morning. We jump of our beds and run with our pajamas to the street, before we get told it’s a routine check on evacuating the building! Even after we got to know it is just a routine procedure, it didn’t change that fact that you could be woken up to leave your room -still sometimes in pajamas- and stand in the street until you’re allowed in again, at any time.
>
> How would you feel at Home, when the COA staff are allowed to (break into) your room anytime? Anytime, they can open the door of your room and then

> your private space becomes public. How would you ever feel at home in the AZC?

Ahmed Al-Ghurair's lengthy statement illustrates liminality through two of its main characteristics: the lack of privacy and the highly controlled existence (by others – COA in his case). According to Al-Ghurair, asylum seekers are constantly acting in compliance with a certain authority, even if it is not seen. This authority, through is tools, trains the asylum seekers to respond in a certain way to certain stimuli. The serine bell is an example; to hear the bill, exit the AZC, and stay there until you are allowed to re-enter. The way the body responds, Foucault's idea of body as a tool of power, a means of enforcing and maintaining the status quo can metaphorically identify with Al-Ghurair statement. If we read the body of the asylum seeker as an instrument of control, and a way of ensuring that certain behaviors are accepted and others are not. It would be fair to consider lived liminality, in the AZC, as an embodied experience.[61]

This section demonstrates how the spatial design of the AZC intensifies the feeling of a highly controlled existence, and how the rules and regulations enforced by the COA staff remove the sense of privacy and intimacy that is essential for creating a sense of home. Moreover, in accordance with what O'Reilly stated, the spatial design and location of the AZC generate a feeling of isolation and exclusion.

## PASSING THE TIME AS AN ARDUOUS TASK

The experience of liminality in the AZC is one that asylum seekers experience through time. The answers of my interviewees were thus closely related to this factor. The open waiting time range, which O'Reilly referred to as "permanent temporariness,[62]" has an effect on every aspect of an asylum seeker's life. As I read, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews, I noticed a common

[61] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 3-31.
[62] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 827.

sentiment of nothingness expressed by the interviewees. Life for them is what happens after AZC. And the greatest accomplishment is crossing this phase, and dispelling the time before losing one's mind. The repeated answer "nothing" when asking the interviewees "how do you spend your day?" is painful. Time during this phase is worthless.

> I hardly dispel a day by day. It is a very difficult task passing the days here. Believe me there is nothing to be told. I'm sick of the ping pong table, Shisha, mobile phone, and talks and talks and talks

The AZC provides very limited options for activities. Except for the parents, who might have a sort of routine related to their children's schools, the rest of the interviewees struggled to find an answer for the question: "How do you spend your day?". It was remarkable finding that 3 interviewees -who live in the same AZC- gave the exact same answer or list of activities with just a different order (playing ping pong, chatting, walking, and surfing the internet using smart phones). These activities with the time turn to be a trap, or a vicious circle in which the asylum seeker revolves with no clear ending point. Samer Khalaf explains:

Time is not a friend to the AZC residents, despite the emptiness. It is full of waiting and worrying, slow and devoid of everyday events of interest. This vicious cycle not only leads to a state of chronic anxiety and uncertainty, but it also exacerbates the feelings of isolation or exclusion. In other words, the asylum seeker living in the AZC cannot yet lead the life that others lead in the "outside world". The desired life is still at an indefinite period of time away.

This section demonstrates how time is a crucial factor in comprehending the experience of going through the asylum-seeking process and living in the AZC. Dealing with time on a daily basis in this experience is mainly based on waiting and wasting, leaving the asylum seeker in a state of uncertainty, anxiety, and insecurity. The limited activities available, which are mostly or entirely confined to the AZC, further increases the feeling of isolation from the outside world.

## "MY NAME IS V. NUMBER"

By living in the AZC, one is given a certain identity that remains as long as they live in the AZC and return back to it. Even though there are doors in the fence surrounding the AZC through which an asylum seeker can enter and exit, the feelings associated with the place and the transitional phase, such as instability and insecurity, remain with the asylum seeker as part of their identity.

Liminality as a status is the third aspect through which life in the AZC is experienced in the AZC. It is, in other words, the fear, the uncertainty, temporariness, the highly controlled existence and the lack of autonomy and privacy, carried as an identity by the asylum seeker. This 'ontological liminality' creates forms of self-censorship and self-regulation or how power infiltrates the most intimate parts of daily life, the self, and identity.[63] Al-Ghurair mentions how his current identity made it difficult to go for a romantic date.

> One of my friends suggested me to go on dates. I downloaded Tinder App. But I couldn't do it. I felt like if she asks me what is your name, what am I going to say? V. Number 9***. Yes, right now this is my name.

The AZC as a space, phase and impacts not only the personality of the asylum seeker, it -somehow- becomes an identity itself. The asylum seeker in the example above feels that he has no solid status, hence a name to introduce himself with. He, instead, says: "*my name is v. number*".

Living in liminality does not only relate to the AZC as a physical space, but also as a phase. Liminality is thus both temporal and spatial. Leaving the AZC does not necessarily free its inhabitants from this state. Inhabitants of the AZC carry a certain status as refugees. And

[63] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", p. 839.

liminality, in turn, becomes a part of this identity. It prevents them from perceiving, feeling, or predicting the future. It locks them in a certain moment, space, and phase.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the daily life experience of asylum seekers in the AZC through a few scenes, applying the lens of liminality to understand the impact of the AZC on its inhabitants in terms of time, space, and political or legal status. It investigated how these conditions lead to a state of isolation or exclusion. The spatial design and the rules were seen to create a constant feeling of being watched and controlled by a visible and invisible power. The long open waiting times left the asylum seekers with a deep feeling of uncertainty about their fate and future, resulting in a state of fear and anxiety. The legal status associated with living in the AZC was also found to have an influence on the interviewed asylum seekers, leading to a withdrawal from the outside world and a sense of isolation.

Given the notion that Home is typically associated with stability, protection, security, privacy, and control, while Liminality is associated with temporariness, fear, insecurity, instability, and often a highly controlled existence, the idea of creating a sense of Home in a liminal space is an attempt to make a certain space function, even if temporarily, against its nature. The understanding of this nature as developed in this chapter provides essential context to the home making practices of asylum seekers discussed in the following chapter.

# 3. HOME MAKING AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE

Asylum seekers, as earlier stated, do not passively react on the living conditions in the AZC and on liminality as a phase, space and legal status. Instead, they actively negotiate with these conditions and challenge them on a daily basis.[64] Using various practices, asylum seekers strive to make the AZC operates, even if partly, against its nature. Those practices are, in other words, a sort of home making.

Home making for displaced people is described as a "complex and highly- charged socio-cultural and psychological" process.[65] Because the displaced people have, during such a process, to cope with the trauma of displacement and then with the challenges of resettlement. It is about more than just finding a place to live; it is about creating a new sense of safety, identity and belonging in a new place. In the case of the asylum seekers, it is important to note that the process of permanent settlement is an advantage they do not (yet) have. The homes and feelings of home they make in the AZC are so fragile. Collapsible.

Duyvendak and Boccagni state that the different forms of home making are usually "enacted across the private/public divide—from the micro-level of one's body, across household, and kinship groups, to larger spatial units."[66]And so were the practices detected by the interviewees of this project, which aligned with the approach to home suggested in the first chapter, from the most intimate and private to the most wide and public. For example, from a bed surrounded by a curtain (simulating a canopy bed for privacy) in a shared bedroom in an AZC, to joining the celebrations of King's Day in Amsterdam.

[64] O'Reilly, "Living Liminality", pp. 821-842.
[65] Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, and Ashika Singh, "Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice* (S.l., Belgium: LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022), p. 28.
[66] Boccagni and Willem Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" p. 3.

## HOME MAKING

Home is a matter of home-making.[67] It is an ongoing process that requires continual maintenance, known as home making practices. Home, in that sense, is not a static state; it necessitates "renewals, alterations, (re)creations"[68], and is in a perpetual state of becoming. Through the everyday and the mundane, these practices constantly create and recreate home and feeling at home, striving to give a place a meaning, value, and identity, and to create a sense of attachment and belonging. Home making practices are the "actual day-to-day domestic living experiences" [69] that turn a place into home.

As mentioned earlier, the different facets of home making are practiced on various private and public levels. They expand between "the micro-level of one's body, across household, and kinship groups, to larger spatial units."[70] Meaning that creating the connections and the sense of attachment are practiced on different levels and over various domains. Home making, in that sense, is a constant process of "the construction and reconstruction of one's self,"[71] feelings of insideness, and altering one's surroundings.[72]

Creating a home is an activity that is both universal and unique to each culture. This process can be especially challenging for migrants and refugees who are displaced from their original homes. The process of homemaking for these individuals is a complex, emotionally-charged process of socialization that involves the negotiation of their new environment and culture. It is considered to be complexed and challenging because of the fundamental contradiction between the two notions of home and displacement. [73]

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[67] Boccagni and Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" p. 3.

[68] Başak Bilecen, "Home-Making Practices and Social Protection across Borders: An Example of Turkish Migrants Living in Germany," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 32, no. 1 (December 2015): p. 79, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-015-9490-1.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Boccagni and Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" p. 3.

[71] Iris Marion Young, "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme," *Motherhood and Space*, 2005, pp. 115-147, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-12103-5_8.

[72] Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, and Ashika Singh, "Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice* (S.l., Belgium: LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022), pp. 11-44.

[73] Beeckmans, Gola, and Singh, "Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice," pp. 11-44.

Furthermore, asylum seekers are developing practices of home making in the AZCs. The AZC are described as "structures [that] exhibit an institutional aim of deterrence."[74] Meaning that they are designed to be uninviting and unwelcoming. This is one way of ensuring the asylum seeker's urgency to stay, despite all those conditions. In a state of temporariness, insecurity, instability, and conditionality, asylum seekers create their sense of home. That is why this chapter is named "Home Making as an Act of Resistance". A resistance that not necessarily directed towards to the institution but the conditions.

In the AZC home making can involve creating an atmosphere that is conducive to relaxation, comfort, and safety, as well as providing a sense of belonging and security.[75] This could be done by improving the living space to suit the preferences, tastes and needs of the asylum seeker. Or by cultural reproduction and routines, where residents shape their everyday activities, such as eating, dressing and cultural consumption in ways that reflect their lifestyles prior to migration. Another way of improving the space is to create thresholds of privacy and intimacy, in order to gain more space for oneself and one's belongings, or to make the space reflect one's identity.[76]

In public space, home making by refugees and migrants is described as a dilemma. It is, generally, about creating the sense of heaven. Meaning the feeling of safety, security, belonging and being publicly free and independent in public. Home making in that sense is seen as day-to-day dialectic between established majorities and outsider minorities.[77] The majority refers to the local population and the minority in our case are the asylum seekers. The everyday relations between majorities and minorities are depicted by Boccagni and Duyvendak as a "battlefield between different ways to approach the public space as a metaphorical home.[78]"

For the purpose of analysis, I will divide the study of home making practices into three scopes: private, semi-public, and public. The private scope will include the bedrooms or any other

[74] Paolo Boccagni, "At Home in the Centre?," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice* (S.l., Belgium: LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022), p. 143.
[75] LOUISE MEIJERING and DEBBIE LAGER, "Home-Making of Older Antillean Migrants in the Netherlands," *Ageing and Society* 34, no. 5 (2012): pp. 859-875, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x12001377.
[76] Paolo Boccagni, "At Home in the Centre?," pp. 139-154.
[77] Boccagni and Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" pp. 1-14.
[78] Boccagni and Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" p. 2.

more private spaces. The semi-public scope will include the camp and its shared facilities/spaces. While the public scope will include everything outside the camp. This division of scopes will be used to analyze the house-making practices in this chapter.

I do this for two reasons. First, as previously mentioned, home consists of three main elements divided into public-oriented (Heaven), domestic-oriented (Haven), and a shared element (familiarity).[79] Such a categorization/division is therefore useful in approaching and critically analyzing the primary material. The second reason is the argument made by Duyvendak, which states that the more home and the process of home making move towards the public domains, the more the duality between majority versus minority plays a role in the process. In public, the feeling of entitlement to claiming the space as home is a constant "battle" between the majority and the minority(ies).[80] The environment in the public domain is much more out of an individual's control, especially for a refugee or an asylum seeker. This suggests that other factors play a greater role in home making in semi-public and public spaces than in private spaces. Therefore, categorizing practices in three scopes allows for a better reading considering more relevant factors of each domain.

The most notable results of the analysis can be summarized in three main thoughts. The first is that the interviewees' practices of home making are to a far extent affected by their past home experiences. Therefore, those practices aim to restore the feelings of home by exercising the activities, rituals, and routines associated with the sense of relaxation, comfort, and safety, as well as the sense of belonging and security. The strategies of home-making, and this is the second finding, do not necessarily make the AZC or the Netherlands feel like home. The nature of the AZC as a space, the legal identity given to the asylum seeker by the authorities, and the procedure as a phase, are all designed not to make the asylum seeker feel at home. Therefore, the feeling of home simulated by those practices is, as mentioned earlier, so fragile. The third and last observation is related to home making in public. The interviewees showed a limited capacity for home making in public. This can be attributed to different factors; such as the short duration, language barriers, and the dynamic of home making between the majority and minority

[79] Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home"* p. 38.
[80] Boccagni and Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" pp. 1-14.

groups. It is important to note that asylum seekers are still in between the home they left behind and the home they are striving to reach. Therefore, creating a sense of home in the public space of the Netherlands is not the focus of this thesis. However, it is important to consider the effect of each domain on the other, as public space can still influence the feeling of being at home, even in more private settings.

## HOME MAKING IN PRIVATE SPACES

Home making in private spaces begins with finding those spaces. A private space might be a bed, corner, or a room if one was lucky enough to get a "private" AZC room. Then, making the space familiar by getting to know it, making it comfortable and predictable. After that, making it intimate by customizing and personalizing the space, giving it a meaning, an identity, or a sense of domesticity and privacy. This process, as Duyvendak names it, is called Haven.

Given the lack of privacy in the AZC, finding one's private space or creating it can be challenging. Therefore, people sometimes go creative in doing so. Maha Ayyoub resists the lack of privacy, for example, by redefining private and public. Ayyoub creates her private space in what is supposed to be a public one. She escapes her bedroom and the shared apartment to a spot in the open-air area of the AZC and makes it her private space. Where she can have her morning coffee, cigarette, and a little chat with her AZC friends. She finds a spot under the outdoor stairs and puts two chairs, a small side table, and an ashtray. (Figure 3)

> I have a corner where I set with my friends. I created it to have a private space. Although it is outside the flat. But I feel I don't share it with other family. I like to set there with my friends. If it is sunny we move to the other side to set on the bench and enjoy the sun.

Maha, moreover, responded to the question regarding the moments she feels at Home in the AZC by saying: “When I sit in my coffee corner that I showed you. This is the place I feel is my own.” Home here, is about privacy and intimacy. In this example, Ayyoub recreates her private space in a different setting. Which takes us back to Foucault’s panopticon, where the space is greatly monitored and people look for the overlooked corners for a sense of privacy and homeliness. Ayyoub also, by creating this corner by herself and for herself, claims sort of ownership, which provides her with an extra feeling of safety and a sense of belonging.

*Figure 3 - Maha's coffee conrner*

As mentioned in the earlier, the interiors of AZC bedrooms are identical. To resist this and claim ownership of the space, one way is to change as much as possible of the room interior and bedding accessories, such as the bed sheets, covers, and quilts provided by the COA, with ones of different designs and colors. Sometimes this is done by illegally smuggling a piece of furniture into the room (the Ikea method of disassembly and assembly makes it easier to pass through). This is a small victory to celebrate - I had smuggled an electric cooker into my room in the camp - as it makes the room a little more private with a relative personal choice and a familiar taste. Not only does it give the asylum seeker a sense of control over the place, but it extends to time as well. The material objects related to daily routines affect the feeling of rhythm and, thus, time.

Although I could not visit all the bedrooms of my interviewees, Rebal Al-Khatib is a good example of how one can domesticate a space and claim ownership of it by changing the interior or adding a personal touch. He began by arranging his personal belongings in the space and putting them in their places. He then made the space feel personal and familiar, with clothes in the closet, a personal computer on the small table, a little shelf to hang the headsets and

chargers, a few books in Rebal's mother tongue next to the electric toothbrush on top of the small closet, and a guitar that Rebal managed to carry from Abu Dhabi in the corner. The system created by Rebal and the way he let himself and his personal items be in the room is his practice of, not only claiming it as his own, but making the space predictable and feeling in control. Which is a means of resisting the state of the highly controlled existence enforced by the AZC's liminal conditions.

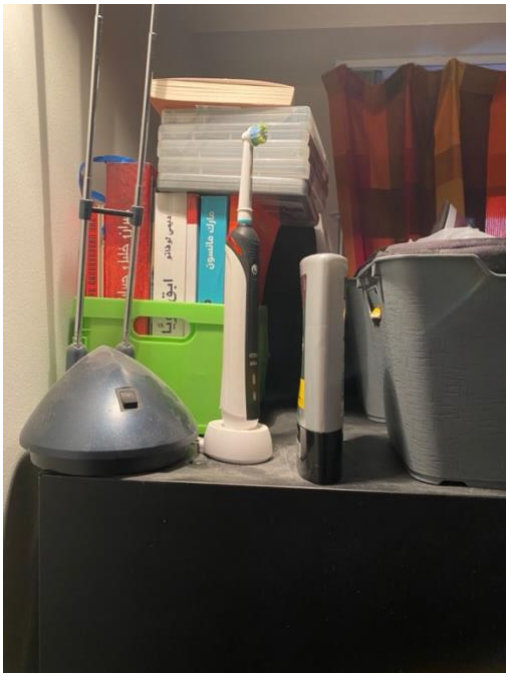

*Figure 4- Re'bal's bedroom*

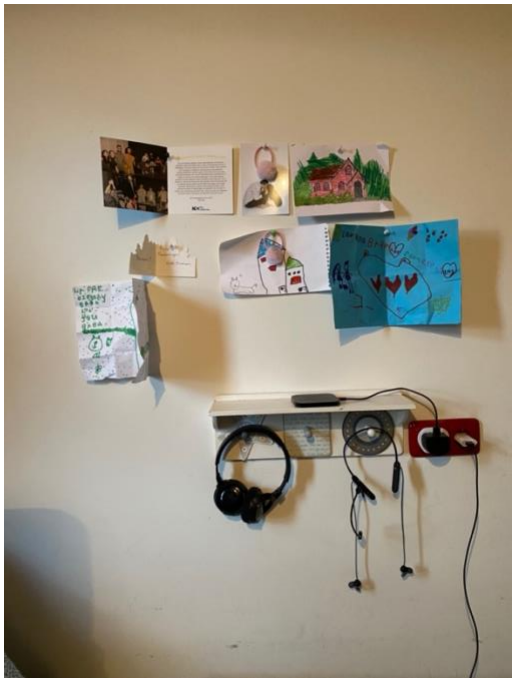

*Figure 5- Re'bal's bedroom*

A closer look at the details, reveals a more complex or an advanced practice of home making than familiarity (Figure 5 & 6). For example, a few drawings of Rebal's 2 kids (Ahmed and Reem), that are posted on the wall and bringing a sense of warmth and intimacy to the room. On the closet, in the opposite side of the wall, some personal belongings are kept next to a small book collection; "Broken Wings" by Gibran Khalil Gibran in Arabic, an Arabic translation of "Everything is F*cked" by Mark Manson, "Staying Strong" by Demi Lovato and other books. The common thread between these books, which span literature, biography, and self-development, is their attempt to search for, or give a meaning to life. Their writers strive, in different ways, to understand the causes of unhappiness, the problems of hope that could lead to disappointments, and the ways to deal with these issues. This list of titles is highly relevant to the experience of

modern man in general, but especially for someone going through an experience as challenging as Rebal's. In the corner, stands the guitar that is not just a guitar. It is Rebal's guitar that he fixed its strings in a particular way to make it play the Arabic special quarter tones. Those personal and cultural details are what constitute Re'bal's little world in his private room, and what takes it beyond familiarity to personalizing, domesticizing and identity giving. (Figure 4 & 5)

Routines and ritual practices are also a means of Home-making. Although practicing rituals and routines do not engage with the arrangement of the physical space, they still influence the identity and the meaning given to a certain space. Samer Khalaf domesticizes his room with a musical routine.

> Fairouz in the morning, Umm Kulthum in the evening, and Abu Wadee all the time. When I play his music, everything comes back to me. He is not like the new crazy singers of these days. In the evening, if I talked to my kids in the phone and they were fine, I play Umm Kulthum's songs in my room and I enjoy the good mood.

Khalaf begins his day with songs of the leading Lebanese vocalists and one of the most famous singers in the history of the Arab world, Fairouz, which is a common routine in the levant, as many radio channels there stream a morning hour of her songs. And ends the day with the iconic Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum, which is also a very common routine in the Arab World. Music, in this case, reflects both personal preference and cultural identity. By practicing this ritual/routine, Khalaf recalls the feelings associated with this music and brings it to his AZC room. Rituals, specifically religious, that are individually practiced in private spaces are described, by those who practice them, as a source of reassurance and a feeling of security. For Sadiq Al-Oqaili, practicing religious rituals individually is a way of relaxation and practicing privacy in his room or space. It brings him the sense of safety and comfort in a very particular way that belongs specifically to him, and that is created by him.

This section investigated the ways by which the interviewed asylum seekers create their feeling of comfort, relaxation, intimacy, as well as safety and security on both physical and mental

levels. The analysis of the asylum seekers' practice in this regard shows that home making was firstly done by securing a minimum of privacy as in Maha's case, even if privacy is created in a non-expected setting. Then in giving this space a sort of personalization and domesticity by bringing meaningful personal details to it. In both Rebal and Maha's cases, the places were arranged with personal taste – as much as possible - to suit each one's need to privacy, warmth, and intimacy. The meaningful details are not always objects. In the cases of Sadiq Al-Oqaili and Samer Khalaf, the meaningful details were practices of routines and rituals that are associated with the desired feeling of comfort, relaxation and intimacy that eventually give the space the sense of Haven. Those rituals could be in listening to music, praying, or practicing any other spiritual rites. It is a private oriented approach to Home and Home making where the individual is entitled to define home and to choose the elements, practices, and routines that creates his own home.

## HOME MAKING IN SEMI-PUBLIC SPACES

By semi-public space I mean the AZC, where the space is shared between many people from different cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, identities, and backgrounds. Home and feeling at home in semi and public spaces is named Heaven. Which is a term used to refer to the sense of belonging and security in public. Heaven is a way of framing, feeling, and claiming extra-domestic space as "home".

Home making in semi-public space in an interactive process where the environment is not entirely under the control of an individual. And this what makes reading and analyzing its practices differ from home making in private. It is a constant vital process of defining home, and claiming its ownership by a group of people. It is their way to practice their identity and sense of belonging. But how does this happen in the AZC?

My interviewees showed more than one practice to do so. However, these practices have one thing in common, which is that they reproduce the past sense of home by (re)building social

networks based on sharing the nationality, language, ethnicity, culture, political stances, sexual orientation. Those communities are created and maintained by collectively practicing social activities, religious rituals, cultural practices on a daily bases in the open spaces of the AZC. Which gives the place a certain taste and identity(ies).

A sense of belonging to a particular culture, language, and group of people is built naturally. From the first "Marhaba مرحبا" (Arabic for "hello") to the responses it elicits, a certain circle of privacy is created that includes those who speak the same language. This community is formed without much effort and is maintained when collectively practicing mundane popular culture activities like smoking shisha in the evenings, drinking and serving Arabic coffee in its unique settings and rituals, praying together (e.g. Juma'a prayer), fasting and having Iftar during Ramadan, cooking special dishes and sharing recipes and exchanging spices in the shared kitchens, spreading the Middle Eastern cuisines' smell all over the place, and engaging in political talks and actions sometimes. These examples are not only of community building, but of forming a sort of majority in the AZC and thus claiming some sort of ownership of it. The community-making does not stop at building circles of understanding, closeness and intimacy; it extends to creating a state of solidarity and resilience.

> Their food [the food provided by COA in his AZC] is inedible! It tastes like shit. No oil, no spices. And we don't have ovens or cookers inside our AZC. We buy electric cookers, and they confiscate them. And then we buy again new electric cookers, and they confiscate them. And so on. I think it is becoming like a funny joke between us and the security guards. We refused eating and we had a serious talk with the COA. Then came to an agreement. One of us will voluntarily get access to kitchen and cook Arabic food for all of us. Twice a week only, but better than nothing.

In this anecdote, Ahmed Al-Ghurair gives a clear example of a state of solidarity between members of a particular community that is created based on language and culture. It is interesting how Al-Ghurair uses "we" instead of "I" here. The represented case, as told, is a collective one. It concerns all Arabs in the AZC who, by extension, have a relatively similar taste

in food. The food here symbolizes something bigger. A shared culture, taste, and preference developed to form a collective claim and solidarity.

Moral and political stances, although with less intensity, play a role in bringing a group of people together or dividing them. People who leave their countries for political reasons tend to seek home and feeling at home in finding those who share the same positions or those who went through the same experiences. Although the surrounding circumstances that led to these stances have changed by migrating to a different political context, the sense of home and belonging is, partly, felt and practiced by holding on to these positions.

> Some people engage strongly in politics and political talks. He [someone] is hungry, homeless, sleeps in the street, and talks in politics! Others find themselves in religious talks. You see him alcoholic, does not pray, follows nothing from religious teachings, and talking in religion and religious matters. Two days ago.. look at the wound in my hand.. my shelter mates, an Egyptian and a Sudanese, had a very tough political argument. The discussion developed into insults and then a fistfight. Each of them was defending a political position by his country. I was in between and I tried to stop them. My hand got wounded. I shouted at them: What are you fighting for? you are homeless.

The most important thing is not what Oqaili's mates are giving to the causes or beliefs by talking about them or defending them. In my opinion, the important thing is what feeling it gives them. Why does a person who does not practice or follow religious teachings have the need to talk about religion, preach it, and defend it? (Figures 6a & 6b).

Each of Sadeq Al-Oqaili's mates were reproducing the sense of home on a collective level by engaging in such debates. And Al-Oqaili by using the term "انت تنام بالشارع you are homeless" was simply undermining this feeling. This takes us back to the first chapter, where home is described as a relative concept that is felt and practiced on different levels, each of which affects the other. It is also important to consider what impact talking about religion, not practicing it, has on the sense of belonging to a homeless person.

*Figure 6a- Sadeq's wounded hand*

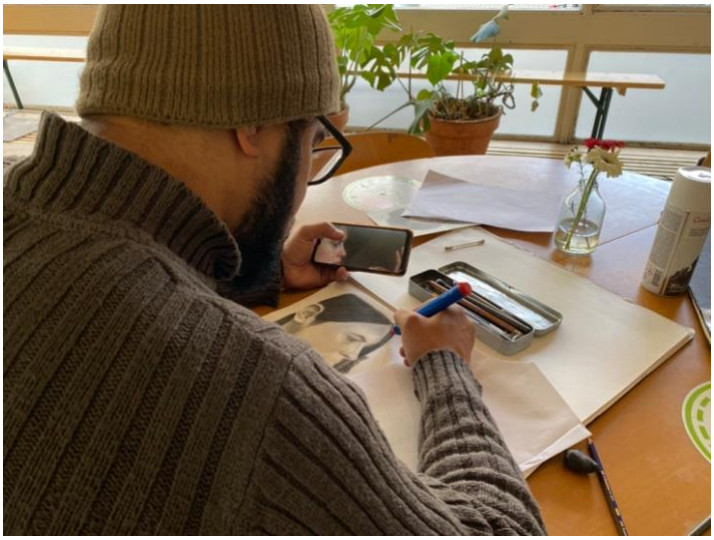

*Figure 6b - Sadeq practicing his hobby*

Boccagni and Duyvendak confirm that participating in shared activities (regarding leisure, religion, etc.) is related to newcomers' and migrants' feelings at home. Because it connects them with the past home experience.[81] This explains something about Al-Oqaili's mates' strategy of home making in the semi-public space. The other way of creating a sense of heaven (or home making in public), according to Boccagni and Duyvendak, is by bridging the boundaries with majority groups in the receiving societies.

This section sheds light on a few examples of home making in the AZC as a semi-public space. It emphasizes the role that language, culture, religion, and even politics play in building communities and social networks inside the AZC. These communities are constantly built, rebuilt, and maintained by practicing cultural, social, and religious rituals and activities. The substantial number of Arabic-speaking asylum seekers in the AZCs gives them a sort of majority, which can be recognized in the visibility of their communities and activities within the AZC. This is something that is not granted to asylum seekers from different parts of the world.

[81] Boccagni and Duyvendak, "Homemaking in the Public" pp. 1-14.

## HOME MAKING IN PUBLIC SPACES

Home making in this part is more public-related. Home as heaven indicates the feeling of freedom, independence, and comfort within a group. It also means a sense of sharing in terms of culture, history, and belonging. The dynamic of home making in public is studied by Paolo Boccagni and Jan Willem Duyvendak, as mentioned earlier this chapter. The two scholars mention that process of home making is a constant process that is done not only by migrants but also by the receiving societies and its people. Therefore, the question of home meaning and home making meaning, in public, is no longer a question of displaced or mobilized people. Instead, the process of defining and redefining home amounts to what Boccagni and Duyvendak called a battle "between different ways to approach the public space as a metaphorical home."[82]

Obviously, the majority is the group that has a strong sense of entitlement, but that does not mean they have the full authority in doing so. On the contrary, and this is what makes the process of home making a continuous one, minority(ies) are in a constant negotiation of those conditions. This perspective has provided an additional dimension to understanding the practices of home making by the interviewed asylum seekers and the differences between those practices between private, "quasi-public", and public spaces. In light of those differences, it appears that the more public an asylum seeker (as a minority) goes, the different conditions apply to the meaning of home, hence the practices of home making. To claim a public space as home.

While home making practices work in the private space to restore the old image of the home and the feelings associated with it, the issue seems more complex and difficult for the not settled yet minority in the public space. Which is why the duality of majority and minority is significant in understanding the home making practices by the asylum seekers in public. It gives an explanation to the shift in those practices or at least their effects. This section discusses the practices of home making in public, meaning outside the AZC and how it differs from the semi-private space of the AZC. Considering the suggested duality of majority and minority, I will explore and analyze my interviewees' home making practices in the public spaces.

[82] Ibid.

The noteworthy point here is that the factors that helped build a community inside the AZC (e.g. language and culture or identity), which give the interviewees a sense of belonging, are the same factors that can lead to a sense of isolation and alienation outside the AZC. This does not mean that a different language or culture is the only cause, but as Boccagni and Duyvendak explain, it can put them in the minority.

For example, Arabic language in public spaces does not function in terms of creating a sense of belonging in public. In fact, a feeling of isolation and alienation surround those who do not speak another language but Arabic. *"بصفن فيهن هيك وبقول أنا ليش ما تعلّمت" "I look at them, not understanding anything. I think of why didn't I get the chance to learn when I was young."* This is how Samer Khalaf responds to a question regarding his communication with the AZC's outside world. Arabic, the language of the minority in this context, creates a sense of isolation not interconnection.

Some interviewees, who speak English, mentioned examples of attempts to break through this isolation by forming relationships/friendships with the locals outside the AZC. But they do not amount to home making practices nor create a form of community making, even though some of them spent years in the AZC.

The practice of home making by the asylum seekers in the public is not about creating or restoring their own system, routines, and rhythm; rather, it is about absorbing, with little margin for negotiation, the existing ones. It is about familiarity, that Duyvendak describes as the first founding phase for home making. The interviewed asylum seekers mentioned practices such as getting to know the city/village they live in; finding out where the nearest grocery shop, home supply stores, gyms, and bus or train stop are. One can also consider the very basic knowledge asylum seekers make of the Dutch language, added to the aforementioned practices, as a way of making a sense of familiarity with the public. It should be noted, however, that most of the answers I received did not indicate a real connection with the "outside world". Meaning that home making and feeling at home does not succeed to go beyond familiarity in most cases.

This may be explained by the isolation imposed by the living conditions in the AZC, that influences the identity of the asylum-seeker and the way they see themselves. Or, by what is

earlier called the majority vs. minority battle, that often ends in favor of the majority. The dialectic of home making in public space is not always consensual or peaceful. While home making in the private may be more secure, home making in public is more akin to a battlefield that's evolving in the public space.

A day after my interview with Rebal, he shared a picture on his Instagram story. The picture is of a sign that got fixed on a lamppost in front of "his" AZC gate. It says: "AZC? NEE" (figure 1). [83] Which was an electoral slogan by the Forum for Democracy (PVD), right-wing populist party.[84] It is certainly not a unique incident. Those incidents added to many daily lives experiences asylum seekers face when leaving the AZC -especially in its surrounding- that challenge their desired feeling of home and being at home in the Netherlands. This example illustrates clearly the battle over the public space. Not only over who has the right to claim this space as theirs, but to decide who should stay and who should not. Even if it is done through passive aggression or hostile slogans directed at asylum seekers who are not part of the electoral bloc and are not addressed by its slogan, as they simply do not have the right to vote. This act is, albeit in a hostile way, a claim of ownership of the place and an exercise of this feeling.

*Figure 2 - AZC? NEE*

[83] Al-Khatib, Re'bal. "AZC? NEE." *Instagram*. March 13, 2022. Accessed March 13, 2022. https://www.instagram.com/rk_pho/

[84] Rob Paardekam, "Doet Forum Voor Democratie Dan Toch Mee in Goes? Poster Pleit Tegen Een AZC," DPG Media Privacy Gate, March 1, 2022, https://www.pzc.nl/bevelanden/doet-forum-voor-democratie-dan-toch-mee-in-goes-poster-pleit-tegen-een-azc~a91db7aa/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the ways in which asylum seekers practice home making and create a sense of home. It divided these practices according to domain (private, semi-public, and public). Although these practices are consistent in striving for a sense of safety, security, and belonging, they differ depending on the domain.

In private domains, the interviewed asylum seekers create a feeling of comfort, relaxation, intimacy, safety, and security on both physical and mental levels. The analysis of their practices shows that home making is first done by securing a minimum of privacy, even in unexpected settings. Then, the space is personalized and given a sense of domesticity by bringing meaningful personal details to it. This is a private-oriented approach to home-making, where the individual is entitled to define home and to choose the elements, practices, and routines that create their own home.

In the semi-public space, which is the AZC in this case, the practices of home making are collective and interactive. They work on recalling the past image of home by rebuilding social networks based on commons like language, culture, religion, and moral or political stances. Those networks develop to form a sort of communities that provide its people with the sense of belonging and security in public. These communities are constantly shaped, reformed, and sustained through the practice of cultural, social, and religious rituals and activities. The large number of Arabic-speaking asylum seekers in the AZCs gives them a certain degree of visibility, which is not afforded to asylum seekers from other parts of the world.

In public, which is the “outside world” of the AZC, the home making practices were mostly about understanding the system, a bit of the culture, and a bit of the language. It remains within the limits of the familiarity making. Interestingly, the factors that were helpful in restoring the feeling of home in the AZC, especially for Arabs and Arabic speaking asylum seekers, plays a different role in public. Some interviewees expressed how they felt isolated and unable to effectively communicated with the “outside world”.

Finally, it is essential to note that all these strategies and practices are merely attempts to reduce the anxiety of asylum seekers during their liminal phase, and to provide them with a sense of security, stability, and belonging. It shows that asylum seekers do not passively submit to the conditions of insecurity, isolation and surveillance imposed on them. However, this form of resistance should not be romanticized. The feeling of home can be disrupted at any time due to a decision by the IND to transfer, reject, or deport them, or even due to a random racist incident, despite all efforts to make the space feel like home.

# CONCLUSION

This thesis investigated the meaning of home in an unusual setting. It analyzed the practices of home making by the people who live in the in-between. Focusing on the refugee camps in the Netherlands, the research project aimed to understand what home means to the asylum seekers and how they create their sense of home. It looks at the tension created by, on the one hand, the conditions of liminality, and on the other hand, the home making practices as an act of resistance.

With a particular focus on Arabs and Arabic speaking interviewees, this thesis examined the consequences of the "ontological temporariness" on the asylum seekers' conception and creation of home and feeling at home in the AZC. To address this topic and direct the research process, two main questions were asked: How do asylum seekers living in the refugee camps make a sense of home? And what strategies and practices do they employ to feel at home (if possible)?

This project utilized a qualitative method based on semi-structured in depth interviews with six Arab or Arabic-speaking asylum seekers from different countries and backgrounds. The interviews were held with informality, leaving a space of freedom for the interviewees to speak and express. The questions were varied and dealt with the daily life experience, social relations, and activities of the respondents inside and outside the AZC. The researcher benefited from her background as an Arab, and her personal experience as a refugee.

The thesis consisted of three main chapters. This first chapter explored how asylum seekers conceptualize home. How they understand it and define it. It also looked at the connections between their definitions and whether or not those definitions can add something to our understanding of home as a notion. The primary material was approached and analyzed through Susan Gal's fractal approach to the public/private distinction, and Jan Willem Duyvendak's three components of 'home' (Familiarity – Haven – Heaven). This was done in order to gain insight into the multiple domains through which the feeling of home is signified and practiced and how the practice differ between public and private domains.

The second chapter has examined the daily life of the asylum seekers in the AZC, and how the lived liminality affects their lives in terms of time, space, and political or legal status, resulting in a state of isolation or exclusion. Utilizing the concept of liminality as an analytical tool enabled comprehending what the interviewees experienced, the characteristics of the AZC as a space and a phase.

The third chapter has discussed the ways in which asylum seekers practice home making and create their sense of home as a means of resistance to liminality conditions. It divided these practices according to (private, semi-public, and public) domains. While all the practices of home making are geared towards achieving a sense of security, safety, and belonging, or Duyvendak's three components of 'home' (Familiarity – Haven – Heaven), they might varied from a domain to another.

The findings of this research project suggested that home, as the asylum seekers conceptualize it, consists of a complex web of emotions and experiences that is largely shaped by their past experiences of home. It is based on a psychological, social, and material sense of safety, and of social, political, and economic justice. These feelings are experienced and practiced in both private and public domains, and are interconnected in that Loss of a sense of safety in one's dwelling can erode a person's sense of security and belonging to their homeland, while not feeling at home in one's country can affect them even in their bedroom on their pillow. The home making practices by asylum seekers in the AZC are largely aimed at restoring a sense of safety, stability, identity, and belonging. However, the contradictory nature of the AZC as a liminal space, phase, or identity disrupts the asylum seekers' sense of home, which has been described as fragile.

Studying home and home making in the AZC does not aim to give suggestions to make an AZC home or home like. Because it is impossible. This is because AZC is not a place where people should belong to or inhabit as home. This thesis, in addition to studying the notion of home in an unusual setting, gets closer to the experience of people who lost their homes and struggle to restore some sort warmth, stability and feeling of security in displacement. It investigates the human capacity to give meaning to space and create emotional attachment and social

connections in the least ordinary of times. It also engaged with how asylum seekers reproduce themselves, their culture and their histories in a way that allows them to give meaning to their lives and their long waiting. It also looks at the kind of objects and practices that are associated with feelings of safety, stability, and belonging, and how can we understand them in terms of a cultural, and socio-political perspective.

Studying the life experience in the AZC reveals also that AZC is not a neutral factor in the process of the asylum seeking. The AZC is another place where authority and power manifest itself. It is not just a refuge; it is a tool in the hands of authority. And perhaps future research studies on asylum seekers and refugees should consider asking questions about the role the AZC plays in the asylum seeking procedure and in establishing the relationship between the asylum seeker and the authorities in general.

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