MA Dissertation

"Home Sweet Queer Home": A study on the homing experiences of LGBTQI+ refugees living in the Netherlands

By Jose Guillermo Ricalde Perez

University of Stavanger, Norway

Abstract

The Netherlands was one of the first European countries to provide refugee status due to persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Since then, the country has been perceived as a promising land of acceptance for LGBTQI+ migrants and refugees. However, queer refugees are often asked to prove their identities by the Dutch authorities in a procedure where past life events are questioned, and specific narratives are forced to gain credibility in their asylum claims. During this process, LGBTQI+ individuals' homing experiences are juxtaposed by describing a previous heteronormative 'home' where their gender and sexual identities were marginalized while conceiving the Netherlands as a welcoming and tolerant 'home' towards them. This dichotomy of queer refugee's homes seems insufficient to comprehend the multi-layered and unfixed nature of the home's concept and its connection with gender and sexual diversity. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate on the queer-home-migration nexus by unraveling the multiple interactions between sexual diversity and migration in queer refugees' notions of home.

Through a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews and using the analytical framework of queer theory, intersectionality theory, and Paolo Boccagni's homing, I explore the home experiences of queer refugees living in the Netherlands. The results show that for the interviewees, attributes such as safety and acceptance have gained relevance as primary factors in their homing.

Moreover, for some of them, home is not permanently emplaced in a specific country. Instead, it relates with attachments to certain environments, feelings, relationships, and communities. The findings also demonstrate that for some queer refugees, the intersection between race and gender identity significantly limits their homing in the Netherlands as desired. Finally, queer refugees are continuously building their homes through attitudes of resilience and resistance against heteronormative patterns.

Key words: Home, LGBTQI+, refugee, queer, the Netherlands.

Acknowledgments

Two years ago, I left one of my *homes* in Mexico to study for a master's abroad. At that time, I was not aware that I also left Mexico because this *home* was not enough for me. I had a conflict with my sexuality and identity, they were captive there, and unconsciously I wanted to find something different, a sense of *home* that could genuinely align with who I am.

When I chose the topic for this thesis project, I never imagined it would cross me in such a profound and personal way. Before starting my fieldwork in the Netherlands, I experienced a breakup with someone whom I dreamed of building this envisioned *home*. I found myself lost emotionally, and I felt *home*-less. Moreover, I did not have a stable roof over my head, living in a foreign country, far away from all the people I love. However, I decided to complete this project, and I stayed. I cannot be happier to have made that decision. Listening to queer refugee's stories meant an opportunity to share brief moments of joy, reflection, empathy, and they became life teachers for me.

This research was born from the kindness and help of all the people that collaborated with it. It would not have been possible without the goodwill and trust of the refugees that accepted to be interviewed. They offered me their time and opened the doors of their houses, lives, and stories.

I want to thank *Rainbow Den Haag,* particularly Roel van der Wal, who extended an enormous support for this project and opened the doors of his house and his organization to me. Without his help and networks, I would have never been able to contact the interviewees during pandemic times. I would also like to thank *Secret Garden,* especially Elie Karam, who trusted this research and contacted LGBTQI+ refugees who accepted to be interviewed by me. These two organizations and their members were pillars in the creation of this thesis.

Likewise, this text could not have been polished and finished on time without the advice of my supervisors Dr. Oleksandr Ryndyk and Dr. Marie Louse Seeberg, who were always attentive to my progress, sharing with me updated materials and guiding me through the interviews with their suggestions and questions. Both were critical to my ideas, confronted my preconceptions, and encouraged me during the whole process.

I also thank my friends and family, who encouraged my reflections and motivated me with countless conversations about the concept of *home*. Particularly, Lisa and Alejandra, who have been on this journey with me since the beginning, you were my second family and compass when I doubted what direction to take during this research. Thank you for all your patience, love, and passion for this topic. ¡Viva AGL!

Moreover, I want to thank Juliana and Steven for offering me a place to stay in the Netherlands when I needed it. Without your support, I do not know how I would have finished my fieldwork. You will always have a place when you need it and wherever I go. Finally, I dedicate this master thesis to all the queer refugees striving to build their *homes* despite all the obstacles. We, LGBTQI+ people, are often obliged to live our lives in secret and constrained environments just because of who we are or whom we love, but especially

queer refugees have so much to share and teach to all of us. Their experiences need to be heard and documented; they are unique, powerful, and can become sources of self-reflection and self-discovery.

As one of my informants argued: *Being LGBT [+] is love, we are more what you think, and we are not going to cease being here tomorrow. We are always going to be here. So learn from us and learn how to live with us.*

I am still learning from you, and I hope this research contributes to your lives in one way or another.
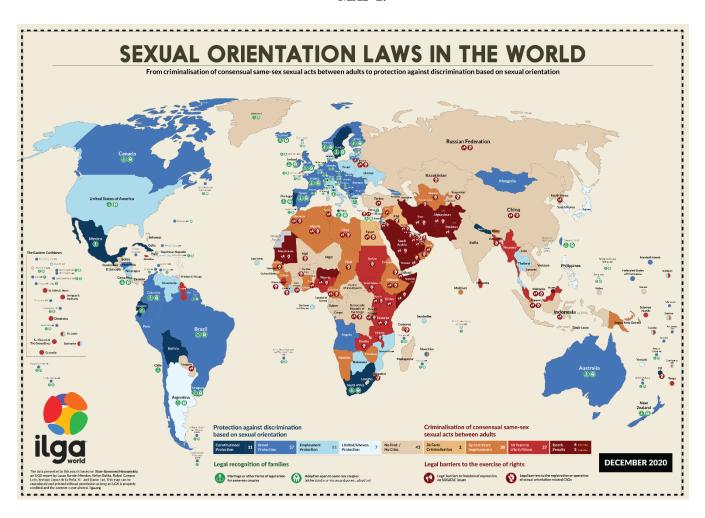
¡Gracias!

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[1] ILGA World. (December 2020). Retrieved from https://ilga.org/map-sexual-orientation-laws-december-2020

1. Introduction: Fleeing home or finding home?

To ask someone what home means for them is an invitation to 'dive into the waters' of a person's life. Sometimes, it means returning to their past experiences, feeling their present emotions, and sharing their hopes and fears for the future.

Home is a category that resounds with routines of the every day and, therefore, means different things to different people (Boccagni et al., 2020, p.1); however, it can be a word that creates a shared space, a unique entry point to have meaningful exchanges among individuals from different backgrounds.

For instance, having a conversation about home with people who have experienced different types of persecution because of their sexual orientation and gender identity might be challenging. Discussing the meaning of home with LGBTQI+[2] asylum seekers and refugees can trigger memories of certain life events in which their notion of home might have been disrupted, perceiving it in a tension between different places, feelings, and aspirations (S. Taylor, 2013 cited in Boccagni, et al., 2020, p.11). These tensions can lead to simple questions like: What does the term home mean to queer refugees[3]? Do they feel they were forced to leave their home because of persecution? Or, on the contrary, are they in search of a home?

This is only one example of the contrapositions, synergies, and entanglements between home, forced migration, and SOGIESC that this research attempts to cover. Notwithstanding, throughout this text, I will explore multiple subjective interpretations of home from the queer refugee's standpoint.

1.1 Motivation and main questions

As someone who considers himself as a part of the LGBTQI+ community, or as I will also call ourselves: 'queers,' I have always been fascinated by our way of creating varied strategies to cope with discrimination and exclusion. These exclusion conditions for queer people occur through systems of heteronormativity and cis-normativity[4] that continue permeating every aspect of human life.

Home is a concept that does not escape from heteronormative and cis-normative patterns. These patterns might produce exclusionary settings and views towards queer identities, particularly headed for groups that live multiple discriminatory intersections, such

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[2] Throughout the text I will employ the acronym LGBTQI+ standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex. The + is added to acknowledge the broader spectrum of possible identities and sexual orientations that are not covered by the acronym (Hynes, 2018, p.97).

[3] For this thesis, I will use the terms "queer refugees/ asylum seekers" and "LGBTQI+ refugees/ asylum seekers" indistinctively.

[4] Heteronormativity and cisnormativity are defined as the systems of norms that affect our understanding of gender and sexuality. According to the heteronorm [and cisnorm], people are either girl/woman or boy/man and always heterosexual (Piehl & Lenke, 2018, p. 56).

as queer asylum seekers and refugees. In this regard, the multiple forms of homing and the vocabulary related to home have been typically aligned with heteronormative life paths (Halberstam, 2005, as cited in Koegler, 2020, p. 4).

Considering this context, I became intrigued by the ways in which LGBTQI+ asylum seekers and refugees live and understand their queer identities and how this might play a role while attaching a sense of home. This interest led to the central question of this research: *How do sexual orientation and gender identity interact with the homing of LGBTQI+ refugees in The Netherlands?*

This research embarks on this challenge focusing on refugees and asylum seekers who have faced extreme persecution due to their SOGIESC[5], forcing them to flee the countries where they grew up and apply for asylum in the Netherlands. I decided to focus on this specific location because the Netherlands has been perceived as a pioneer country across Europe towards LGBTQI+ rights (Swetzer, 2016; Van der Pijl et al., 2018 Hertogs & Schinkel, 2018; Huethorst, 2018), and therefore, it is regarded as a welcoming land for individuals with diverse sexual and gender identities.

1.2 My journey in the Netherlands: Contextualizing the research

In order to find the voices of queer refugees and asylum seekers in the country, I established communication with two queer refugee NGOs in the Netherlands: *Rainbow den Haag*[6] and *Secret Garden*[7]. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic[8], both NGOs suspended most of their activities, making it impossible to volunteer and carry out ethnographic fieldwork. Despite those circumstances, the coordinators from both organizations were willing to connect me with LGBTQI+ refugees who potentially could agree to be interviewed.

I started my journey in the Netherlands by having valuable conversations with Rainbow den Haag and Secret Garden staff. They shared with me information about the current issues that queer refugees and asylum seekers face within the Dutch asylum system. Remarkably, the distrust by the Dutch asylum authorities concerning LGBTQI+ asylum seekers' sexual orientation or/and gender identity was a constant interference in their procedures and claims.

This fact caught my attention since it was also repeated and emphasized through the literature and several other NGO reports. This issue implicates a severe obstacle in

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[5] From the English: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (Piehl & Lenke, 2018, p. 57). Throughout this text I will use the abbreviation SOGIESC to define these categories.

[6] For more information about the NGO see https://www.rainbowdenhaag.nl/en/home-4/

[7] For more information about the NGO see http://www.stichtingsecretgarden.nl/

[8] The World Health Organization (WHO) identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the infectious disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) and declared it a pandemic in March 2020. See https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-1 (Visited in October, 20, 2020).

recognition of diverse queer identities, and specifically towards gay and lesbian asylum seekers, since most of the cases of skepticism were in relation to their sexual orientation, being labeled as "fake gays" or "not gay enough" based on stereotypes and misconceptions of LGBTQI+ identities. On this aspect, there have been several cases in the Netherlands where asylum claims were denied because of the applicants' body expression, appearance, or story not fitting into the preconceptions of how an LGBTQI+ person is supposed to look or act (McNeal & Brennan, 2021, p. 172).

Frequently, asylum applicants need to show that their fear of persecution is based on one of the five grounds listed in the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention. Asylum claims based on SOGIESC are most commonly recognized under the "membership in a particular social group" ground (UNHCR, 2016). For this reason, similarly to other countries in Europe, the Dutch asylum system requires queer asylum seekers to prove their sexual orientation and gender identity to recognize their asylum claims on this specific ground.

However, although the intention is to make the asylum procedures efficient, it develops a series of downsides. In practice, it is problematic for asylum applicants to provide sufficient proof of persecution when there is little or no evidence of an LGBTQI+ status or 'lifestyle' because they come from countries where exhibiting their sexualities and identities involves an extreme danger (Leigh, 2012, p. 53). In this sense, the need for proof forces them to expose private life aspects hidden in fear of persecution in the country previously inhabited. They have no other option than to share this information to succeed in their asylum claims and gain more credibility regarding personal persecution stories. Several authors (Berg & Millbank, 2009; Carillo, 2010; Carrillo & Fontdevilla, 2014; Shuman & Bohmer, 2014; Kahn & Alessi, 2020, Alessi et al. 2018) have highlighted that in order to prove persecution due to SOGIESC, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers have to out themselves prematurely and reveal intimate details of their sex lives to immigration adjudicators.

Thus, queer asylum seekers (and later on refugees) hold a specific positionality, encountering themselves in a contradiction where the same factors that are a disadvantage and a synonym of danger in the country of their previous residence become the key to getting protection from the Dutch asylum system.

I argue that this circumstance not only plays a role in queer refugee's asylum procedures but also in their homing practices after arriving in the Netherlands. The multiple dynamics between queer refugee's sexualities-identities and the internal-external environments surrounding them often constructs a dichotomy in their notions of home. During this process, they could embrace the idea of a 'fictional'[9] heteronormative home left behind in their previous country while having to prove to the asylum authorities that this home was fictional due to its opposition to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

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[9] I use the term fictional to describe the possible unconscious misrepresentation of LGBQTI+ refugees and asylum seekers' notion of home during the asylum procedures. For example, some of the research's interviewees found that their previously inhabited country does not represent what they understand as home. However, others still found home-like elements in these countries. Therefore, it is impossible to talk about a singular and real notion of home.

Hence, throughout the process in which they seek asylum and even after they are granted the refugee status, LGBTQI+ refugees have to follow a narrative in which they appear to be searching for a 'real' home, the new supposedly welcoming and more accepting home they will experience in The Netherlands. This circumstance relates to the idea of queer migration to liberation narrative, in which moving to The Netherlands would bring the emancipation of repressed dissident sexualities and gender identities (Murray, 2015). It also links with the arguments of queer migration scholars such as Fortier (2001), Ahmed (2003), and Gorman-Murray (2007) that conceive the homing of queer migrants and refugees as a double process, in which sexual orientation and gender identity are concealed within the heteronormative home and projected towards a future home. A new welcoming home where hypothetically, they can express their gender and practice their sexualities without the fear of persecution.

This double connotation of home influences queer asylum seekers and refugees during and after the acts of fleeing. In other words, the dichotomy affects them while living in the countries where they have been persecuted and, also, when seeking asylum and living in The Netherlands. This circumstance might shape the already complex nexus between home and queer identities, an aspect that seems to need further research. The context of queer refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands has been investigated by authors such as Sabine Jansen and Thomas Spijkerboer (2011, 2019), particularly regarding the asylum procedure. However, little is known about queer refugee's homing and its relation with Dutch society. For instance, these are some unanswered questions: where lies the queer refugees' notion of home? Is it in the country that hosts them as refugees? Is it in the country that they left? Do these two places coexist together as their home? If not, is their notion of home geographically determined? These questions are essential to understand the complexity of homing while being queer and a refugee.

On this aspect, I argue that SOGIESC are factors that play a vital role in determining the daily homing experiences of queer refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands. For some, they might be an anchor that motivates them to find ways to settle in the country and develop a sense of home; for others, they would be the aspects that continue balking their attempts to feel at home.

Although studies link the queer refugee's life experiences with the concept of home, not many have particularly focused on the Dutch context. I intend to explore the complex intersection of home-queer and forced migration from the perspective of queer refugees currently living in the Netherlands. Consequently, this thesis will entirely focus on their own narratives, stories, ideas, and thoughts about home.

I hope that this research will contribute to the migration field, queer studies, and home studies. The findings will be useful for migration and home scholars interested in the intersectionality of gender and sexuality and policymakers working with LGBTQI+ refugees' integration and inclusion in The Netherlands.

The rest of this thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter two describes the background of LGBTQI+ rights in the Netherlands and the queer asylum seekers and refugee's current context upon arrival to and settlement in this country. It also explains some

fundamental concepts and terminology. Chapter three investigates the central theories that lead this thesis, such as homing, queer theory, intersectionality theory, and the academic discussions around them. The fourth chapter describes the methodology employed for data collection and reflects on the researcher's positionality, the methods application, limitations, and ethical considerations. In chapter five, I present and explore the interviewees' narratives about home, homing experiences in the Netherlands and previous countries, and I analyze and discuss the role of sexual orientation and gender identity in these narratives. Chapter six serves to draw my conclusions.

2. Background

To understand how aspects like sexual orientation and gender identity influence the homing experiences of queer refugees and asylum seekers living in the Netherlands, it is essential to have a closer look at the terminology and concepts that describe this specific group. The usage of terms such as 'refugee,' 'queer' or 'LGBTQI+' will be explored through this chapter. For this, I will consider the particularities of the Dutch context and its relation to sexual diversity and forced migration. In addition, I will explain the terminology related to SOGIESC and its adoption by different frameworks connected to asylum-seeking processes. Lastly, I will briefly describe the legal framework and social approach towards LGBTQI+ rights in the Netherlands that have made this country an interesting setting for queer individuals.

2.1 Defining the queer refugee

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify that I will employ the terms "LGBTQI+" and "queer" interchangeably. In this regard, I will use 'queer' in relation to the terms refugee and asylum seeker as an umbrella term to encompass all sexual and gender-diverse identities displayed by these groups. However, I am aware of the world's multifarious and intricate applications theoretically and contextually. Therefore, the word queer will have other meanings and usages throughout this thesis. For instance, queer will also be conceived as not merely a synonymous of LGBTQI+ identities, but to refer to all the processes of building non-normative gendered and sexual behaviors, recognizing the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender that create complex hierarchies between and within communities (El-Tayeb, 2013, p. 307). It is vital to underline that the umbrella approach of the word queer will be only employed through this text when it is explicitly linked to the terms refugee and asylum seeker.

      Likewise, it is important to explain the use of the acronym LGBTQI+ in this study. Currently, LGBT and LGBTI (in Dutch LHBTI: lesbienne, homoseksueel, biseksueel, trans, intersex) are the main categories applied by the Dutch asylum system (McNeal & Brennan,

2021, p. 166). For instance, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) adopts the acronym LGBTI with the following definitions:

> "A lesbian is a woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Gay is often used to describe a man whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other men, although the term can be used to describe both gay men and lesbians. Bisexual describes an individual who is physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to both men and women. Transgender describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term intersex covers bodily variations with regard to culturally established standards of maleness and femaleness, including variations at the level of chromosomes, gonads, and genitals" (UNHCR, 2015).

Nevertheless, UNHCR definitions do not necessarily describe and accurately represent the broad spectrum of sexualities and identities of the populations discussed in this research and do not take a position on which acronym is more appropriate to label asylum seekers and refugees with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. For this reason, in this thesis, I will employ the acronym LGBTQI+ as used by Hynes (2018), standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex. The + is added to acknowledge a broader range of possible identities and sexual orientations that are not represented by the previous abbreviations but are still part of sexual and gender diversities (p.97).

Concerning the term refugee, article 1 (A) (2) of the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention and Article 1 of the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees define the term refugee as a person who:

> "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality, and being outside the country of his former habitual residence (…) is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Similarly, according to UNHCR, a refugee is someone who has left his or her country of origin and is incapable or reluctant to return there because of a serious threat to their life or freedom. At the same time, asylum-seeker is a general designation for someone who is seeking international protection. In some countries, asylum seeker is a legal term referring to a person who has applied for refugee status and has not yet received a final decision on his or her claim. Here is imperative to indicate that not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee (2017, p. 17).

In this respect, since 2004, EU asylum legislation stipulates that persons persecuted because of their sexual orientation can lodge a claim for asylum in the European Union. Similarly, since 2011, gender identity must also be given due consideration when

determining whether a person belongs to a particular social group under persecution (ILGA Europe, 2016, p.1).

The addition of sexual orientation and gender identity in EU asylum legislation was a necessary step since the UN and UNHCR definitions of refugee and asylum seeker are too general, and they often fall short considering other reasons to claim asylum. This circumstance provoked the rejection of LGBTQI+ people's asylum applications in several European countries in the past. For instance, fleeing because of being queer, because of one's *identity*, is inherently stronger related to the self than other reasons for flight, such as war (Huethorst, 2018, p.12). Hence, it is essential to follow Malkki's (1995) arguments on not to generalize the refugee since each migration trajectory is utterly different from the others. Fixed categories might negatively impact the individuals supposed to fit those categories.

People's persecution because of their SOGIESC is not a new phenomenon. However, it has necessitated greater awareness of the vulnerabilities, factors involved, and contextual circumstances that this particular group experiences before, during their journey, and upon arrival to a host country (UNHCR, 2016). For example, as of 2020, 69 States criminalized same-sex sexual behavior (67 by explicit provisions of law, two *de facto*) and homosexuality was explicitly punishable by death in at least six of these countries (Mendos et al., 2020).

These statistics provide an overall idea of what State-related persecution implies. However, other reasons for LGBTQI+ individuals to flight because of SOGIESC are more related to personal life aspects and are often overlooked in the general discourse. Several studies (Alesso, Kahn &Chaterji, 2016; Alessi, Kahn, & Van Der Horn, 2017; Alessi et al.,2018; Hopkinson et al., 2017; Shildo & Ahola, 2013) have shown that queer refugees and asylum seekers could experience severe and prolonged trauma prior to fleeing their countries, including psychological abuse, blackmail, public shaming, physical and sexual assault, forced conversion therapies, among others. These events can start in childhood and continue into adulthood, being perpetrated mainly through family, community members, and, as previously mentioned, State actors (Alessi et al., 2016; Alessi et al., 2017 & Alessi et al., 2018).

2.2 The promise of a welcoming home: Situating the project in the Netherlands

During the last two decades, the number of asylum applications in Europe has fluctuated mainly towards increase. In 2015, the asylum statistics reached their pinnacle, when 1.3 million persons arrived in the continent fleeing from armed conflict, war, and persecution (Connor, 2016, p. 4). This increase raised new challenges and became an invitation to question the assistance strategies for vulnerable subgroups of the forced migrant population, such as LGBTQI+ individuals (Alessi et al., 2018, p. 13). While several European countries struggled with the explosion of asylum applications, the Netherlands steadily rose applications acceptances from 40 percent to 70 percent in 2010-2015. Since then, the numbers have tapered down although still maintaining a high rate of asylum applications

acceptance, particularly on LGBQTI+ cases (IND, 2016, as cited in McNeal & Brennan, 2021, p. 165).

In this regard, the Netherlands has been generally perceived as a 'promising land' for queer migrants and refugees, a place of opportunity and tolerance (Patterson & Leurs, 2019, p. 92). Like other European countries, this country has followed a narrative of 'modernity' conceived through sexual freedom and expression. Indeed, particularly the sexual freedom of LGBTQI+ people is understood to exemplify a culturally advanced position (Hertogs & Schinkel, 2018, p. 698). However, the particularities of the Netherlands stand out from other regions in Europe. For instance, since the 1960s, the Netherlands has been a pioneer in relation to sexual rights, being the first country in the world to build a monument in 1987 for the LGBTQI+ victims of the Holocaust. Also, in terms of LGBTQI+ rights achievements, the Netherlands was the first country in Europe to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001[10]and the first country that allowed adoption for same-sex couples (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011, p. 625). Six years later, transgender people could legally change their gender identity, positioning Dutch society globally in a forerunner role in recognizing LGBTQI+ rights (Van der Pijl et al., 2018, p.11). Moreover, its capital, Amsterdam, was proclaimed internationally as the gay and sex capital of the world, becoming popular among foreigners, especially for its Red Light District and its gay scene (Hekma & Duyvendak 2011, p.625).

Besides, recently in June 2020, the Dutch House of Representatives voted in favor of a measure to add "sexual orientation" to the list of protected characteristics in Article 1 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of "religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds." This represents an important step for sexual and gender diverse individuals living in the country since it would be the first time that the Dutch constitution enshrines in its core LGBTQI+ demands. As of the current date, the proposal still has to be ratified by the Dutch Senate with a two-thirds majority before it comes into force (Mendos, 2020, p. 190).

Another relevant aspect about the Netherlands concerning sexual diversity is the amount of time it has accepted queer refugees and migrants. For example, rules or policies on same-sex partner immigration were introduced in the country as early as 1975 (Wintemute, 2021, p. 15). According to Spijkerboer (2016), the Netherlands was one of the first countries to implement sexuality as a ground for refugee status in 1981 (as cited in Hertogs & Schinkel, 2018, p. 668). Furthermore, a decade ago in the Netherlands, the applications of homosexual and transgender asylum seekers amounted to approximately 200 per year, which is a considerably high number compared to countries like Italy (around 50 cases) or Norway (around 20) (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 15). Recent statistics from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights estimated that asylum claims linked to sexual orientation

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[10] Article 30 of the Act on the Opening up of Marriage (2000) states "[a] marriage can be contracted by two persons of different-sex or of the same-sex", thereby making the Netherlands the first country in the world to enact same-sex marriage laws, and Article 1 of the Law on Adoption by Persons of the Same-Sex (2000) amends Article 227(1) of the Civil Code to allow for joint adoption by same-sex couples (Mendos, 2020, pp.287-313).

and gender identity in the Netherlands could fluctuate between one hundred and one thousand (EUFRA, 2017, p. 4)

Despite all the facts that make the Netherlands a pioneer in LGBTQI+ rights and its favorable legal framework regarding sexual orientation and gender identity issues, Jordan argues that queer refugees might experience a double stigma within the Dutch society due to their categorization as both 'LGBTQI+' and 'refugee' (2009, p. 167). For instance, these are individuals who are racialized in the Dutch context in varied and intersectional ways since colorism and racialization are inextricable from the politics and experience of asylum (McNeal & Brennan, 2021, p. 166). They might also be confronted with "Western fixed categories of sexual orientation and gender identity during both the asylum procedure as well as when settling down" (Huethorst, 2018, p. 9). Studies have shown that this subgroup has distinct needs that tend to be overlooked during resettlement, which may impede their integration into host societies (Alessi et al. 2018, p. 13).

In a report made by Sabine Jansen in cooperation with COC Netherlands (2018), statistics show how a large majority of asylum applications rejections from LGBTQI+ individuals in Europe are unmistakably due to the incredibility of their sexual orientation. This trend is also present in The Netherlands, where approximately 85% of the total asylum application rejections to this specific group are based on this reason (Jansen, 2018, p. 41). As reported by civil society organizations in several countries across Europe, asylum claims are often denied due to the applicant's appearance and/or story not fitting the stereotypes and preconceived ideas about LGBTQI+ individuals. In other cases, the main reason for rejection was the applicant's lack of knowledge about laws on homosexual behavior or the famous gay and lesbian locations in their former countries. In particular, asylum seekers who were previously married to a person of the opposite sex or had children were also denied since this life background does not fit the conventional idea of being part of the LGBTQI+ spectrum. These different grounds for asylum rejection show that both stereotypes on sexual diversity and preconceptions about certain cultures and countries are present in the deliberation of these cases (McNeal and Brennan, 2021, p 172). This damaging pattern on the asylum system needs to be addressed since LGBTQI+ people can be affected to the detriment of their integrity.

I must point out that these practices in the asylum system derive from the heteronormative, cisnormative, and gender binary views about sexual orientation and gender identity and often ignore that many applicants come from countries where displaying "non-conventional" SOGIESC is extremely dangerous, and consequently, there will be very little evidence to demonstrate their LGBTIQI+ status (Leigh et al., 2012, p. 53). For instance, many applicants have been forced to adapt to those heteronormative patterns, being victims of arranged marriages to follow social conventions. For others, the comprehension of their sexualities and identities is precarious due to the fact that they have never been in contact with concepts such as 'transgender' or 'homosexuality,' and if they have heard about them, the conceptions are more inclined to negative aspects in their societies. This has led queer asylum seekers and refugees to conceal their SOGIESC to minimize the risk of persecution

inside their countries and often even creates an internalized denial of their SOGIESC that is still present during the asylum procedure.

Finally, when it comes to the 'home concept,' it is necessary to remember that the asylum-seeking facilities and officers are sometimes the first contact LGBTQI+ asylum seekers experience in the Netherlands. It is during this process where, for some of them, their previous visions of their future lives in the country are impacted, and their homing suffers a long pause (often for years) since it might be difficult for queer asylum seekers to attach a sense of home when there is no certainty or guarantee that they will stay in the Netherlands.

3. Concepts and theories

To better comprehend queer refugees and asylum seekers displaying their identities and understand their everyday homing in the Netherlands, I will delve into home, queer, and intersectionality theories. These theories will serve as the lens through which I will analyze the interviewee's narratives of this study.

During my fieldwork, I noticed the struggles of several queer refugees/asylum seekers with identity categorizations imposed by the asylum authorities and later on the Dutch society. For some of them, their identities concerning SOGIESC were still transforming or in the process of discovery. In this sense, their gender and sexual identities should not be seen as fixed categories. As fundamental aspects of the human being, they are in constant evolution, and the dynamics related to this evolution should not be misinterpreted or categorized as immobile. For this reason, queer theory will serve as the prism in which diverse sexual and gender identities will be conceived as un-fixed and in constant movement. For other interviewees, their position as refugees or asylum seekers was a source of difficulties and was intrinsically related to their background and SOGIESC. I attempt to shed light on the possible connotations of the intersection between these aspects with intersectionality theory. Finally, I will employ Boccagni's theory of homing (2017) to conceptualize the term home and use it as a framework to understand queer refugees/asylum seeker's notions of home.

3.1 Intersectionality theory and the lived experiences of queer refugee identities

The interviewees of this study came from several backgrounds and identified themselves as part of different groups belonging to the LGBTQI+ spectrum (e.g., Gay, Lesbian, or Transgender). For this reason, I must underline that not every asylum experience is the same, and each queer identity has its struggles and singularities. As Audre Lorde stated in 1982 during a talk at Harvard University, there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives (Lorde, 2017). Considering that, it is essential to apply an intersectional approach focused on the particularities of queer identities and the lived experiences of refugees.

During the '90s, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality in the United States legal doctrine, basing it on social justice movements, particularly the feminist activism from Black women, Chicanas, Asian-American women, and Native American women (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hancock, A.M., 2016). The theory crossed borders among disciplines, becoming a method and a disposition, a heuristic, and an analytic tool in law and social sciences (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 303). This theory was previously employed to highlight how social movements around violence against women elided black women's vulnerabilities and multidimensional experiences, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 304). However, nowadays, intersectionality usages in research, law, and advocacy have expanded and have experienced a theoretical resurgence in feminist theory and the social sciences (Chadwick, 2017, p. 5).

For instance, scholars have used an intersectional framework to examine migrants' and refugees' experiences as they attempt to resettle in host countries. Similarly, intersectionality has been used to conceptualize the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual refugees living in Western contexts (Alessi et al., 2018¸Kahn, et al., 2018; Lee & Brotman, 2011).

Although there is no universal understanding of the intersectionality concepts and methods, the current approaches can be classified into two categories. One is the intersectional 'group-centered' approach, which has focused on the unique experiences of marginalized groups located between the intersections of several axes of inequality. The second is the 'dynamic-centered approach,' which focuses not only on the individuals or groups that have been systematically marginalized but also on the systems of inequality themselves and its exclusion categories (Sosa, 2017, pp. 71-82). Both approaches provide helpful insights for working with intersections related to gender identity and sexual orientation. As the UN independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity Victor Madrigal-Borloz pointed out in his report on gender theory, an intersectional approach should consider that lived human experiences are not static. They often vary in space (as persons move between cities, regions, and even across borders) and time (UN General Assembly, 2021, p 7).

On a similar note, Chadwick (2017) argues that intersectional theory compels us to approach gender, race, class, and sexuality as single or discrete categories (p.6). Therefore, this theory helps us comprehend the interaction between different social categories or identities that creates even more specific categories/identities (Schachter 2013 as cited in Huethorst. p. 21).

When applying an intersectional approach, a space is produced to examine the interaction among diverse dimensions of social relations and subject formations (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). For example, in the case of individuals who are part of the LGBTQI+ community while being a refugee, intersectionality leaves room for creating a unique third identity category at the intersection of sexuality and forced displacement: queer/ LGBTQI+ refugee (Chadwick 2017, in Huethorst, 2018, p. 21).

Furthermore, basing on Crenshaw (1989), Chadwick describes three forms of intersectionality: structural, political, and representational. Structural intersectionality relates to everyday oppression and social positions caused by economic status, race, and other factors. Political intersectionality refers to the marginalization of certain groups in the social system. Finally, representational intersectionality refers to both: the many forms in which marginalized individuals are devalued by socio-cultural norms and the discourses, representations, and ways of oppression that contribute to this marginalization (2017, p. 7).

For this research, the concept of intersectionality will be understood within its representational form as a critical lens that evokes the visible struggles experienced by queer refugees. In other words, it serves as a tool that provides a space in which no identity is hidden and excluded in the narratives employed. Using representational intersectionality allows comprehending the context and process in which queer refugees attach a sense of home and live their home-like experiences as outcomes of an intersection of two distinctive identities.

3.2 Notions of gender and sexuality

Another relevant theory for this study is queer theory. However, before exploring its complexities, I will briefly explain the most common conceptualizations regarding SOGIESC used in academia, policy, and law. I attempt to situate a point of departure to delve into queer theory. This is also relevant since the participants of this research ascribe themselves to specific sexual orientations and gender identities, and, therefore, it is necessary to explain the framework I will use to understand these two concepts.

From an academic perspective, the concept of sexual orientation usually refers to the direction of an individual's sexual and emotional attraction (Stefano et al., 2008, pp. 15-16). Similarly, within the international legal framework, the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law concerning Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity define 'sexual orientation' as "each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender" (2006, p.6). The Yogyakarta principles also define 'gender identity' as:

> "Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech, and mannerisms" (2006, p.6).

In different societies, the concept of gender identity has usually been defined as a person's deeply felt sense of identification of their gender in relation to the social construction of masculinity or femininity. Moreover, gender identity is separate from, though

sometimes linked to sexual orientation (Stefano et al., 2008, pp. 15-16).

Another relevant concept involved in a person displaying of their sexual and gender identity is 'gender expression.' For the Yogyakarta principles, this concept refers to:

> "Each person's presentation of the person's gender through physical appearance – including dress, hairstyles, accessories, cosmetics – and mannerisms, speech, behavioral patterns, names, and personal references, and noting further that gender expression may or may not conform to a person's gender identity" (Yogyakarta principles +10, 2017, p.6).

Separating the notion of gender expression from gender identity is critical because gender expression does not imply an identity but makes gender identity visible, entailing certain reactions from societal structures.

Lastly, although there is international recognition of SOGIESC's diversity, in many societies, there is still a misleading idea of a universal gender norm from which gendered behaviors and expressions are originated. This inaccurate gender norm is what I frame in this research as *cis-heteronormativity* and is based on preconceptions and stereotypes in which different forms of gender and sexual expression are dichotomously constructed. The mentioned dichotomy produces a limited understanding of gender and sexualities as only male-female, heterosexual-homosexual (UN General Assembly, 2021, p. 2).

Nevertheless, how gender and sexuality are understood changes from one socio-cultural context to another, and it is important to acknowledge the impact of this circumstance on LGBTQI+ persons. Here it is where queer theory becomes a turning point in which researchers can explore the multiple and varied forms of SOGIESC in specific environments and contexts.

3.3 Queer theory

The term 'queer' encompasses multiple interpretations depending on the field in which it is being used. For instance, queer has functioned as an umbrella term applied to dissident sexual and gender identities, intending to bring them together as a form of representation. Likewise, the word queer can refer to the conception of fluid and non-fixed sexualities that challenges socially constructed norms about sexual desire and gender (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer is thus conceived as not merely synonymous with LGBTQI+ but as a concept that describes the processes of constructing sexual and gendered normative and non-normative behaviors (El Tayeb, 2013, p 307). Furthermore, queer also describes an emergent theoretical model denominated as queer theory. Developed from previous lesbian and gay studies (Jagose, 1996, p. 1), this theory is not necessarily a unified body of work but a group of theories that employ 'queer' in various evolving perspectives (Watson, 2005, p. 68).

Queer theory was popularly adopted in academia during the early 90s, being a product of cultural and theoretical pressures regarding interrogations of LGBTQI+ identities (Jagose, 1996, p. 76). Hence, queer theory does not have a specific origin. However, the first

documented use of the term queer theory is attributed to Teresa de Lauretis (1991) in an article called *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* (Watson, 2005, p. 69). It is also important to highlight that certain theorists and their respective work, such as Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1990), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), are considered by many as pivotal texts of queer theory (Marinucci, 2010, p. 34).

What is more, queer theory is conceptually aligned with poststructuralism[11], exercising a critique of biological determinism and essentialism of gender and sexuality (Lovaas et al., 2006, p. 5). In this regard, it was born from the idea that sexuality and gender must be framed in relational terms.

It also highlighted the plasticity and fluidity of LGBTQI+ experiences, opening up the field of sexualities studies and research. The main focus of queer theorists is to broaden the inquiries to making a 'sexuality culture,' which creates and establishes supposed fixed sexual identities and sets hierarchies around notions of sexual and gender normality/abnormality (Lovaas et al., 2006, p. XXV). As Seidman argues, "[q]ueers are not united by any unitary identity but only to their opposition to disciplining, normalizing social forces" (1993, p. 133).

In conclusion, as a theory, queer moves away from the lesbian and gay studies tradition that emphasized the stability of sexual and gendered identities and focuses on their reconceptualization as non-fixed and rather varied and fluid, deconstructing those previous notions (Lovaas et al., 2006, p. 6). According to Beemyn & Eliason (1996) and Warner (1993), queer theory aims to disrupt the binary opposition between homosexuality/heterosexuality, constituting an all-inclusive category of subversive political and cultural identity practices (as cited in Fortier, 2001, p. 406). For this theory, identity becomes an essentialist category that constrains the different possibilities to analyze gender and sexuality (Lovaas et al., 2006, p. 22).

3.3.1 Heteronormativy and Cis-normativity from a queer perspective.

Queer theory avoids adhering itself to heteronormativity. Jackson defines heteronormativity as a term that exposes the "numerous ways in which heterosexual privilege is woven into the fabric of social life, pervasively and insidiously, ordering everyday existence" (2006, p. 108). Another concept that works alongside heteronormativity is cis-normativity, which refers to the system of norms that rule society's conceptualization of gender and normalize as the general rule that gender identity should match the sex of a person that was assigned at birth (Piehl & Lenke, 2018, p. 56). Both systems influence the chore of our understanding

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[11] Concerning feminist and queer studies, poststructuralism gives considerable attention to structuring meaning through oppositional and dualistic relations. For instance, more recent poststructural theorization has challenged the meanings of sex and gender as being confined to a reference to a biologically sexed body (Hughes, 2002).

of gender and sexualities. For instance, in the United Nations General Assembly report on the situation of women human rights defenders, heteronormativity is defined as:

> The privileging of heterosexuality and the rigid definition of gender identities, sexualities, and gender relations – [Which] reinforces clear distinctions between men and women. Heteronormative ideas render gender non-conforming persons invisible and reproduce expectations about how women and men should express their sexuality and gender; those who do not conform are cast as 'deviant', 'abnormal' or 'wicked' (2019, p.7).

According to heteronormativity and cis-normativity, girls and women are expected to be feminine, and boys and men are expected to be masculine. Moreover, everyone is expected to be heterosexual, and those who transgress these norms might be subjected to different kinds of punishments – all from silence to violence (Piehl & Lenke, 2018, p. 56).

In this line, queer theory considers that "gender and sexuality are not reducible to hegemonic heterosexuality" (Butler, 2004, p. 54), giving space for categorical deconstruction for those who profess other than heteronormative norms (Lovaas et al., 2006, p.25). Thus, by essence, queer theory also constitutes a critique of cis-heteronormativity attempting to transform social structures such as traditional gender roles[12] or the view of heterosexuality as the dominant sexual orientation (Borges, 2017, p. 22).

Furthermore, throughout this study, the concept of queer primarily provides a reinterpretation and a critique of the heteronormative model of home. In this regard, I am interested in the transgressive nature of queer theory, which challenges the dominant understandings of sexuality, gender, and home. It also challenges the perspectives implicit in these notions that have been normalized in contemporary society, permeating LGBTQI+ refugee's lives. As Warner points out, queer is not only a form of resistance to the norm but, more importantly, consists of protesting against 'the idea of normal behavior' (1993, p. xxvii). Thus, queer theory becomes a deconstructive practice towards normalizing ways of knowing, being (Sullivan, 2003), and homing.

3.4 Home as a multilayered concept

Much of the references to home in migration studies have led to descriptions of some sort of place or location (e.g., dwellings, houses, countries, or regions) (Boccagni et al., 2020, p. 7). Notwithstanding, the representation of the concept of home as a static space where identities are supposedly rooted is problematic. This is because the focus on home material and geographical aspects might underplay its more symbolic and existential dimensions (Malkki

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[12] For example, masculinity and femininity describe the roles that men and women are assigned and expected to perform according to gendered social constructs (Schrover & Moloney, 2013, p. 12).

(1995); Bakewell (2004); Jansen & Löfving (2011), as cited in Perez Murcia, 2019, p.140). As Rybczynski's stated more than three decades ago:

> To explain home "is like trying to describe an onion. It appears simple on the outside, but it is deceptive, for it has many layers. If it is cut apart, there are just onion skins left and the original form has disappeared. If each layer is described separately, we lose sight of the whole. The layers are transparent so that when we look at the whole onion we see not just the surface but also something of the interior" (1986, p. 230).

The approach to the term home in academia has evolved from geographical perspectives and narrow understandings related to physical spaces to draw out into its other many layers of meaning. For instance, scholars have attempted to put a greater focus on a contextual understanding of home that transcends the material characteristics of domestic space (Lawrence, 1995; Gauvain & Altman; 1981, Moore, 2000). Thus, home is a multidimensional concept related to feelings, practices, and identities that have been commonly attached to relational, spatial, and context experiences (Massey, 1992; Rapoport, 1995; Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Fortier, 2003; Mallet, 2004; Den Boer, R., 2015; Boccagni, 2017; Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019).

On the one hand, the material aspects of home denote places such as dwellings, geographic locations, or specific countries and territories. On the other hand, the non-material facet of home encompasses symbolical, emotional, political, and cultural characteristics in which people can recreate feelings, memories, and social interactions that are closely related to identity and belonging (Perez Murcia, 2019, p.142). Hence, for this research, I will take the conceptualization of home proposed by Paolo Boccagni. Boccagni (2017) understanding home in a relational way, in which open-ended relationships, aspirations, and negotiations occur in various spatialities and temporalities. Hence, home is enacted in a dynamic process of incorporating or excluding specific rituals, interactions, and practices in a particular location and time.

On its spatial dimension, home is a space in becoming that emerges from a process of relationships within society that does not necessarily occur in a fixed location (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). In this regard, home can be spatially located, but it is not limited to one place. Concerning the temporal dimension, home can work in the past attached to nostalgic emotions, in the present involving the here and now, and in the future as a projection of what home could be (Ahmed, 1999, p. 331). Therefore, being at home might mean a constant interchange between the past, present, and future. As Jacobson (2012) argues: "We are beings who are always making ourselves at home and always such that we are never entirely at home. We are forever becoming at home" (p.181).

Moreover, for Sommerville (1992), the notion of home goes beyond temporalities and localities or practices and feelings, becoming at the same time an intellectual construction. On that matter, "people may have a sense of home even though they have no experience or memory of it" (p. 530). Consequently, a definition of home can embrace real

and imagined places, the possibility of multiple identities, social constructs, and hybrid spaces (Vidal & Perteghella, 2018 p. 601).

3.4.1 Home on the move

The varied ways in which home has been negotiated in migration trajectories are frequently related to place and place-making notions (Boccagni, 2021. P. 9). However, the assumption of home as a fixed place where one has a sense of identification and belonging is too narrow to understand the home experiences and meanings for refugees and other types of forcibly displaced people (Pérez Murcia, 2019, p. 140-141). In this regard, people on the move are overexposed to the risks of being marginal from home in terms of place, time, and belonging (Boccagni, 2020).

As it was previously mentioned, looking at refugees and asylum seekers' home experiences can contribute to recognizing the multifaceted nature of home and understanding it as a relational space, meaning that it is both space and a place in which social interactions coexists at multiple and diverse scales (Massey, 1994).

From a material perspective, refugees' and asylum seekers' notions of home may be located in a tension between the country they grew up in and their host country. A contraposition between 'here' and 'there' is produced by the struggle of searching for a new home (Perez Murcia, 2019 as cited in Boccagni, 2020 p. 10). However, it is crucial to consider that the material aspect is just one of the multiple facets of home and that homing attempts are not only based on the attachment to a determined place. For instance, the condition of refugees as forced newcomers in an unknown land makes their homing processes more challenging since they cannot rely on familiarity or previous routines in the new environment. Thus, their homing begins from a 'marginalized' positionality (Boccagni, 2020. p. 12).

In the case of queer refugees and asylum seekers, this position about home is merged with the intricacies of the association between queer identities and home, which doubles the homing struggles from the margins. On this aspect, I must stress that the concepts of cis-heteronormativity have been valuable in queer migration research. They have enabled scholars to articulate how normalizing regimes towards sexuality and gender produce marginalized subjects (Luibhéid, 2008, pp.170-171).

In conclusion, displacement and cis-heteronormativity converge in a double dynamic of marginalization towards LGBQTI+ refugees and asylum seekers homing, a topic that I will explore in the next segments.

3.4.2 Queer and home

Conceptually, the relation 'queer' and 'home' describes an intersection between space and identity (in the most basic and material sense) and shows a set of feelings and practices related to belonging (Bryant, 2015, 262). In this sense, both concepts are multifaceted, and as it was

previously explained, even the relation of the word queer and identity has its own complexities (Oswin, 2008 as cited in Gorman-Murray, 2012, p. 111). Concerning LGBTIQI+ individual's homing practices, the nexus of queer and belonging implies a subject position and a direction that displays "non-normative ways of feeling "at home" with varied forms of gender and sexual desire" (Bryant, 2015, 263). For instance, several authors from multiple disciplines such as geography, anthropology, and history (Gorman-Murray, 2012; Scicluna, 2015, Cook, 2014, Rowntree, 2017) have argued that gender and sexuality are central to the individual's experiences of home.

However, the vocabulary related to home has often been aligned with heteronormative structures in society and academia. This has resulted in an unequivocal relationship between home and an internalized concept of family ruled by heteronormative life paths. This conceptualization of home is something that queer studies have attempted to refuse and resist (Halberstam 2005 as cited in Koegler, 2020, p. 4). Hence, in contemporary society, home has been notably intertwined with the image of the heterosexual nuclear family, which has been the ideal model of home for centuries (Bowlby, Gregory & McKie, 1997; Mallett, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2007). Within this idea of family, heterosexual interactions, where solely 'man plus woman' relationships are the rule and traditional gender roles such as the idea that men should be masculine, and women feminine, also construct and mold the home experience. In this sense, behaviors, emotions, desires, and family members' social lives are conceived through hegemonic patterns of cis-heteronormativity, leaving no space for different gender identities and sexual orientations.

Furthermore, home can play a significant role in the lives of people who transgress gender and sexual dichotomies (Fensenthal, 2009, p.246). For them, home is not necessary a space of comfort; they might have to negotiate wider injunctions to 'fit in' at home. Their positions within the home are not equal compared to the "normative" ways of living gender and sexuality (Fortier 2003, pp. 131-132).

Therefore, the heteronormative meaning of family and its connection with the concept of home represents confrontation and an exclusionary setting for LGBTQI+ individuals since it does not provide adequate spaces for their narratives and representations. In this respect, Koegler (2020) points out that the lack of these inclusive spaces for queer people could result in the idea that queer and home form a natural contradistinction (p.4).

However, since queer theory intends to dissemble common beliefs about heteronormative categories in all areas, including social sciences (Lovaas et al., 2006, pp. 27-28), the queer and home nexus can form a relation between space, belonging, and subject that might also open a possibility to non-heteronormative ways of feeling at home with gender and sexual orientation (Bryant, 2015, pp. 262-263). Thus, queer people's homes can be seen as a space to subvert heteronormativity and cis-normativity from inside-out and outside-in and sustain non-heteronormative identities and relationships (Pilkey et al., 2015, p.131).

Likewise, according to Gorman-Murray (2007), some LGBTQI+ individuals generate 'homes that affirm sexual and gender difference' during their practices and habits (p. 232).

For instance, they deconstruct gender roles or use symbolic imagery, such as rainbow flags, to proclaim their gendered and sexed identities at home (Felsenthal, 2009, p. 244).

Consequently, a queer notion of home plays a significant transformative role for LGBTIQ+ people's lives, making their home-building process a way to subvert and resist heteronormativity (Pilkey et al., 2015, p. 131).

Finally, queering the home would imply reconfigurations of language (Halberstam, 2005, as cited in Koegler, 2020, p. 4), public and private spaces, and a reformulation of gender and sexuality preconceptions that inhibit broader conceptual possibilities for LGBTIQ+ homes (Bryant, 2015, p. 262). This will guarantee that queer people have access to real home-like spaces of shelter and comfort (Bryant, 2015, p. 262) and that their homing processes can engage with their histories of differentiation, struggles, and exclusions, transforming into resources for peaceful acknowledgment of otherness (Gilroy, 2002 as cited in Fortier, 2003, pp. 131-132).

3.4.3 The Queer-Home-Migration Nexus

Migration scholars such as Ahmed (2003), Fortier (2000), and Luibhéid (2005) have reconceptualized the process of migration when it involves diverse gender and sexual identities through the notion of 'queer migrations.' Queer migration scholarship has explored the overlapping power regimes within migration trajectories and their influence in shaping people's identities on the move. On the one hand, it understands gender and sexuality through the intersection of power relations embedded in categories such as race, class, citizenship status, geopolitical location, among others. On the other hand, it deploys the term queer to acknowledge that all LGBTQI+ identity categories are burdened by unequal legacies that need to be questioned (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 170).

Thus, the concept of queer migration refers to migrations that are not only and not always straightforward, cis-normative and heteronormative (Borges, 2017, p. 22), insisting on recovering, theorizing, and provide value to the histories of subjects that have been silenced and rendered invisible from both queer and migration studies (Luibhéid, 2008, p. 171).

Several academicians (Eng 1997, Sinfield, 2000 as cited in Fortier, 2003, pp.116-118) label queer migrations as a form of emancipation, where mobility is perceived as necessary to fulfill the real (and often utterly hidden) sexual and gender identities of migrants and refugees. Other scholars such as Manalansan (2003) challenge the perspective of "repression to liberation" by highlighting that inequalities for queer migrants are only 'restructured' through migration, by a continuous engagement with the new regimes of power within the countries of arrival (as cited in Luibhéid, 2008, p.170). Therefore, it is impossible to talk about a fully embraced liberation. However, it is essential to highlight that despite those approaches to the concept, the central aspect of queer migration is to closely attend to the dynamics of sexuality–in all its forms–in structuring migration (Luibhéid, 2005).

Regarding the nexus with home, the act of migration carries additional complexities to the already convoluted relation between home and queer. For instance, LGBTQI+ individuals might also experience unequal power relations and a feeling of discomfort within their dwellings and external environments due to the alleged irreconcilability of being queer and being inside the heteronormative family home. Family and society, functioning as vectors for cis-heteronormativity, become the leading cause of mobility and a reason for seeking emancipation. Hence, queer migration scholarship explores the "narratives of queer migrants as homecoming, where 'home' is a destination rather than an origin" (Fortier, 2001, p.408). Eng (1997) describes it as "a traumatic displacement from the lost heteronormative "origin"" (as cited Fortier, 2003, p.116). Especially for LGBTQI+ refugees, when sexuality and gender identity are performed outside the heteronormative mold, it represents a high risk of persecution and, in some cases, a danger for their freedom and, ultimately, their lives. This risk of persecution results in constant identity suppression for the sake of self-preservation. As Jordan argues, "propelled by fear of violence and flight from stigma, impelled by a desire for connection and belonging, the movements of people whose sexualities or gender defy and offend norms cover a complex spatial, social, and psychological terrain" (2009, p.169).

Consequently, migration for queer people might be the outcome of a projection of a more desirable and welcoming home, establishing the notion of home in the future (Fortier, 2003, pp.119-120). In other words, queer migration is conceived as a movement towards another site to be called home, configuring home as a destination rather than an origin (Fortier, 2001, pp. 408-409). Here, the meaning of 'home' appears to be fetishized (S. Taylor 2015, as cited in Boccagni, 2020, p. 9) and widely sentimentalized through the movements between two "allegedly homes": the movement away from home-as origins that lead to a notion of an 'ideal of home' as a site of familiarity and comfort by reinstating in a new location (Fortier, 2001, p.412). As a result, for some queer refugees, mobility guarantees survival and a possibility for self-reinvention, bringing a feeling of safety and relief on the person's sense of otherness (Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2011, p. 1385). This also constitutes their home-building attempts in a double process of concealment (within the heteronormative home) and projection (towards a future, welcoming home) (Fortier, 2003, p 119). As Deneen Wallace (2018) describes:

> "Whatever else home may be, it is often a space of longing—longing for what was, what could have been, or what will be. Such longing signifies an anticipation of something that will usher in a more concrete experience of belonging" (p. 60).

Notwithstanding, it is vital to clarify that although this is a prominent perspective towards home in queer migration studies, it is often limited to the material conception of home. On this aspect, as previously stated, home is a multifaceted concept that involves more than a material dimension. Thus, home can be attached not only to a country or place but also to memories, emotions, or even objects, and personal relationships. Therefore, for this research, I will include the perspective of queer migration to liberation narrative as one

of the main focal arguments, but I will also attempt to move away from its universalization as the only way to understand the queer home. In this sense, I will explore other meaningful ways for LGBTQI+ refugees to gain a sense of home in their countries of asylum.

3.4.4 Homing

The multiple ways in which home is connected with notions of identity and belonging show that it is a valuable analytical tool to understand the lives of those forced to leave their countries because of SOGIESC persecution (Pérez Murcia, 2019, p. 144). Many researchers have emphasized the role of home as a key site of identity construction (Wise 2000; Blunt 2003; Noble 2004; Duncan & Lambert 2004 as cited in Gorman-Murray, 2017, p. 233).

Massey (1992) and Mallett (2004) argue that in the case of migrants and refugees, attaching this sense of home is a process in which transferences of meaning are made between places; re-enacting forms of place-making in radically new life circumstances (as cited in Boccagni, 2017, p. 51). This process depends on reclaiming certain practices, objects, names, and histories that might have been uprooted during mobility (Ahmed, Castañeda, & Fortier, 2003, p.9). In the case of queer individuals, home not only reflects sexuality but also how this aspect continuously interacts with gender, ethnical-cultural heritage, and familiar interrelations. In this sense, neither home nor queer identities are fixed and unchanging; they mutually and continuously reflect and remake each other (Gorman-Murray, 2017, p. 233). Home practices and attachments imply points of connections and disconnections to ideas, objects, people, or places within a process of inclusion and exclusions that correlate and define queer refugees and asylum seeker's identities (Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2011, p. 1384).

For this study, the nexus between queer, migration, and home will be explored through the analytical framework proposed by Paolo Boccagni, in which he uses the term 'homing,' not as a noun but as a verb, to describe the process where people attach a sense of home.

Boccagni's (2017) homing entails four dimensions: domesticity, spatiality, materiality, and temporality. Concerning domesticity, home can be enacted as a domestication process, providing distinctive meanings to internal (dwellings) and external environments (public spaces). It can include family life, social engagement and communal spaces. The spatial dimension investigates how home is experienced as a matter of physical proximity, hence in co-present environments or distant interactions. It encompasses everyday life spaces and far away spaces constructed as home-like. Materiality consists of giving symbolical meaning to objects, distinctive relational bases (e.g., caring and nurturing relationships with significant others), or eliciting emotional and imaginative energies. Thus, it involves a sense or atmosphere to a place or setting, and attachments to objects and personal relationships. Finally, the temporal dimension defines home as a social experience in the

present, oriented towards the past or projected to the future. It underlines the changes over time in which home is related and reflected.

Throughout the research, these dimensions and meanings will revolve around sexual orientation and gender identity as crucial elements involved in the process of homing.

4. Methodology

For this thesis, I employed a qualitative and queer methodology based on semi-structured interviews and literature review. Since my goal was to gather people's meanings of home and their experience as queer refugees/asylum seekers, a qualitative approach suited the needs of the project and my intention to gather in-depth data from the interviewees. This chapter will describe how I developed the methodologies used to answer my research question. Moreover, I will explain how I managed to access the participants and keep them engaged. Finally, I will reflect on the challenges and limitations I had throughout my fieldwork, my positionality as a researcher, and the ethical considerations that my work with queer refugees implied.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research facilitates exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social situation. This research type relies on text and image data and generally adopts an inductive style that involves the researcher's interpretations from particular to general themes. In this sense, it is not my aim to generalize the queer refugee's experiences of home. What I attempt is to keep their experiences as multilayered as the concept of home itself. Their homing narratives are not absolute, fixed, or intrinsically equal. They depart from different starting points and multiple constructions of their realities. Therefore, the similarities between queer experiences found in this research provide a contextual light regarding the homing of the participants but still considering their uniqueness and individualities.

To accomplish this, I also decided to apply a queer methodology. A queered methodological perspective helps identify how social categories of being are constructed within specific historical, cultural, and spatialized contexts. Hence, this perspective assists in bringing up to light the diverse forms of gendered and sexual homing practices (Brown & Nash, 2010, p. 133). Besides, a queer methodological approach facilitates the sharing and interpretation of narratives without imposing preconceived meanings and ideas, seeking to discover those meanings through the whole extent of their possibilities (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010, p. 101)

4.1 Methods: Literature Review and Semi-Structured Interviews

I employed a traditional literature review to collect the theoretical data related to queer, intersectionality, and home theories and gather reports on the context of LGBQTI+ refugees and asylum seekers in Dutch society.

Literature review is one of the most prominent and prevalent methods of social sciences, with multiple types and usages. The primary objective of a traditional literature review is to analyze and summarize a body of literature. The literature should be presented by collecting a comprehensive background of information that will serve to highlight new research streams and identify gaps within the topic selected (Arshed & Danson, 2015, p.31).

I used traditional literature review as my first method to provide a solid basis to develop the content of this thesis. As a result, I collected sixty-two academic articles, thirty-two books, and three dissertations relevant to understanding the academic background of the theories and concepts applied in this research and the context and history of the topic selected. Moreover, I gathered five handbooks, thirteen reports, and various legal documents that provided me updated information on the situation of queer refugees in the Netherlands. Thus, the material selection was crucial to understanding the existing background knowledge about the main and relevant topics that framed this project.

Moreover, I chose to apply semi-structured interviews as the primary method to collect data on the participant's homing experiences. It is worth mentioning that I aim to prioritize their ideas, thoughts, and interpretations about home and show what their voices have to say the most authentically possible. Nevertheless, to gather the relevant data, it was necessary to provide some direction through their narratives.

Consequently, this type of interview serves as a flexible guide, allowing researchers to change or adapt questions depending on the response (Bryman, 2016). This guide employs a blend of closed and open-ended questions commonly accompanied by follow-up *why* or *how* questions. The dialogue can take place around the scheduled topics but, at the same time, gives space to delve into unforeseen information that might become relevant (Adams, 2015, p. 493).

Besides, a semi-structured interview is designed to collect subjective experiences regarding a particular phenomenon or situation. The relatively detailed interview guide or schedule used in semi-structured interviews is functional when there is sufficient objective knowledge about the phenomenon researched. However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding subjective experiences (Merton and Kendall (1946); Morse and Field (1995); Richards and Morse (2007) as cited in Mcintosh & Morse, 2015 p. 1).

By applying this method, I guided the queer refugees and asylum seeker's narratives structure and further analysis without compromising the content with biased personal interpretations. Hence, this thesis becomes interpretative and descriptive, centering on the queer refugees' framing of their own homing experiences rather than having them pre-framed by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013 as cited in Huethorst, 2018 p. 27). In addition, the semi-structured interviews helped me guide the participant's narratives about specific moments and individual practices of gendered and sexuality life aspects.
Finally, with semi-structured interviews, I could elude the repetition of stories representing a trauma or struggle for the interviewees and avoid possible emotional and psychological fatigue with the questions guide.

4.2 Accessing the informants

I originally envisioned for the fieldwork process, conducting an ethnographic study where I could interact with the refugees and asylum seekers, settle a sense of trust, understand their environment, and listen and talk to them for long periods. Accordingly, to get into the queer refugee network, in October 2020, I established communication via email with several queer refugee NGOs across the Netherlands. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed at the end of 2020/ beginning of 2021, most of these NGOs shut down their activities and were not accepting volunteers or researchers for physical and virtual fieldwork.

For this reason, I decided to change my approach and apply semi-structured interviews as the primary method. I contacted these NGOs again in December 2020, explaining my circumstances and the changes on the project. I also shared a call for participants (See Annex 1) by email. Two small organizations replied to my call and supported the idea: *Secret Garden and Rainbow Den Haag.*

To start the fieldwork, I moved to Amsterdam in February 2021. I had several meetings with the staff of both NGOs, in which I got to know the context of queer refugees from the perspective of the organization coordinators. They also provided me contacts and even shared my call for participants with other NGOs.

I will elaborate briefly on the work of Secret Garden and Rainbow Den Haag in the following subchapters since they were fundamental support for getting me in touch with the queer refugee networks in several cities in the Netherlands.

4.3 Sampling method

I chose to employ a snowball sampling method due to the difficulties mentioned for accessing the queer refugee's network in the Netherlands. This type of sampling method is usually applied when a target group of people is difficult to access. Thus, the first contacted samples, which are generally found via convenience sampling, are asked to share if they know other people with similar characteristics (in this case, other queer refugees and asylum seekers living in The Netherlands) to take part in the research, creating a chain effect (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2).

The first contacted people were the leaders of *Secret Garden* and *Rainbow Den Haag* that worked directly with the potential participants. It was vital to count on the networking support of these organizations because it contributed to the trust-building process between researcher and interviewee. In this sense, without the possibility to apply an ethnographic approach, I did not have space and time to develop a sense of trust with the interviewees. However, both Secret Garden (founded in 2009) and Rainbow Den Haag (founded in 2002) have worked for years with queer refugees and asylum seekers, providing legal, psychological support and social-intercultural meetings in which solid personal relationships

and a sense of commitment and belonging have been developed through time. Thus, both NGOs were intermediaries to gain the trust of the queer refugees by sharing the call for participants, explaining the project to them, and asking them to recommend other people interested in collaborating with the research. This way of sampling also opened the door to alternative digital semi-structured interviews in cases where the participants preferred it due to the COVID-19 risks. The well-established relationship between the queer refugees/ asylum seekers and the organization coordinators created a zone of trust and comfort.

Moreover, the different cultural backgrounds of the queer refugees and asylum seekers who are Secret Garden and Rainbow Den Haag members made them a heterogeneous group. In the case of Secret Garden, there is a predominance of individuals coming from Middle-Eastern countries, while in Rainbow Den Haag, the majority of the people came from African countries. This provided a tangible diversity to the sample in terms of cultural perspectives. Concerning SOGIESC, there is a high proportion of men who identify as gay, bisexual, or queer in both organizations, a visible group of women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer, and a small number of people who identify as transgender individuals. There was no current acknowledgment of intersex people participating in the organization's events and activities.

Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that this thesis was initially conceived focusing on LGBTQI+ refugees, avoiding contemplating asylum seekers due to their even more vulnerable condition regarding legal status in the country. In addition, I was aware of the difficulties that interviewing asylum seekers would imply concerning trust from the participant's perspective. Notwithstanding, the support, particularly from the Rainbow de Haag coordinator in terms of communication and creating a safe space for the interviewees (e.g., providing a place to conduct the interview), allowed me to include one asylum seeker in the sample. The outcome of this decision was a wide range of temporalities of stay in the Netherlands among the participants. While the individuals with a refugee status have lived in the country for years (an average of 3-5 years), the person still in the asylum process has stayed only for a few months. I decided not to specify these temporalities in the analysis but to reflect on the impact of the legal status in their homing experiences.

As a result of the networking, fifteen LGBTQI+ adults (fourteen refugees and one asylum seeker) living in different cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Haarlem, Rotterdam, and Almere) agreed to participate in the interviews.

Lastly, it is necessary to explain in detail the cultural and sexual/gender diversity within the sample of participants. I interviewed three lesbian women, ten gay men, one transgender woman, and one person identified as queer, although they indicated their sexual orientation was homosexual. In this sense, I must mention that transgender and other non-binary gender identities representations were limited compared to the sexual orientation category. Additionally, it is necessary to emphasize that this sample does not represent bisexual and intersex identities since any participant self-identified as part of these categories.

Concerning the cultural background, the participants came from a varied list of countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Congo, Uganda, Guinea-Conakry, Tunisia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Jamaica.

The informants' country background, asylum status, SOGIESC, and city of current residence alongside their corresponding pseudonyms are summarized in Table 1. I use the pseudonyms of the participants here and in the subsequent chapters to personalize their voices and give space to their narratives.

Table 1: Overview of the Interviewees

Participant's name	Country of origin	Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity	Current city in the Netherlands	Asylum Status
Hassan	Lebanon	Queer/Gay man	Amsterdam	Refugee
Ali	Lebanon	Gay man	Amsterdam	Refugee
Elias	Jordan	Gay man	Amsterdam	Refugee
Yussif	Sierra Leone	Gay man	The Hague	Refugee
Juliet	Sierra Leone	Lesbian woman	The Hague	Refugee
Selma	Jamaica	Transgender woman	The Hague	Refugee
Daniel	Jamaica	Gay man	The Hague	Refugee
Faruku	Uganda	Gay man	Utrecht	Refugee
Simon	Uganda	Gay man	Amsterdam	Refugee
Sesey	Uganda	Gay man	The Hague	Asylum Seeker
Abdou	Tunisia	Gay man	Amsterdam	Refugee
Jack	Congo	Gay man	Haarlem	Refugee
Sam	Congo	Gay man	The Hague	Refugee
Anita	Guinea-Conakry	Lesbian woman	Rotterdam	Refugee
Farai	Nigeria	Lesbian woman	Almere	Refugee

4.4 Researcher's positionality

As researchers, it is imperative to reflect on our positionality while working with other people. Positionality refers to the *situatedness* of the researchers in terms of power relations and asymmetrical interactions with their subjects of study (Fremlova, 2018, p.101). In addition, it is worth mentioning that this positionality is not fixed and can shift and change while conducting the research (Greene, 2014 as cited in Fremlova, 2018, p. 101). In this sense, how the participants could perceive me not just as a researcher but as an LGBTQI+ person influenced the outcomes of our interaction, the participant's attitudes, and how the interviews took place. In this sense, our mutual perceptions created a space that determined the level of openness or the type of answers I received from their part.

In this respect, I had concerns about my position as a gay man, researcher, and migrant and how to negotiate identification, differences, and subjectivities with the informants to gain mutual trust. During the data collection, the reflection process about my positionality was intricate since the interviewees and I had specific common grounds regarding being LGBTQI+. However, at the same time, my privileged position as a researcher would never make me fully understand the participants' subjective views.

Thus, at the start of this project, I was unsure about expressing personal and private aspects of my life and identity to the interviewees. In my view, keeping these aspects apart would help me to avoid any possible bias. However, I found it unfair to ask the participants to share sensitive information about their private lives without giving anything in return. Consequently, I decided to put my personal background and views into the table, introducing myself as a gay man and explaining my motivations to make this study. The outcome was beneficial since this also created a sense of trust and safety between us. This also facilitated the interview process since sharing mutual experiences as LGBTQI+ people made them deeply explore their understandings about SOGIESC and its impact on their notions of home.

Despite these benefits, I also had to keep in mind that even if we shared these common grounds, I also had an outsider and privileged position: I am not a refugee/asylum seeker, I have not the same cultural background, and my living experience as a gay man is still totally different from their experiences with their gender identities and sexualities. For instance, I have never lived persecution because of my sexual orientation. Therefore, I tried to have a learner approach towards their narratives, always asking for clarification if something was unfamiliar to me. In case of particular traditions, country contexts, or spiritual beliefs, I had to pause and ask if they could explain those aspects in more detail. Consequently, by acknowledging the impossibility to fully understand the participants' views, I allowed my subjectivities, constructs, and perspectives to be challenged (Chen Lee, 2020, p. 48). This facilitated my aim to focus on their narratives and not on my personal thoughts and interpretations.

Finally, I would like to highlight that this impossibility was more palpable during the interviews with lesbian and transgender women since gender identity and sex factors made our common grounds more distant than those I had with the gay men participants.

Notwithstanding, our interaction took place in a similar way. For the women of this study (Juliet, Selma, Anita, and Farai), the fact that I was part of the LGBTQI+ community allowed them to see me as trustworthy and someone who could sympathize (although not fully understand) with their struggles in relation to SOGIESC. For example, Juliet expressed that she is not used to having interviews with men, especially in her house. However, knowing that I was gay changed her mind since, in her words: "We are part of the same community."

4.5 Ethical considerations

Another essential aspect to consider for this thesis was safeguarding the queer refugees and asylum seekers' confidentiality. During the interviews, they shared highly sensitive and private information, and by writing about their individual experiences without being aware of the importance of confidentiality, I might pose some risks for them, such as discrimination, disruption of their social ties, and even have a particular influence over the asylum process of the ones that were still in it.

In this regard, I provided the fifteen participants a consent form and an information letter (see Annex 2) with detailed information on the project's nature, personal data rights, data storage procedures, and their involvement in the research. These documents followed the guidelines of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).[13] I emphasized that their personal data, such as names, would be anonymized with pseudonyms to protect their identity and privacy. On this aspect, the majority of the interviewees expressed that I could use their actual names. However, I must highlight the positionality of the asylum seeker (Sesey) that decided to participate in my project. He expressed some concerns about his anonymity since he is still in the asylum procedure. Sesey also emphasized that he was very interested in bringing his voice to the project but only accepted because he trusted Rainbow Den Haag. Thus, to conduct the interview with Sesey, the support of the coordinator of this NGO was vital. I attempted to create a safe environment for this particular case in cooperation with him.

Moreover, I informed that the data would be recorded and stored in an encrypted pen drive. I explained to the participants how their information would be used and protected before, during, and after the interview. In this sense, I ensured that the interviewees' data was kept confidential, and all identifying features were anonymized in every research output.

Likewise, the Covid-19 pandemic posed a series of ethical concerns throughout the process of data collection. I agreed with the interviewees to follow all the biosecurity measures emplaced by the Dutch government, such as using masks, maintaining at least one meter of distance while doing the interview, and following the curfew times that prohibited being outside our dwellings after 9 pm. On this aspect, part of the participants expressly asked to have online interviews due to the Covid-19 risks that meeting with me could pose towards

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[13] For more information see https://www.nsd.no/

their health. For example, one of the interviewees was concerned about his HIV[14] status and his possible vulnerability against the virus. Therefore, although we previously agreed on having a physical meeting, we decided to change to a virtual platform.

Moreover, during my fieldwork, I was cautious in following all the measures and avoiding meeting more people outside the research since I knew that doing physical interviews was already a risk for the participants and myself.

Finally, I must mention that my sample initially consisted of 17 persons who had agreed and scheduled a time to do the interview. However, two dropped out for Covid related reasons. One got a positive result for the virus two days before our meeting, making it impossible to conduct the interview physically. The other also dropped out because of fear of getting infected after an outbreak in her neighborhood. Both were not interested in interviewing in an online way.

Thus, researching in pandemic times brings up ethical challenges that imply more flexibility for the researcher towards the methods, and it requires an awareness that every plan and schedule can change in a matter of hours.

4.6 Interview's process

I divided the interview's structure into five thematic blocks (See Annex 3). First, I asked about the participants' backgrounds in the countries where they grew up and their migration trajectory until they arrived in the Netherlands. Then, I focused on their understanding of the term *home*. Next, I asked them to elaborate on their home experiences in their previous country and the Netherlands. The fourth thematic block addressed their feelings towards being queer and being a refugee and its connection to homing. Finally, the last topic revolved around their ideal concept of home. This structure served as a guide to follow during the interview process and helped to avoid redundant questions and repeated unnecessary information.

Despite this order, I did not follow it linearly, jumping through the themes when I considered necessary depending on the flow of the interview and the participant reception of the questions. I also let them know that the interviews were voluntary and that it was not necessary to answer all the questions. I emphasized that they could stop the interview at any time if they found a specific question uncomfortable or if they had an emotional breakdown due to the experience shared. Lastly, I asked for their permission to use a voice recorder to record the interview.

Regarding timing, I tried to take all the time needed so the interviewees could elaborate on their narratives without any pressure. Using open-ended questions allowed me

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[14] Human immunodeficiency virus

to invite them to provide detailed reflections. This resulted in an average recording time of one hour. However, I had one interview that lasted more than two hours.

4.6.1 Challenges and limitations

As mentioned in previous subchapters, it is essential to mention how the Covid-19 pandemic shaped the consecution of the interview process. I originally planned to conduct only physical interviews. However, when I arrived in the Netherlands to start my fieldwork, the number of cases rose, and the government restrictions were tightened up (e.g., lockdown, a minimal number of guests from other households, and a curfew).

These contextual circumstances caused by the pandemic posed new challenges changing my initial plan. For this reason, I considered two modality possibilities to conduct the semi-structured interviews: physical interview and online interview. As a result, I conducted ten physical interviews and five online interviews. The physical interviews took place with all the biosecurity measures recommended by the Dutch government and considering the participant's preferences. In this sense, some interviews took place in inside environments (e.g., houses and apartments) while others occurred outside. As I also had interviewees living in different cities across the country, I frequently moved by train and bus for the physical interviews. This increased my awareness regarding Covid-19 measures to protect my health and the health of my informants. However, the risk of getting mutually infected with the virus by conducting physical interviews was still present and out of my control. Although this added a burden to creating a safe space and sense of trust between us, I opted to raise the Covid-19 topic from the beginning with the participants to avoid misinterpretations. Both parts were aware of these risks and mutually agreed to maintain the physical modality since it remained their preference.

On the contrary, I offered a virtual modality for the informants that felt uncomfortable participating in a physical interview. I used two platforms to do it: Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Regarding the online modality, it is essential to highlight that I experienced technical issues related to connectivity that obstructed crucial moments in which the participants shared very emotional and private information. Here, I reaffirmed the benefits of applying semi-structured interviews as my main method for data collection. First, I managed to reestablish these emotional moments through my questions guide, and second because by having five thematic blocks to focus on, I went back to the conversation and kept track of their narrative when connectivity failures obstructed our communication.

Furthermore, after this process, I reflected on the importance of physical interaction when conducting interviews. I noticed how the trust-building process was more manageable when being in presence with the participants. For instance, I observed that most of the physical interviews lasted longer than the online interviews, and I got to know more about the participant's life, share more thoughts and record more detailed narratives.

In this sense, although I gathered all the information required in my questions through the online interviews, I noticed that the participants took more time to open themselves during

the online interviews, and particularly the first questions were answered with less detail than in the physical interviews. In addition, the ice-breaker dynamics I applied at the start of the interviews work better physically, mainly due to the constant connectivity and audio issues during the online interviews, in which I had to repeat myself several times.

Therefore, even though I completed the fifteen interviews, the Covid-19 pandemic posed several challenges that obliged me to have more flexibility regarding my methods and schedule. Applying two interview modalities caused a certain unbalance between the participant's narratives. This was reflected in the number of physical interviews surpassing the one-hour timing average compared to the online interviews that lasted roughly forty minutes.

In addition, the possibility of having physical interviews in outside environments also had its complexities. For instance, noises from the environment affected some of the recordings, which I detected when transcribing the audio files. Likewise, the fact that restaurants, coffee shops, and other common social areas were closed due to the lockdown left few possibilities on location terms to conduct the interviews. I chose parks and green areas as the best option to propose to the participants. However, due to the usual unpredictable weather in the Netherlands, rain and snow caused some interview reschedules.

One of the methodological limitations of this project was in respect of language. I conducted the interviews in English since all the interviewees spoke English as a second language. The native languages of the participants were Arabic, French, Swahili, Hausa, Patois, and Krio. In this sense, although English enabled me to proceed without any issue in communication terms with the participants, I am aware that many significant meanings, discursive elements, and concepts might have been lost in translation.

Finally, some of the participants could neither read nor write, while others had completed university education. This made a clear unbalance in regards to communication before and during the interview. Thus, I had in mind using simple expressions, so all the participants could understand my questions. For instance, to make the interview process equal for all of them, I read the consent and the information letter for those who could not read it before starting the interview recording. I also supported the credibility of these documents with validation from the Rainbow den Haag and Secret Garden coordinators, who also explained to the participants the documents' content beforehand.

4.7 Transcription process and analysis

To transcribe the interviews, I used the Express Scribe transcription software, which works with a variable speed playback that allowed me to reduce the time speed of the recordings without connecting to the internet. This made the transcription process fluid and shorter. I kept all the audio files and transcriptions in an encrypted pen drive for the data analysis.

However, it is not enough to collect and store data. The data gathered in the form of text from documents or interview transcripts must be analyzed by following the particular

purposes of the study. According to Newman (2014), analyzing data means systematically organizing, integrating, examining information, searching for patterns and relationships, and connecting them with specific concepts. By doing this, the researcher can identify broad trends and themes, improving understanding of a particular topic and expanding its theory (P. 477).

4.7.1 Coding the data

Coding in qualitative research implies structuring the data into conceptual categories that lead to the creation of themes. The research question guides this method, but the process often opens the floor to new questions, which allows the researcher to move among its theoretical framework to analyze the narratives on a general and higher level (Newman, 2014, p. 480). Hence, to categorize the information, I looked for patterns in each interview's narrative and organized it into thematic blocks for further analysis.

It is indispensable to mention that I employed open coding for the categorization process and the creation of the thematic blocks. This form of coding allows the researcher to locate themes and assign initial codes to condense the mass of data into categories but remaining open to change these initial codes in subsequent analysis. In addition, by using the chosen theoretical framework during the open coding process, themes in a low level of abstraction within the narratives can be brought out to the surface (Newman, 2014, p. 481).

Subsequently, this process helped me make sense of the collected data and structure the analysis to draw conclusions. Here is vital to highlight again the descriptive and interpretative nature of this thesis. My priority was to show the participants' thoughts, ideas, and feelings about home and its relation to SOGIESC. Hence, I maintained the original participants' speech unaltered (including grammatical errors), and avoided taken-for-granted ideas from my part. My interpretations were only present when applying the theoretical framework to the narratives to support my arguments and answer the research question. Thus, I did not elude theoretical analysis and interpretations of the narratives, but I only used it to provide supportive evidence to discard some theoretical explanations or increase the plausibility of others in relation to the research question (Newman, 2014, p. 479).

Finally, I must mention that since the participants' notions of home, their SOGIESC experiences, and their migration trajectories were intertwined, it was impossible to analyze these aspects separately and categorize them as totally distinctive themes. Thus, I underlined their multiple intersections in the analysis chapter.

5. Findings: "We are here, and we are real." The homing journeys of queer refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands

"When you say 'home sweet home,' you think in the home you grew up, where your family is. The problem it's that you cannot grow up in a place that doesn't accept you, even if it's the place where you were born. You are not home. How can I say is my home there?"
(Jack, personal communication, Haarlem, March 24, 2021)

After documenting the queer refugees and asylum seeker's homing experiences, I found that home and SOGIESC are profoundly intertwined in their narratives. The participants' sexual orientation and gender identity play a significant role in shaping what home means for them at different levels and in unique ways. Some queer refugees and asylum seekers have learned to attach a sense of home while performing their gender and sexualities by acts of resistance and/or suppression. As contradictory as it might sound, they have experienced multiple identity reconstructions, continuously concealing and embracing their SOGIESC during their homing. Many queer refugees have constrained their identities to survive in the countries they grew up in, while others have fully embraced them confronting the hegemonic cis-heteronormativity of their societies. At the same time, others have interchanged these two facets at different stages of their lives. This double process is also present at various degrees during their homing in the Netherlands.

In this chapter, I will explore the interviewee's stories, dreams, and multilayered understandings of home. To facilitate the reading, I structured this analysis in six thematic blocks. The first section will describe the stories and backgrounds of the participants, the second will depict their notions of home, the third - explore the geographical and material aspect of home between two countries, the fourth will examine the role of SOGIESC and refugee status in queer refugees homing, the fifth will expose the homing reinforcements and transformations that queer refugees have undergone due to forced migration. Finally, the last section will delve into their concept of an ideal home.

5.1 The stories: "Let's live before it is too late"

Boccagni argues that across social sciences and humanities, as much as in commonsense, the idea of home is frequently associated with some sort of origin, the starting point of personal stories, the roots of individual biographies (2017, p. 70).

Hence, following Boccagni's statement and before exploring the notions of home and homing practices of queer refugees, I considered it necessary to look back at their background and the life experiences that formed their identities and worldviews. In this sense, I will elaborate on their personal journeys to set the context that will help to comprehend the

connection between SOGIESC and home.

I decided to focus on specific stories that reflect the central themes of this thesis, and therefore I will not depict the backgrounds of all the participants. However, all of them will have a space in the subsequent sections.

The people interviewed for this research have gone through complicated life paths. Their stories are not common; they are crossed by traumatic experiences in which they have faced discrimination, violence, and persecution. While some are still recovering from their emotional wounds, others have learned to survive by acts of resilience and resistance. This is the case of Farai, a lesbian refugee from Nigeria who opened up with me and told me her life story.

5.1.1 Surviving by acts of resilience and resistance

After losing her parents, Farai grew up with her sister and grandmother in a small village in Nigeria. Growing up there as an LGBT person was harsh, and her life had a turning point when she was discovered kissing a girlfriend at the school's toilet. The rumors about Farai's sexual orientation increased in the village, and since then, she experienced many forms of discrimination. She was expelled from the school, rejected by her community, and ultimately forced by her uncle to marry a Muslim man. As she describes her experience:

> "How can a woman be kissing another woman, isn't that crazy? They said: 'Something is using her, she is not normal, she is not ordinary,' and a lot of things happened then, it was bad, my grandma was taking me to some traditional doctors, they give you traditional herbs that you have to drink to be "cured" (...) the rumor started to fly in the village, they started to see me as a strange person, someone who is possessed with some evil spirit, so that it became like a problem for me when I go out people isolated me. They rumored about me. They would hide the children of me." (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021).

Although Farai had plans to become a hairdresser, her dreams were interrupted by a turbulent arranged marriage in which she had no possibility of choice. She continued having a heterosexual life, suppressing her true feelings and desires. To survive, she concealed her identity with the façade of a perfect housewife, and she had two children with her husband. However, she lived another defining moment when she fell in love with a woman. The husband discovered this new situation, and after that event, exercised violence against Farai and eventually raped her.

What is more, he threatened Farai about informing the community authorities on her "condition" unless she accepted being subjected to certain rituals to be "cured." She knew that accepting his request could imply a risk of being tortured or killed. This led Farai to leave their house and children and ultimately flee the country where she lived all her life.

"He wanted me out of the house. He told me, you must leave my house because I cannot stay with somebody like this. It is humiliation. In Quran people like that is supposed to be killed immediately. It's forbidden. I was pleading, this man was insisting that he's going to bring me to the police, but first, he said that I was going to his village and perform some rituals. I agreed. If that will make me live my normal life inside the house again. I will do it, I don't care. But a friend advised me: don't go there if you go there, you're not gonna come back alive. They are gonna kill you there. He is persuading you to go to the village for the cleansing, but there is nothing like cleansing when it comes to Quran." (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

Farai survived by resisting discrimination and exclusion. Her family dragged her into a heteronormative life path, and still, she adapted to the new circumstances. She rebuilt her notions of home several times while being forced to hide and pretend to be a person she was not. By doing this, she found temporary peace and comfort, supported by her resilience, her children, and her dreams. Notwithstanding, her life and the home she learned to love in Nigeria proved insufficient to fulfill her needs. As Johnston and Valentine (1995) argue, the heterosexual family home is incapable of meeting the needs of LGBTQI+ individuals (as cited in Felsenthal, 2009, p.244).

Similarly, Faruku, a gay refugee from Uganda, learned in a hard way that life can change in a matter of a second. In Uganda, he grew up happy and felt at home even if his conservative family would never accept his sexual orientation. Moreover, he had dreams of becoming a lawyer and was working hard to achieve this goal. He was working and studying at the same time.

"*We are Muslims, so we grow up from a religious family (...) a family of maybe 20 people in the house, so growing up was fun actually. I miss it. It was always a happy time. I had the best education."* (Faruku, personal communication, Utrecht, April 15, 2021)

For Faruku, sexual orientation was not supposed to be hidden, and at a young age, he started to resist the heteronormative patterns in his society by showing and expressing his sexuality with his appearance and behavior. However, this courageous act almost ended his life. At the age of 16, while he was leaving his job, he was attacked by eight men in the street. They beat him and broke his jaw, leaving Faruku unconscious on the sidewalk for a whole night until someone took him to the hospital.

This event completely changed Faruku's point of view and made him reflect on his future. He was still proud of being gay, but now he lived a traumatic experience provoked by irrational hate, a scar that was never going to disappear. He was a survivor, and now he needed to choose what was best for his well-being.

"I always said that fleeing Uganda is not a solution because if we all flee Uganda. Then how will change come? In a way, freedom is freedom to come, a price has to be paid (...), but after that, it was very painful. I've always said I never fear death because is a fact of life. But

I think from that incident, and seeing what I went through when I was in that hospital and that pain. I said: maybe I can deal with death, but maybe I cannot deal with pain anymore. It's happening many times and I don't think I want to experience it anymore. That's why I decided to flee." (Faruku, personal communication, Utrecht, April 15, 2021)

In contrast to Farai's story, Faruku did not conceal his gay identity. He purposely showed it to his family and the society in which he lived. He survived by resisting heteronormativity. However, this almost compromised his life. For him, the home where he grew up happily and built good relationships, dreams, and routines was transformed from one day to another. Uganda was not home anymore. In this regard, the author Meth (2003) points out that home is not always a productive site for self-identification. The heteronormative home can be alienating, dangerous, and destructive for queer people through experiences of abuse and violence (as cited in Gorman-Murray, 2012, p.113).

5.1.2 The intersectional paths of SOGIESC persecution: Embracing who you are.

"It is like being a kid who will be an artist, a painter. Maybe this kid has pencils and drawings all the time. But what happens if you try to change him? Whoever might stop him from doing that and tell him don't paint, by the time you check on his bedroom, you'll find some papers, some drawings, because that is who he or she is, the kid is an artist, so that's how it is to be LGBT." (Simon, personal communication, Amsterdam, April 20, 2021)

As Farai's story demonstrated, the sexual orientation of LGBTQI+ people may be made public against their will. This could be pushed by partners, neighbors, or relatives, creating a permanent risk of persecution. In this regard, even if an LGBTQI+ person successfully hides their sexual orientation, there is constant anguish and fear in their lives, and by suppressing a fundamental aspect of their identity, they degrade their self-esteem. (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011, p. 8). That was the case for most interviewees, and I chose to represent this common situation with Farai's narratives. However, I also found it relevant to explore this circumstance concerning gender identity. Although the persecution related to gender identity is similar to the one exercised because of sexual orientation, it has its particularities. The story of Selma, a Jamaican transgender woman, illustrates these specific factors that bring another perspective of SOGIESC persecution to the table.

Selma grew up in a Christian family in Jamaica, in which she had little knowledge about LGBTQI+ topics. When I interviewed Selma, she constantly remarked that in Jamaica, homophobia, transphobia, and violence against LGBTQI+ people are enormous issues that are often overlooked. Still, those problems did not affect her until she was 17. She describes her past context as following:

"I grew up in a country community where I didn't know that gay exists; I see them on TV, but I think it wasn't in my country, and then I felt alone like I was the only person that is having

these feelings and thinking about the punishment if somebody finds out. And also based on my religion they tell you that God doesn't like you and you are a demon, and stuff like that, so it gave me a lot of suicidal thoughts." (Selma, personal communication, the Hague, March 25, 2021)

Selma came out first with her family as a gay man before embracing her real identity as a transgender woman. It was a gradual process of discovery in which the main factors of persecution were her gender expression and body.

"I had to leave my community when I decided to be brave enough to dress like a woman and went to a party and my brother was there [twin brother], and he found out it was me, and he pulled the wig off my head, and everybody know it was me and then started to spread in the community that I am gay and I was forced to leave the community at the age of 17 years old." (Selma, personal communication, the Hague, March 25, 2021)

The intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity is tangible in Selma's story. Transgender people are more vulnerable to multiple forms of violence than many other queer identities as it is more difficult for them to cover their gender nonconformity (Alessi et al., 2017, p.14).

Although Selma struggled with her sexual orientation at first, it was her gender identity that marked a point of no return in her life. Being not entirely accepted as gay within her home, Selma was still happy and lived her everyday life through concealing practices towards her sexuality. However, dressing as a woman started a process of self-discovery that brought visibility to her gender identity. In this respect, Fenselthal argues that the lack of spaces in which trans persons can safely be and express who they are makes them feel the need of choosing between living as either male or female to avoid the risk of harassment, ostracism, and transphobic violence (2009, p.244-251). Selma chose to be herself and stop hiding.

Ali's story represented a case in which other factors besides SOGIESC intersected with the persecution suffered. Ali is a gay refugee born and raised in Lebanon. He discovered his sexual orientation at a young age, and although it posed some struggles for him in several spaces, it never interfered with his family relationships. He was accepted by the most important people in his life: his parents.

"I never had problem with my family, but you know, the culture, the people who is around you at work, at university, no one was accepting (...) we can't be ourselves there, it's totally difficult to be yourself, you have to hide from everyone." (Ali, personal communication, digital platform, May 05, 2021)

Ali's reasons to flee Lebanon were related to his sexual orientation. However, they were mainly driven by religious and political beliefs. He had a confrontation with the

Lebanese Shia Islamist political party 'Hezbollah,'[15] which resulted in a failed attempt of murder.

> *"There is lots of other reasons but the main reason I left Lebanon it was because I had a big problem with some Hezbollah in Lebanon. The religious people, I was having trouble with them for long time (...)I was in a relationship with someone from them, and when they found out , they were scared that I will mention it to someone, so they tried to kill me once."* (Ali, personal communication, digital platform, May 05, 2021)

Ali's story shows that for some queer refugees, their premigration experiences can include persecution based on their SOGIESC and a combination of war, religious conflict, and political instability experiences (Alessi et al., 2017, p.14).

Lastly, another aspect present in the interviewee's narratives was the intersection between SOGIESC and HIV status. Hassan, a queer refugee from Lebanon, and Abdou, a gay refugee from Tunisia, had struggled due to the combination of both aspects in their lives, which forced them to flee their countries.

The story of Hassan particularly reflected this intersection. He already built a queer life in Lebanon. He was living with his boyfriend and was accepted by his family. In addition, he was involved in LGBT activism within his community. He resisted the heteronormative patterns in his society, living an openly gay life.

> *"Living in Lebanon was not very easy, but it was acceptable, you know, to come out to my family as gay. I told them at a very early age when I was 17, and it was my sister who encouraged me to come out (...) I would have never left Lebanon. I had really good life. With my ex, we owned our house rooftop with 120 meters house. My parents, they were ok with me being gay."* (Hassan, personal communication, Amsterdam, March 29, 2021)

Hassan worked as a nurse in a catholic private hospital, and his colleagues knew about his sexual orientation. Although this made him deal with different forms of exclusion among his social networks, living in peace never was a big problem. This changed when his HIV-positive status was made public without his consent. In his words:

> *"I would have never left until I had a problem in my work. In the hospital where I work, they knew at that time that I was HIV positive. This HIV testing was the reason for them to kick me out. They also knew I was gay, they saw me many times on television talking about gay things, so maybe they stopped and said, 'it is enough a scandal that he works in a hospital, and people will see him on television, and he is HIV positive. If people know that one of our staff or our nurses is HIV, it will make the hospital reputation bad' (...), so they kicked me*

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[15] Hezbollah (the "Party of God") emerged in 1982 as a manifestation of Iran's influence and a response to Israel's massive invasion of Lebanon. Hezbollah won legitimacy by resisting Israel's occupation, but it also offered Shias a credible ideology and an array of institutions. The party is now deeply embedded in Lebanese politics (Norton, 2007).

out, and then I was not able to work". (Hassan, personal communication, Amsterdam, March 29, 2021)

In Hassan's story, it is essential to consider the marginalized position at the intersection of identity categories. For instance, when these categories are made visible, it creates a downward spiral of discriminatory social interactions towards marginalized groups (Huethorst, 2018, p.21).

As Hassan himself states:

"I think being queer in Lebanon is already an obstacle (...) if they know about you, it can be a problem, but if you are also HIV, on top of it that is a curse from God. That's Stigma." (Hassan, personal communication, Amsterdam, March 29, 2021)

The narratives of Farai, Faruku, Selma, Ali, and Hassan show most of the central topics involved in this thesis, and they work as a representational set of stories. However, they do not fully depict the unique and individual backgrounds of the other ten participants. Hence, throughout the following subchapters, I will explore the narratives of the rest of the interviewees, providing a space to know more of their backgrounds.

5.1.3 "How can someone be gay enough?" The issue of credibility in the asylum procedure and its impact on queer refugees homing

One of the main topics repeated in the participant's stories was the issue of credibility of their SOGIESC by the Dutch asylum authorities.

Often, the applicant's testimony is the only source of evidence to prove persecution on these grounds. This is because family members or community members usually perpetrate this kind of persecution, and there are no registries of these events (Tsourdi, 2012). I argue that this situation might play a long-term role in the queer asylum seekers and refugees' home attachments to the Netherlands. While they had to conceal their SOGIESC in their former countries of residence, they must undergo a sometimes premature coming out when applying for asylum. Their gendered and sexed identities are scrutinized and questioned in a procedure that often reinforces stereotypes and prejudices, impacting queer refugees' homing and sense of belonging in the country. Here is important to highlight that the Dutch asylum authorities and facilities are usually their first contact with the Netherlands, and this process can mark a strong impression for many years.

Elias, a gay refugee from Jordan, describes the issue of credibility as a process of revisiting traumatic experiences and realizing the uncertainty of his future:

"You are talking about papers, you are trying to prove to someone you don't know that you are gay, you are trying to prove to someone that your life is actually in danger, and you don't

know how they will decide, whether ok we believe you or we don't believe you, so you don't know what is the criteria, you are just telling your story, the same embarrassing stuff, you are being very vulnerable, you are saying stuff you never shared with anyone before, and then you are just, you know waiting." (Elias, personal communication, digital platform, March 26, 2021)

For Jack, a gay refugee from Congo, the lack of credibility occurred due to stereotypes related to gender expression and appearance. Being a big, strong man who used to wear military clothes, he explained that people usually perceived him as very masculine. This situation was repeated during his asylum application when the authority that examined his case showed specific prejudices of how a gay man must look like:

"They did not trusted me. So I was denied, and I lived in the street for three years, and then I applied again. The lady that interviewed me said: They should have gave you papers since the first interview, so in 2018 I got my status. The first time they said they don't believe me because I don't look like a gay. They didn't believe me for my appearance." (Jack, personal communication, Haarlem, March 24, 2021)

In Farai's case, the reason for disbelieving was related to her background. For the Dutch asylum authorities, her story did not fit with the expected behaviors of a lesbian. They questioned her sexual orientation without any kind of sensitivity, intersectional approach, or LGBTQI+ knowledge. Farai admitted during the interview that she was not sure she was a lesbian. At that time, Farai considered herself bisexual for the sole reason she had two children with a man. She was not aware of what sexual orientation meant.

"The IND[16] did not believe my story. They were like, so you are lesbian? Oh no, you are bisexual. You said you are bisexual. You were married. So you say you are bisexual and never attend any LGBT organizations. First, I did not know where I belong. I did not know where I fit in. Now I am a lesbian before I was not, so when I saw my report, they put me as a bisexual woman. I don't understand. Is there anything that makes us gay enough? How do we get gay enough, or are we not being gay enough? Being gay is just a question of the mind and how you feel about yourself. I don't have to prove to you that I am a lesbian." (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

Additionally, she was interrogated about her lack of involvement with LGBT organizations while being in the asylum seeker's camp:

"*They said: you have been in the Netherlands for six months, and you didn't go to any meeting,*

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[16] Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service. For more information consult https://www.ind.nl

any LGBT organization (...) But I wasn't interested to go to any organization, I was still thinking about the children I leave behind. So, I wasn't interested in any kind of gathering."
(Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

When analyzing these narratives, it was notorious that the asylum procedures do not account for the different ways in which LGBTQI+ individuals have experienced persecution and lived their identities. For instance, lesbian refugees like Farai tend to experience persecution in private contexts, which leads the adjudicators not to perceive forced marriage or domestic violence as factors related to a woman's sexual orientation (Alessi et al., 2017, p.15).

In addition, the Dutch asylum authorities see SOGIESC as fixed categories with concrete characteristics contributing to a general bias in the way they examine their cases. On the one hand, they were expecting a particular "gay" look and behavior with Jack. On the other hand, with Farai, they were dubious of the consistency of her sexual orientation since she was previously living a heterosexual family life, and she did not demonstrate an interest in integrating with the LGBT community. These cases represent relevant misjudgments of LGBTQI+ basic notions from the Dutch asylum authorities that carry severe consequences for queer asylum seekers' applications. Here is important to bear in mind the principles of queer theory, which conceives gendered and sexed identities as fluid and mobile. In this sense, by applying queer theory, stereotypes related to gender expression, gender performance, and the steadiness of sexual orientation can be challenged. In this sense, although manifesting specific categories for LGBTQI+ people is functional for the asylum procedures, it should not leave aside the fact that gender and sexual diversity cannot always be standardized.

Finally, the prejudices about LGBTQI+ identities reflected in these stories also relate to the nexus between home and queer. Some queer refugees of this study expressed that because of the issue of credibility, they felt induced to follow narratives of leaving heteronormative homes of unbelonging, discomfort, and struggle during the asylum procedure. This to prove to the Dutch asylum authorities their persecution. Although this circumstance might be true for some of them, it does not describe the actual home experiences of all queer refugees. Therefore, by sticking to these ideas of fleeing the heteronormative home and seeking a welcoming and tolerant home in the Netherlands, queer refugees might have more success in their asylum claims. However, this process could go on the other direction: while embracing these stereotypical ideas of home and SOGIESC during the asylum procedures, queer refugees could already face a sort of discordancy in their notions of home. They could end up conflicted on where to attach a sense of home and what this word actually means for them.

5.2 What is home for queer refugees? A glimpse into their minds

Retaking Boccagni's (2017) definition of homing, it is necessary to consider that migrants and refugees' notions of home entail a complex social experience dislocated over multiple settings, shifting bases and across contexts. Therefore, it is not static and involves a process of attachments in light of the assets available to them and the societal structures in which they live in. Moreover, queer refugees attach a sense of home in even more unique ways since their SOGIESC are highly entangled with their homing. Consequently, in this subchapter, I will explore the interviewees' personal definitions of home, applying a queer perspective.

5.2.1 Home as a place of acceptance and freedom

For all the informants in this project, the concepts of acceptance and freedom were fundamental in their narratives. They remarked them several times as crucial elements in their homing. Acceptance and freedom serve as abstract notions that reflect the non-material facet of home for queer refugees. Linking to Boccagni (2017) and Perez Murcia's (2019) position of the non-material conception of home, it recreates feelings and symbolical characteristics that are influenced by the interviewees' backgrounds as LGBTQI+ individuals.

Yussif, a gay refugee from Sierra Leone, defined home in this way:

"The sweetest thing in this world is freedom. So, if you want to find a home, if that country don't give you that freedom you need. Forget that. That place is not your home. You can only get home, where you are respected, people respect your own opinion and respect other's people opinion, not people to force you on their own opinion that is not home." (Yussif, personal communication, the Hague, March 28, 2021)

Similarly, for Sesey, a gay asylum seeker from Uganda, the concept of freedom implies an apparent absence of fear. Having been a victim of human trafficking, Sesey confessed to me that he is constantly learning to trust other people. He confesses that living with fear and the uncertainty of not knowing whether his asylum claim will be accepted affect his homing attachments.

"Home means doing what you want to do when you want to do it. That makes you feel home. To not be scared about anyone (...) when nobody is looking at you like you have a problem, that's what I mean with being free." (Sesey, personal communication, the Hague, April 13, 2021).

Acceptance was intertwined with the feeling of fear for Anita. As a lesbian refugee

from Guinea-Conakry, she shared with Sesey the fear of other people due to the exclusion suffered before because of her sexual orientation. This fear is continuously being brought back by her memories.

> *"Home is acceptance, if you accept me as who I am, I feel at home immediately (...) I just fear from people in my country, because of the memories, because I know they will never accept me (...) being gay and talking about gay stuff is tabu in my country, nobody wants to talk about that even if we are here, and we are real."* (Anita, personal communication, digital platform, April 17, 2021).

In the case of Farai, who concealed her lesbian identity for years, freedom and acceptance have acquired a new meaning. This relates to Massey (1992) and Mallett's (2004) conceptualizations of homing as a process in which transferences of meaning are made by re-enacting home attachments in extreme circumstances. Thus, Farai understands the concepts of acceptance and freedom as synonyms of home. To feel at home, she should not need to hide or pretend to be someone else. At home, she is not anymore a housewife or an "evil woman". She is free to be herself, and that is enough.

> *"Home is a place of acceptance, is a place where you have refuge, for example, is where you can live with your family. This is what I understand as home. Because now I'm no more in hiding. You don't have to pretend to be another person. You already identify your sexuality, your sexual orientation. You know who you are"* (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021).

Throughout these narratives, the connection between home and SOGIESC is present. The experiences of the queer refugees as LGBTQI+ persons have already influenced what home means for them at several levels. As Gorman Murray argues, the everyday integration of sexuality and gender with a "general sense of identity" in the home plays a significant role in self-affirmation and self-determination (2007, p. 234). Here, the words freedom and acceptance are strongly linked to their previous struggles concerning identity and self-expression.

5.2.2 "Home is my family": Redefining the concept of family

During the interviews, I observed that the nexus between queer and home often linked to the concept of family. Even though the interviewees grew up with cis-heteronormative models of home, in which the heterosexual nuclear family has been the ideal of what home should be, they have redefined these notions and their familiar relationships with others. In this sense, the cis-heteronormative meaning of family that represented confrontation and exclusion for their queer identities (Koegler, 2020) is no longer the family notion they embrace.

For instance, Daniel, a gay refugee from Jamaica, understands home through familiar dynamics that move away from heteronormative patterns and relate closely to the idea of acceptance.

> *"What makes me feel at home is family, and family for me is not necessarily blood relatives. It's people who love you, that is for me, family. People who accept you, people who celebrate you, people who recognize you, that for me is family that for me is home. I can make a home anywhere I go if the dynamic between the people is family-like. That would be my home."* (Daniel, personal communication, digital platform, March 30, 2021)

Daniel can attach a sense of home without a fixed location as always as he can reproduce his notion of family. This relates to the argument that home can reflect familial belongings while simultaneously affirming and legitimizing queer identities. The sexual orientation and gender identity of the informants are normalized through reconciliation with familial connections (Gorman-Murray, 2007, p. 235-236).

Likewise, Hassan and Juliet, a lesbian refugee from Sierra Leone, expressed a similar perspective in which they have chosen the type of family they incorporate at home. Here is essential to remember the unfixed connotation of home, in which it can certainly be a space that represents for queer refugees both familial/childhood homes as well as chosen family homes (Borges, 2018, p.70).

> *"Here, my new family is my home. We love ourselves. We come together, if we want to help each other. We are safe. So that's what I say is home for me, it's my family (...) in my country if they know that I am LGBT, they will not come closer to me."* (Juliet, personal communication, the Hague, April 12, 2021)

> "*I have my own family here. But it is a chosen family. Those people that I chose to be my family and make me feel at home is people that I can count on, people who care for you. They know who I am, they know my background. They understand it; they appreciate it. So this is what is family, this is what is home for me.*" (Hassan, personal communication, Amsterdam, March 29, 2021)

These understandings of family as homing illustrate an attempt of queering the home's dimension of materiality proposed by Boccagni (2017) that also considers the nurturing of relationships with significant people in a person's life. The similarities between the narrator's different ideas of the familial home show that queer refugees continuously challenge the typical approach to home as something always heterosexual and cis-normative by nurturing their bonds and relationships within their new contexts.

5.2.3 "Home is where one feels safe"

Due to their background of persecution, many of the queer refugees interviewed highlighted the attribute of security as the main element in their homing. For Boccagni, security is related to experiencing a sense of belonging and personal protection in which outsiders do not have easy access to the individual's identity (2017, p. 7).

Elias provided one example of the emphasis in this attribute of home. He concealed his sexual orientation in Lebanon for years. He never felt safe expressing his real identity, and the word 'safety' acquired a new meaning for him after he arrived in the Netherlands. However, he also embraces a non-material definition of home. For him, home is not about the geographical location he lives in. Home is not a place. It is a feeling.

> *"I think it's more of a feeling of being safe, of being secure, just being 100% percent yourself, and being able to be vulnerable. It is like a safe area for being 100% yourself, where you don't have to hide anything, where no one is watching. (...) I do not think I can call a place home. I mean, a place is just a place, but it's just the feeling of love, family, security, and safe it's what makes a house a home. It's your home; it's your little castle."* (Elias, personal communication, digital platform, March 26, 2021).

In his narrative, Elias also underlines the concept of privacy with the phrase "where no one is watching." Privacy for queer individuals is closely connected to creating a safe space that enables relatively supportive interactions for unhindered identity work. In this sense, one reason that makes privacy a crucial aspect of home for LGBTQI+ people is the social constraints and burdens towards sexual diversity in public spaces, in which they have frequently feel inhibited in the performance of their SOGIESC (Gorman-Murray, 2007, pp. 239- 240).

On the same note, Ali defines home with the same connotations as Elias:

> *"I feel I can make myself home wherever I am (...) It's not about being gay or straight; I feel home in my place, where I can be who I am, where I feel safe, that's a good word, to feel safe in your home. Otherwise is not gonna be called home."* (Ali, personal communication, digital platform, May 05, 2021)

In Ali's narrative, there is an interesting detachment of his sexual orientation from home. He says, "It is not about being gay or straight," emphasizing the attribute of security. However, the implicit craving for expressing and being himself at home is still present. I see this narrative as another attempt to queer the home. Bryant explains this process as the act of guaranteeing that queers have access to real-world spaces of shelter and ceaselessly reject normalizing trends (2015, p. 262-275). Thus, Ali avoids normalizing a discourse regarding how a home should be for a queer person but still maintains the importance of home as a

space to be yourself freely without any risk or fear.

Lastly, another particular definition of home that stressed the attribute of security is provided by Simon, a gay refugee from Uganda. He made a metaphorical comparison between home and the notion of death.

> *"Home would be the place where you rest at peace. That's why when some people die, they tell them they have gone home. So I think it's a place where you feel nothing is going to disturb you (...) so in short, is a place where I can have peace, happiness."* (Simon, personal communication, Amsterdam, April 20, 2021)

Simon understands home as a shelter in which he can finally get peace after years of persecution. In his narrative, the materiality of the shelter, expressed by an inner desire for security, not only helps him feel at home but also marks his homing aspirations. As Perez Murcia states, closely related to the idea of home as an open space for self-expression for people on the move, home can also be described as a vital existential dimension of human well-being, where people's personal history and aspirations intersect (2019, pp.155-156). In this sense, for Simon, home is peace, and ultimately his well-being depends on this peace.

This set of narratives demonstrate that homing for queer refugees is in tension with variable meanings that, influenced by the danger and homophobia lived through persecution, facilitate queer aspirations of security, peace, privacy, and happiness (Koegler, 2020, p. 1).

5.2.4 Home is where the heart is and where it hurts

The queer refugees and asylum seekers interviewed represented home always as a positive site of attachments where their aspirations could occur without any obstacle. However, many of them also described feelings of discomfort or stress attached to their notions of home. This connects to Perez Murcia's arguments that home is not always a site where people develop a sense of familiarity, comfort, and security. It can also be a place of discomfort where individuals struggle to fulfill their interests and aspirations, leading to feelings of estrangement and anxiety. In other words, this author affirms in a metaphorical way that home can be both where the heart is and where it hurts (2019, p. 158).

Although, several informants portrayed this understanding in their stories. I chose two narratives to describe this process. For Abdou, who experienced a hard time when he was diagnosed with AIDS[17], it is clear that home can also hurt, and that fact does not make it less home. For a long time, even if he was loved and cared for by the people around him and received the necessary treatments to recover from the severe detriment of his body caused by the virus, he developed suicidal thoughts. However, he learned to adopt a resilient attitude and learned that feeling at home is difficult, takes effort, and sometimes can be unpleasant.

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[17] Acquired immune deficiency syndrome

"I think home is a place where you feel good, you have people around you, you are loved, and you love. And home can suck sometimes, I know that very well, but in the end, is the home you built (...) At home, I feel at ease. I feel I finally belong." (Abdou, personal communication, Amsterdam, April 19, 2021)

For Sam, a gay refugee from Congo, his notion of home is closely attached to the present moment and surroundings:

"I am leaving all these ideas, these idealistic ideas that home is in a certain place(...) I came to a realization that home for me is my body, my very small and strict surrounding, where I am, my small belongings, where I live at that moment, what is at that moment familiar for me." (Sam, personal communication, digital platform, April 4, 2021)

In Sam's narratives, the idea of home as an unfixed concept that is not necessarily linked to a geographical location is depicted clearly. In contrast, he experiences home through corporeal practices, making his body an active category of attachments. This is related to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) theory of embodiment as a useful frame to analyze how the body creates sites of belonging and a sense of home (in Fobear, 2016).

However, taking Perez Murcia's (2019) arguments literally, even if home is where Sam's heart is, it is also where it hurts. For him, the feeling of being at home is a constant exchange of struggles between his gay identity and surroundings.

"When I first arrived in the Netherlands, it was very difficult for me to ground here, and I struggled the first years without being able to settle here, to settle down, and I was always thinking "one day" I will go back home and that was meaning for me to go back to Congo, to our family house (...), what really hit me was that years later when I came back to Congo, I missed the feeling of really being myself, because there is like, hiding my personality, acting sure that even the way I would touch a coup doesn't show anything that would make people think(...) you know those kinds of things, the way I would talk, the way I would dress, everything is just being watched for everybody to spot homosexuality somewhere." (Sam, personal communication, digital platform, April 4, 2021)

In this sense, Sam admitted that he felt that Congo and the Netherlands are both his homes, but he knew that he could not fulfill all his needs in those countries. He learned to build his home in every surrounding because his homing depends on him and not on the location. In addition, Sam embraced the struggles and pain that attaching a sense of home while being queer implied. He understands that home can also be a place of disjunction, unbelonging, and struggles for assimilation/integration (Fortier, 2003, p. 127) since his homing is entirely related to his queer and refugee identities.

5.3 "I feel I have two homes": Homing between two countries?

In the previous sections, I explored the participant's background and their relationships to their respective communities. I also looked at their notions of home, depicting non-material conceptions, home attributes and dimensions, and even varied and confrontational definitions. In this subchapter, I will analyze in-depth the homing experiences of queer refugees in terms of geographical location. In this sense, I will investigate the material aspect and the spatial dimension of home (Boccagni, 2017) by exploring narratives that portrayed their homing emplacement in both the Netherlands and their former countries of residence. With this, I am not trying to emplace the concept of home and frame it as a fixed material category. I attempt to challenge the discourse of queer migration-as-homecoming; indeed, the fetishized queer home concept emerged through the movement away from the familial home toward an imagined other space to be called 'home' (Fortier, 2003, p. 119). Thus, considering the fluidity of both home and sexual and gender identities, I seek to understand the interviewees homing processes in their previous countries of residence and the Dutch context, including the interaction with several systems of oppression towards their queer and refugee identities.

5.3.1 "You live in a bottle": Homing influenced by systems of oppression.

For some participants, to attach a sense of home in the countries they grew up in was difficult. The ongoing tensions between their queer identities and their surroundings, indeed, inhibited their homing.

Anita constantly lived scared of being attacked because of how she looked. While she was living in Guinea-Conakry, Anita started to show her gender expression through her appearance. She used accessories and clothes that were considered masculine in her community. Moreover, she 'came out of the closet' with her parents, a situation that was not well received by them. These events made Anita fall into a deep depression. She realized that she would never feel at home in Guinea.

> *"I was always sick. Depression. I tried to commit suicide in my country two times. First, my family, everybody rejected me because of my sexuality, My own home for me was like a hell, and outside was worse, so I did not have any place anymore, nowhere to go, nowhere to have peace because everywhere, when I am outside people can come and beat me, so it was too much. And you know, we also need our visibility, we need to show ourselves to the world."*
> (Anita, personal communication, digital platform, April 17, 2021)

For Yussif, the structural inequalities for LGBTQI+ persons in Sierra Leone impeded him from attaching a sense of home in the country. Coming from a low-income family, he never had the opportunity to study, and then he got involved in the diamond business, in

which he risked his life daily. Moreover, his sexual orientation represented another factor of risk among his social networks. If someone had known he is gay, he would have been executed.

> *"I didn't feel at home because I was born in a country that for me to get a medical facility is a problem. If I'm sick, my parents take me to the doctor, the doctor says money, and if my parents don't have money, they cannot treat me. At the end of the day, a lot of people are dying there. So what if I left that site, where I don't have that opportunity (...) and if you are gay that opportunity is less, it is a sentence to death. I can't never miss. I've never missed that. I never sat down and said, oh, I miss Sierra Leone."* (Yussif, personal communication, the Hague, March 28, 2021)

Similarly, due to the suppression of her sexual orientation, Farai never found Nigeria as a home. According to her, Nigeria is not a country for LGBTQI+ people:

> *"In Nigeria, there's not really anything that made me feel at home as an LGBT person. It was always a secret. I was always like in a bottle. In Nigeria, we live in a bottle. Because you are not free to live your life, it's like living in prison living in a cage. You're just being killed. You are not allowed to express yourself. You're not allowed to explore places. To call Nigeria a place of home is impossible. It is not a place of home for us."* (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

The present narratives link to the argument that home for queer refugees can become a panoptic tool of systems of oppression, concealing LGBTQI+ identities within the walls of their dwellings. Home then becomes a site of self-censorship and inhibition (Gorman-Murray, 2012, p.115). They also reflect the tendency to oppose queerness and the 'childhood home' where queer identities could never fit. However, it is essential to bear in mind the arguments of Fortier (2003), which also evoke the possibility for queer individuals to reprocess and redefine the 'childhood' home differently, a perspective that I will explore in the following section.

5.3.2 "Despite everything, it is your community, your own people": Homing from the margins.

The preceding subchapter described the impossibility for some queer refugees to attach a sense of home in their previous countries of residence due to the apparent contraposition of their SOGIESC and the mentality there. However, despite persecution, several participants of this research described other ways in which they continue attaching a sense of home in these specific locations. Although suffering some sort of deterritorialization after forced migration, their homing still includes a resilient vision of their 'roots' in those territories (Boccagni, 2020, p. 6).

In the case of Selma, the feeling of home is still related to Jamaica. Even if she is

aware that her life was threatened because of her gender identity, her connection with the culture and community plays a vital role in fulfilling her home aspirations. Thus, not being able to experience that in the Netherlands currently makes her homing incomplete.

> *"To put an extreme example, if somebody might find out that there is a gay party and call the police or call some gang and they'll shoot at the place, everybody will get hurt, but in that moment just knowing that you are with your own people, people like yourself, you understand each other, the same culture, even if it is one or two, the feeling of home is there (...)So it's like here I get the safety that I need, and I can be free in terms of my sexuality, but personal things in my life that should make me feel at home and comfortable, is not here. Living here it's like trying every day of my life to make myself comfortable, looking at all options, but is just not fulfilling"* (Selma, personal communication, the Hague, March 25, 2021).

Daniel, who also comes from a small town in Jamaica, experiences home similar to Selma. He had a happy childhood with a caring family. However, he grew up in a religious context in which homosexuality was not even discussed. For instance, he did not know what the word gay meant until people started to call him Batty Man[18] due to his feminine expression and body language. His sexual orientation was the only factor that caused tension in his homing since he always felt a sense of belonging in the country.

> *"I felt at home in Jamaica, especially growing up. I think I had a pretty good childhood. I felt the sense of home because it was a place where people celebrate to accept you, and you are part of the community; they know you. This familiarity this sense of, he is one of us, even now when I go there, I still feel this. But now, I don't really want to accept it until they can accept me being gay, and then I see if that sentiment still exist. Now my sexuality is also a factor. So, I look at their acceptance as being conditional."* (Daniel, personal communication, digital platform, March 30, 2021)

Through these narratives, the spatial dimension of home (Boccagni, 2017) is experienced not only in the co-present environment inside the Netherlands but also via distant interactions with the precedent residence locations. In this regard, like Selma and Daniel, other interviewees (e.g., Faruku and Abdou) also partly attached their homes to their former countries. Here I must point out that their narratives aligned with Boccagni's (2020) and Perez Murcia's (2019) understanding of home from the margins. For them, 'the margins' can refer to migrants and refugees' location of home in a tension between former countries and host countries, which leads to a feeling of "being away from home." In this sense, their homing is never fulfilled because their home-like attachments are divided between *here* and *there*.

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[18] Daniel explain to me that Batty Man is a derogatory term to call gay men in Jamaica.

5.3.3 A welcoming queer paradise? The Netherlands as home

Regarding the participant's resettlement in the Netherlands, I observed multiple tensions and synergies between their SOGIESC and homing during the interviews. Many of them found a welcoming home in this country for their queer identities, and the Dutch society provided the freedom and acceptance they were craving in the past. In moving to the Netherlands, they found some sort of liberation (Fortier, 2003; Murray, 2015) and started building a sense of home there.

Hassan expressed that he could not have a better home than the Netherlands. He does not worry anymore about being gay or being HIV positive to find a job, and that overcomes any struggle that settling in the country could entail. For him, being LGBTIQ+ is more an advantage than an obstacle in Dutch society because there are many networks for people like him.

> *"One of the things that made me feel at home it's that I had no problem with being HIV, you know, and applying for jobs. Now if I apply for jobs, I would never think about the people let to know I am HIV or worry about that (...) also maybe because the society here is queer friendly, LGBT friendly, that's why it's an advantage for you to be queer, that it will help you definitely to make you feel home."* (Hassan, personal communication, Amsterdam, March 29, 2021)

In Elias's case, his homing was not geographically located until he arrived in the Netherlands. His sense of belonging to Dutch society developed slowly by unleashing his suppressed sexual orientation and gender expression. In the Netherlands, he could finally say he was gay and show his identity through his appearance and practices. Moreover, although he still missed some home-like elements from Jordan, memories have become a way to reconnect with his life there. Therefore, Elias homing is partially emplaced in a specific location but also conceived through familiar memories.

> *"Here is a process to start to show the queer that you are, that you have been trying to hide your whole life. I actually never felt I belong to a land or a place, but I did start to understand this feeling when I came here. I feel that I belong here, I belong to this land, I am accepted, and maybe the home sense also developed a little bit before in Jordan. However, it wasn't Jordan (...) of course I had a lot memories too, but it's more about the memories, memories of the family house, not the place itself. I only felt home in my own room, just in my room. But here when I came I say this is home. I can call this country home."* (Elias, personal communication, digital platform, March 26, 2021)

In Elias's narrative, there is contraposition between a material and a non-material conception of home. While he embraces the Netherlands as a place of home, he also underlines that home is not exactly about a place, but it can encompass other elements such as memories. His views can be associated with Fortier's explanation that memories can

conjure images of places, people, and events, among other components, to attach 'home' to physical locations. It means remembering 'what it was like' to move on to another place of home (2003, p.124).

Similarly, Yussif explained the feeling of belonging with a memory of gay pride. For him, expressing his sexual orientation was still an issue while living in the Netherlands. However, this changed when he attended for the first time to the gay pride:

> *"I was still having that fear in me. I don't want to show myself, that I'm gay, and a friend told me, you can come out, there is no problem. So I was like, no, I don't want to come out because this thing in our country is not allowed. He told me, I give you my word. What can prove that is allowed: there's going to be pride, a Gay Pride, and that was my first time to be into that pride in Amsterdam. It was so colourful. It was so nice. This whole freedom is sweet. This is when I get the message; I'm not going to wait for anything. I'm going to come out. If I find Netherlands as home, is because they have given me peace. I am doing what I want. I have the right to date. I started to feel at home in Netherlands."* (Yussif, personal communication, the Hague, March 28, 2021)

Another example is Farai, who found another family in the Netherlands. Her homing is constructed through meaningful relationships and a sense of comfort and security. Moreover, the performance of her sexual orientation is the key that ultimately brings a sense of home in her life. This relates to the idea of performative homing, encapsulating an empowering a dimension in which self-realization and attachments beyond trauma and disruption are possible (Koegler, 2020, p. 5). For queer refugees like Farai and Yussif, the open performativity of SOGIESC in the home facilitates access to comforts and securities that were previously forbidden for them:

> *"I will say Netherlands is my home now because I've been accepted. I have my LGBT family which is very important to me. You know, this is a place where nobody's gonna judge you. Nobody's gonna blame you for being you. You're not afraid of being killed. You're not afraid of going to prison. You're not afraid of holding hands with your girlfriend or your boyfriend outside. You're not afraid to kiss your partner outside. So this is what I feel like in the NL. This is my new home."* (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

Finally, the precedent narratives echo Fortier's (2001, 2003) arguments of queer homecoming as a way of emancipation for LGBTQI+ individuals. By the very act of moving, queer refugees might have the opportunity of finding multiple sites of belonging. However, it is critical to remember that this is not the only trend in this project's narratives since the Netherlands is also conceptualized as a site where ongoing processes of inclusions and exclusions of home-like elements occur. As a result, multiple forms of oppression continue being restructured during queer refugees homing.

5.3.4 Homing in the Netherlands "it is an on and off"

Even though some of the narratives introduced by the queer refugees interviewed followed the idea of queer migration to liberation (Murray, 2015), several others expressed that the struggles of repression continued in different forms, making them feel a lack of belonging.

In Selma's perspective, the Netherlands provided everything she needed as a transgender woman. She could finally dress and behave as she wanted, and the law protected her integrity. Notwithstanding, the Netherlands is still not a home for her.

> *"I am free to live the life that I want to live. I can walk on the street and dress the way I want to dress. But it's not home. It doesn't feel like home, and sometimes is very depressing. Because now you are in a new country with a new language, is very difficult to meet friends, because you are from different culture. I try to keep Jamaican friends here so I can feel more at home. I have almost everything in my house, my comfort but I am not happy, something is missing. I still feel an empty space, so I know definitely family is missing and having also a good relationship is missing."* (Selma, personal communication, the Hague, March 25, 2021).

Now, Selma partly attaches a sense of home through her body. She finds comfort in her own body and her opportunity to build her life in a safe space. However, cultural differences and the lack of meaningful connections prevent her from fulfilling her homing in the Netherlands.

Likewise, Sam also finds difficulties in his homing due to the heteronormative patterns in his surroundings. Even if he considers that the Netherlands is a safe place for queer people, he has not been able to find close relationships to embrace his sexual orientation. For him, it is not only about a lack of meaningful connections. It is mainly a lack of queer interactions.

> *"I am struggling again with that feeling of home here, and that's more because of the outside environment (…) that doesn't really feel like home for me (…) I feel a little bit uncomfortable as gay. I haven't found the environment where you are able to express yourself (…) where I live there is no any kind of community or at least not openly that accepts you the way you are, and you are able to continue your life as being gay."* (Sam, personal communication, digital platform, April 4, 2021)

Faruku, also depicted this situation as a daily process of inclusions and exclusions. Depending on the time and circumstances, he might feel at home or not in the Netherlands. His homing is frequently in transformation. He particularly mentioned his status as a refugee as one of the main factors that constrain his sense of home.

> *"It changes on the situation. On a good day, you feel at home about on a bad day when something happens, not only to me but when something happens to a person of my character if something happens to a refugee. If they are denied status if someone is deported. If something happens, then you know, okay, anyway, I'm also not home (…) It's an on and off."*

The narratives presented reinforced the idea of queer homing as a renegotiation and a mechanism of inclusions and exclusions of heteronormative patterns (Koegler, 2020, p.4). This also challenges the perspective of repression to liberation through queer migration. In this sense, the homing journey of people like Selma, Faruku, and Sam portrayed another form of experiencing home that, according to Manalansan (2006) and Lubhéid (2008), underlines the restructuring of inequalities and oppressive systems for queer refugees during their attempts to settle in the countries of arrival. Thus, although some of them found freedom and safety in the Netherlands, it is practically impossible to talk about a fully embraced liberation. Many other factors interplay in the nexus between their queer identities and homing, such as refugee status, relationships, and lack of LGBTQI+ spaces. This circumstance will be explored in the following chapters from an intersectional perspective.

5.4. The role of SOGIESC and refugee status in queer refugees homing: Applying an intersectional approach

> *"You can have everything in the world, and in the blink of an eye, you have nothing. This all changed because of something I'm not responsible of (...) because nobody is responsible of their sexuality, of their skin of their gender, of their height. How can somebody blame me for something I have no control (...) I will shout and shout until my death. We have to be own our voice; I will continue to voice out."* (Faruku, personal communication, Utrecht, April 15, 2021).

In this segment, I will analyze the interviewee narratives from an intersectional standpoint. I found that the categories of sexual orientation, gender identity, and refugee/asylum seeker status are closely entangled with queer refugees' homing. While living in the Netherlands, the participants have attached their notion of home to the country, to the past, to their relationships, and symbolical and abstract concepts like security, freedom, and acceptance. In addition, their queer identities have been contrasting vectors of homing struggles and advantages. Moreover, some of them indicated that the refugee status combined with their SOGIESC plays another role that obstructs or obstructed their homing in the country. On this aspect, I noticed in their narratives polarized positions that I will portray in the following subchapters.

5.4.1 "Being a refugee is difficult": The interactions between SOGIESC, refugee status and educational background.

Ali, who arrived in the Netherlands with a master's degree and a high level of English, initially found difficulties adapting to the new environment but settled in a short time. He currently has a permanent job, a strong network, and speaks Dutch fluently. He explained

that his refugee status was a struggle at first. He avoided the term and anything related to that. For example, he never went to queer refugee organizations or attempted to network with people living in the same circumstance. Ali mentioned that he did not want people to pity him or see him as a weak person.

> *"In the first year, I was not accepting I was refugee person, with this title, so at first I didn't want anyone to know that I moved here as a refugee. I said I did move here to study. So it was painful for me to mention it because people will be like 'oh, I am sorry to hear, I am happy that you are staying in my country'. I don't want to hear this. So it was not just that I am scared to mention, but people, they will change their mind about you, they will feel sorry for you, and I don't want people to feel sorry for me, I am strong."* (Ali, personal communication, digital platform, May 05, 2021)

In contrast, Elias empowered his identity as a queer refugee since he arrived. For him settling down in the Netherlands was a scary and difficult experience since he did not count on the educational background and language like Ali. Moreover, because of his HIV status and his feminine gender expression, Elias carried the fear caused by the persecution suffered, even though he considered the Netherlands a safe space. However, Elias was not ashamed of voicing out about his status with friends or new romantic prospects. He embraced the refugee and sexual orientation categories by resisting oppression and accepting the risks that 'coming out' as a refugee entailed.

> *"It was a struggle, it was a tough time, but again I was like really prepared for it. I mean if anyone'd asked me I would say that I just came to apply for asylum. I do not find anything wrong with that. I mean, some people might be ashamed or shy to say that they are refugees, but it really never was a problem for me. It is still part of who I am. It is part of my journey."* (Elias, personal communication, digital platform, March 26, 2021)

As Huethorst argues, to put the label 'refugee' is not something generalizable for a specific "type" of person or situation. Being a refugee is always influenced by different socio-economic, historical, and psychological aspects. In this sense, for some individuals, the term itself might trigger emotions of angriness, anxiety, sadness, or shame (2017, p.13-14), while for others, it might develop feelings of proudness and a sense of belonging to some sort of community.

This approach is also exemplified with the story of Juliet. After being accused of being a sinner, a 'fallen woman' because of her sexual orientation, Juliet left her country. She did not have the opportunity to pursue any type of education, and therefore, never learned how to read and write. This has been a crucial factor that reduced her sense of belonging and affected her homing experiences. For instance, Juliet can never really feel at home in the Netherlands because there is always uncertainty about the future. Although the country provides a stable roof for her and a modest income, she mentioned that she is worried about lacking the necessary skills for a job and ultimately being independent.

"Being a refugee is difficult, is difficult because I think of something today, and other thing tomorrow, but they feed me, they give me a place to sleep, they are taking care of me (...) but I cannot feel good, I cannot feel that this is my home because I don't know whether I will make it, whether I will learn the language and find a job. I have heard of other refugees that have already got jobs, but not me. I still need to go to school, and I am not young anymore. I don't have enough time, and sometimes I feel I am standing alone, I feel that I don't know where to put my feet." (Juliet, personal communication, the Hague, April 12, 2021).

The Dutch authorities' approach to the case of Juliet seems to follow the idea of the helpless refugee that reinforces their image as passive members of society and dependent on governmental or non-governmental aid (Ghorashi, 2005) without considering the intersectional factors that contribute to Juliet specific circumstances. Thus, by not providing the necessary tools for self-sustain, the asylum system pushes Juliet into a spiral of self-doubt that results in a lack of homing aspirations.

Furthermore, for Selma, the combination of challenges due to being a refugee and a transgender woman in the Netherlands affect profoundly her homing. She started her gender transition in the Netherlands; however, she faces several obstacles to complete the identity paperwork necessary to be officially recognized as a woman. Selma explained that she was raised only by her mother, but she was registered with her father's last name when she was born. The issue now is that the Dutch authorities require a birth certificate with her father's full name to validate her past male identity, which she does not possess, and therefore she needs to communicate with the Jamaican authorities to get this document. This procedure will take more time than expected and makes Selma depressed and stressed. She cannot fully embrace her identity because quotidian elements such as changing her identity card take more time for her than for other transgender people. In addition, the institutional processes in her case are vectors of oppression that reconnect Selma to traumatic experiences left behind in Jamaica. Here, the intersection of refugee status and gender identity plays a role in which the Dutch institutional systems contribute to a feeling of devaluation and frustration.

"It stress me out because you are living in Netherlands as a transwoman, and I recently got my Dutch ID, and when I look at it, and I see a woman photo, and my male name, then it just upset me and piss me off, because I am thinking, ok you got to physical transition, and now you need your name to be changed to match your appearance and is so difficult (...) you have these people that try to tell you how to live your life, and what to do, and they have no experience of how is your life, because they are not transgender or they are not gay, so they don't really understand your struggles (...) Sometimes I wish that the healthcare system have people who work on LGBT or LGBT members who can relate and understand." (Selma, personal communication, the Hague, March 25, 2021).

The individual homing experiences depicted in this section as processes entirely interrelated to other conditional life-aspects such as SOGIESC and refugee status, connect with Ahmed's (2000) and Bryant's (2015) notion of "reading home through the skin," in which feeling at home is a personal experience conditional upon the validation and access to one's subjective authenticity. In other words, queer refugees' homing cannot be generalized since it is built and conditioned by subjective experiences involving multiple and intersectional factors. Moreover, the narratives described show the importance of reading them through the lens of representational intersectionality (Chadwick, 2017) since it is also evident that homing for queer refugees is frequently shaped and disjointed by socio-cultural discourses, performances, and institutional ways of oppression.

5.4.2. "Once you are from a different ethnic group, they do not really accept you": The effects of racial prejudice in homing

Continuing with the focus on the refugee status influence of the participants' homing in the Netherlands, I must highlight that the racial aspect of otherness was strongly present in the interviewees' narratives. Notably, for the African and Caribbean interviewees whose ethnic profile was more visible due to the color of their skin, racial prejudice was a constant factor that interplayed with SOGIESC during their homing.

Daniel described this circumstance as being boxed in a category that was not previously relevant in his life. In addition, the perception of people in his close surroundings, such as the workplace or his partner's family, made him more aware of the struggles that racial prejudice represents for him to feel at home.

> "In Jamaica. I was never a black man. I was Daniel, and now I come here, and I am Daniel, a black man. So, any type of stereotype of negative sentiments or even positive sentiments, they are associated with me being black. I just become a box which is black. So while I also had to accept my gay identity, when I came here, I had to deal with this other shift of identity (...) I tend to fall in a very specific category where I have so much potential things to be against me. I'm an immigrant, black, homosexual, highly educated; people cannot deal with these four together it's difficult for them to deal with this, it's a big hit (...), and because of this, the sense of home is not here completely, because I still have to deal with also the sentiments of my partner's family, they don't really accept me. Once you're from a different ethnic group, the family of your partner, they don't really accept you; they don't embrace you. They don't really love you. They often suspect from my skin color." (Daniel, personal communication, digital platform, March 30, 2021)

Moreover, Daniel compares the feelings of being identified as a gay man in contrast to being identified as a black man. He perceives the second as a category of oppression that disjoints his homing in the Netherlands, while sexual orientation functions as a vector of advantages to feel at home.

When we're dealing with black identity, I feel a sense of burden, and I feel a sense of being cornered and being boxed in. I guess because, with homosexuality, I come to see it as something that I don't own. I happen to be gay (…), and so when I identify as a homosexual, I am not carrying the burden of gays. I don't see the burden of that. I feel a sense of liberation." (Daniel, personal communication, digital platform, March 30, 2021)

In his narrative, there is a manifestation of the mutability of homing since these two identity categories had entirely opposite influences during his time in Jamaica. Here, I will complement the arguments of Gorman Murray (2007) that conceive home as a site of identity construction. He states that home and identity constantly remade and reflect each other, materializing different expressions of individuality and transforming the notions of self within the home (Young, 2005 as cited in Gorman Murray, 2007, p.233). Following this line of thought, I see Daniel's description as a manifestation of identity as a site of homing construction. Indeed, both (identity and home) are perpetually constructing each other in his story. In other words, his process of homing in the Netherlands has shift his conception of self and the significance of certain elements of his identity (sexual orientation and race), but most importantly these elements are the key definers of what is home or not for Daniel.

Faruku is also aware of the racial discourses within Dutch society. For him, they represent more challenges to overcome and resist. He then applies a similar approach to what happened with his sexual orientation in Uganda, but with the difference that racial discourses do not directly affect his homing in the Netherlands. Here, he can voice out and confront those discourses without fearing persecution.

"Here, people can be racist, but their racism is internalized, and it's inside them. It's not something that they will openly show (…) if you dwell on every question you get as a refugee and want to look at it on the negative side, somebody can ask: Oh, "did you come by water?" or "okay if you're a refugee, how do you take a flight." They are trying to have a friendly talk, but you can see the racism on those simple things that people think they are okay and some sometimes for us they are uncomfortable." (Faruku, personal communication, Utrecht, April 15, 2021)

In this line, Dutch society is perceived as tolerant towards cultural diversity. However, the 'national imaged identity' has become at stake in the last decades because of global migration and forced displacement. As Ghorashi (2005) argues, the Dutch public has shown some dissatisfaction with the ongoing increase of asylum seekers and refugees in the country in several social and political discourses. This has made them feel like 'unwelcome guests' when arriving in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2005 in Huethorst, 2017, p.14)

Similarly, Simon has also experienced racial prejudice during his interactions with Dutch people. He has found a home in the Netherlands because of the peace he has encountered to express his sexual orientation. However, his homing is impacted by racism

with quotidian acts of discrimination. Like Faruku, he resists racial prejudices by voicing out his unconformity. Simon can still feel at home, including the Dutch acceptance of SOGIESC in his homing, but excluding the racial prejudices experienced.

He described an event that happened in a supermarket to exemplify his argument:

"There is segregation, it's not aggressive, they don't attack or stuff like that, but they will see you bad, they will think you want to take stuff. One day I met one lady that was trying to use the stairs while carrying a lot of bags, she fell down, and I was like, "can I help you?" I was trying to help her to stand up, but she immediately stood up by herself, and say nervously: no no, I am fine, and she looked disgusted and scared by me at the same time. Things like this happen all the time, but I understand. They have their own feelings. They don't know that we are refugees that we have stories (...) but I forgive them because they have very little knowledge about it." (Simon, personal communication, Amsterdam, April 20, 2021).

Daniel, Simon, and Faruku's narratives expose the process of exclusion connected to ethnic physical appearance, shaping the view of migrants and refugees as 'others.' In this sense, the construction of 'the other' image occurs in a contradictory perception of refugees as helpless victims and/or potential dangers for the Dutch social structures (Ghorashi, 2005, pp. 192-193). This perception significantly impacts the queer refugees homing and, in some cases, can be equalized to the impact suffered due to SOGIESC discrimination in their previous countries of residence. Here, I claim that the discourse of welcoming and tolerant country for LGBQTI+ individuals (Swetzer, 2016; Van der Pijl et al., 2018; Hertogs & Schinkel, 2018) promoted by the Dutch government should be revaluated, and one should question if it really includes all types of queer people in the Dutch society, taking into account an intersectional approach that does not erase race and ethnicity from the equation.

Lastly, Sesey, who continues under the asylum application procedure and has not been guaranteed a refugee status, pointed out his concerns regarding racial prejudice in the country. He is still living in one of the facilities established by the Dutch government for asylum seekers and refugees, and while he awaits a final decision for his asylum claim, he is trying to learn as much as possible about the Dutch society, language, and traditions. Sesey is confident of finally having the possibility to live his life as a gay man in the Netherlands. However, he is worried about being seen as a refugee.

"The country accepts you, but do the Nationals accept you? That's another question you should put in your head? The government here accepts and is very likely good with gay people, but the other nationals will really accept you as a refugee?" (Sesey, personal communication, the Hague, April 13, 2021).

Sesey's questions reflect a reality lived by many refugees as soon as they attempt to settle in the country.

As I have elaborated with the previous narratives, the nexus between SOGIESC and refugee status is key for queer refugees homing. Thus, to attach a sense of home, prejudices

and systemic oppression are resisted, confronted, evaded, or justified by queer refugees through their daily practices.

5.5. Homing reinforcements and transformations: "We discovered our power"

Through this chapter, I have explored how LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers have defied cis-heteronormativity, discrimination, and exclusion during their homing journeys in their former countries and the Netherlands. However, alongside these acts of resistance and resilience, multiple identity reinforcements and transformations have occurred in regards to their SOGIESC. This relates to Pilkey, Scicluna, and Gorman-Murray arguments that home can function as a space to sustain non-heteronormative identities, relationships, expressions, and behaviors (2015, p.131).

For instance, during the interview, Elias showed me his pink nails to symbolize that he is more confident and comfortable with his gender expression. He explained that in Jordan, he could only express himself inside his bedroom. In public spaces, he always tried to be as masculine as possible. Pink nails would have never been acceptable in his family house in Jordan. However, this changed via a gradual process. In the Netherlands, Elias has had the time to discover and express his queerness in every space.

> *"It feels like being a cat when they discover a new place…you just need to discover how to feel safe, and step by step, I started feeling more comfortable of showing this queer side that I always wanted to express. So it wasn't immediately like ok, I'm here, I am safe (…) it's like a process where you discover here is different, this is acceptable, and it is safe."* (Elias, personal communication, digital platform, March 26, 2021)

Elias's depiction of "showing the queer side" relates to the domesticity dimension proposed by Boccagni (2017), in which people provide distinctive meanings to public and private environments. For Elias's and many other queer refugees, gender expression was displayed only in internal spaces such as their dwellings before arriving in the Netherlands; these private places were a synonym of safety. However, the meanings of public and private spaces have changed during their homing journeys. The public spaces are not a threat anymore for the interviewee's gender expression. As Gorman-Murray argues, bodies, objects, activities, and discourses can flow and expand between private and public spaces to make them more amenable for LGBTQI+ individuals (2012, p.116).

Anita has also given a step forward in regards to her gender expression in the Netherlands. While interviewing with me, she made emphasis on her blue hair color. For her, appearance has been a critical home-like element that helps her to feel comfortable. She often used clothes that were considered "masculine" in Guinea-Conakry and represented a source of harassment. However, in the Netherlands, she reinforced her gender expression and started to use other accessories in her body, such as piercings, to fully express who she is.

"I dress as a guy because I don't like to be too female. I started before, in my country, but it was very difficult because when I dressed like this and go outside, people will start with "is He or She" and some people they don't stop there, because they want to know more, they can come and touch your sex, to be sure if I am a guy or a girl. But now, in the Netherlands, that is fine, and I also started to use piercings and changed my hair color because now I realized that my body is my body, and no one can tell what to wear or how to look." (Anita, personal communication, digital platform, April 17, 2021)

Other participants also pointed out this particular change in terms of the reinforcement of their gender expression:

"I am not scared anymore to wear whatever I want actually, even if I am having beard or not beard or women or men clothes I don't care." (Ali, personal communication, digital platform, May 05, 2021)

"Sometimes I just want to be masculine in my dressing, and sometimes I really want to be a diva. I just want to dress sexy as a sexy lady. You know, it depends on how I feel on the inside, you understand? As an LGBT person that has changed a lot. In the Netherlands I can do both without judgement." (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

"I can wear a T-shirt of a Rainbow. Here I can do that. I gather with my friends and we go to the gay parade. In Congo there is no way to do all of that. To express yourself for who you are. If here [The NL] you wear a T-shirt of rainbow, they know who you are and its ok." (Jack, personal communication, Haarlem, March 24, 2021)

Aligned to queer theory, these narratives show that gender expression is not fixed and varies according to time and space. They also link to Felsenthal's (2009) observations that LGBTQI+ people often use symbolic markers at home to proclaim and reconcile their gendered and sexed identities. In addition, it also reflects Fobear's (2016) ideas of the body as a canvas to experience resettlement and attach a sense of home. Here home would include private and public spaces, challenging the gender norms that previously ruled queer refugee's lives.

Furthermore, some participants also transformed how they established their relationships with their surroundings and other people in the Netherlands to fit their identities. As Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011) indicate, homing and identity are at a mutual 'work in progress' that opens possibilities to remake social relationships and reconfigure spaces to be more home-likely for LGBTQI+ individuals (2011, p. 1386).

Simon describes this change with the possibility of having open interactions with other LGBTQI+ people. Something that would have been punishable in Uganda if his community discovered it. He empowered this privileged by associating with an LGBT group in Amsterdam in which he can share experiences, where he feels belonging.

"Back in Uganda, you cannot have a conversation with a LGBT person that is visible (...) that will scare me, if they find us together, they will punish us (...) now I am free to do it, and all those fears have gone away. I actually have an LGBT group in Amsterdam, and we have members, we have meetings, we help others (...) we discover our power as LGBT people." (Simon, personal communication, Amsterdam, April 20, 2021).

Juliet also felt this change in her relationships when she decided to participate in a queer refugee organization at the Hague. She describes it as finding a new family where she can finally be herself, a family that constantly reminds her of her identity. She indeed collaborates by cooking for other queer refugees, being the first time that she has LGBTQ+ friends. This fact makes her happy and creates a feeling of home:

"The LGBT meetings make me feel more at home because each time I am in that gatherings, I feel like I'm with my family, so I look forward to those activities. This reminds me of who I am. What we do in our organization, every month we sometimes play a video, and I feel good that they will laugh because the fun will make everything. I have lots of those videos. So that makes me feel good. Sometimes I watch, and that makes me feel at home when I see all my friends, we all just laugh."[19] (Juliet, personal communication, the Hague, April 12, 2021)

I see these narratives as attempts to queering the home by building real spaces of shelter, identification, and comfort for queer identities (Bryant, 2015). In this sense, the LGBT organizations presented as a synonym of home in some of the participant's narratives serve as public spaces where the queer bodies feel at home, and SOGIESC can be performed without obstacles (Baydar 2012, p. 703).

5.6 "If you are not gay, you want to be gay here": Queer refugee's ideal of home

In this final subchapter, I explore "the homing desires" of queer refugees by considering the unfixed temporality of home, which is reflected as a set of homing attachments that can be oriented towards the past, present, and future (Boccagni, 2017). Fortier defines the concept of "homing desires" as the longing to belong, which is produced through the movement of desire (2003, p.129). Therefore, this connotation of home emphasizes the temporality of the future. I argue that LGBQTI+ refugees are in constant attempts of queering their home practices and attachments; meanwhile, having an aspiration of the queer home does not entail disconnection from the past and present. In this sense, home functions as a space of longing —longing for what was, what is, what could have been or what will be (Wallace, 2018, p.60). All temporalities interconnect in their homing in one way or another, by memories, dreams,

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[19] In this narrative Juliet describes one of the online dynamics implemented in the meetings of her queer refugee organization due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

hopes, and present relationships.

For instance, Farai considers that her life in the Netherlands has fulfilled her ideal home. She believes that this country has everything she needs as a lesbian woman, and all her attachments and home-like practices are concentrated in the present moment and space.

> *"Netherlands is already my ideal home now. So everything that I do should be related to Netherlands. I don't think I will ever have any ideal home more than Netherlands; in terms of being an LGBT person (...), I think, Netherlands is an ideal home for every LGBT person. We have gay pride, and we are celebrated. If you see the event, if you're not gay, you want to be gay here."* (Farai, personal communication, Almere, April 07, 2021)

For Farai, her homing desires have been achieved through the movement to a new home. This relates to Ahmed's arguments (2000) that see this process as a way to reinforce the idea of home as familiarity, comfort, and belonging. Farai experiences home in the present while she displays the full potential of her queer identity. Her narrative shows that indeed for some queer refugees, the Netherlands fits with the image of a welcoming home for sexual and gender diverse individuals.

However, for other queer refugees interviewed, the description of their ideal home also implicated a journey to their past relationships and memories. In the case of Ali, Jack, and Anita, their notion of the ideal home involved keeping familiar relationships around them. They have reflected on the importance of their families in their homing while being by themselves in the Netherlands. Home is not home without specific connections in their former countries of residence. In this respect, they also attach their homing towards the past. In addition, they found acceptance in the Netherlands as LGBTQI+ individuals, but they still struggle with a lack of acceptance as refugees with the Dutch public. These two aspects show a longing for a future home in which they are accepted as refugees and have their family members close to them. Something that is not fulfilled at the present moment.

> *"A perfect home would mean to have my mom around me, my family, that's one of the most important things, and being accepted for whatever you are, to be accepted not just as being gay or straight, being accepted also as a refugee, at work, on the street, at the supermarket, people treating you just as they will treat anyone else."* (Ali, personal communication, digital platform, May 05, 2021)

In this line, Fortier claims that homing desires for queer refugees are not only about fixing the heteronormative home into a distant past and seeking their homing elsewhere. The ideal home can also signify a returning act to the past notions of home and remember them differently (2003, p.130)

Finally, other interviewees explained their ideal home by attaching particular imagined spaces and interactions with their gendered and sexual identities. They described multiple possibilities of queering the home by transforming their social relations and converting their domestic and public spaces into homing elements that could fit their needs

as LGBQTI+ individuals.

For instance, Daniel exemplified an ideal home with a queered domestic space where gender and sexual orientation are no longer important. They would not even be considered categories of identity. A space of openness and fluidity that, in his eyes it could be considered a utopia in the current times.

> *"I've always dreamt of living on a farm, living with people that love each other, and it wouldn't be only gays. I liked it to be gay, straight, female, male, all kinds of people, you know just a group of friends. We will work the lands, and produce fresh food from the garden (...), an ideal place for home, where everything is real, authentic, even the food that you eat is real nothing preserved, nothing artificial. A place where we are mixed, true and open (...) for me that's the utopia of home."* (Daniel, personal communication, digital platform, March 30, 2021)

The ideal home of Selma and Sam is closely intertwined with their SOGIESC and fully oriented towards the future. Although they feel free to be themselves in the Netherlands, their sense of home is not complete. They wish for social networks and personal connections that embrace their queer identities. In addition, they need a change in their surroundings, and that the cis-heteronormative patterns and the challenges experienced because of their SOGIESC finally cease to exist.

> *"I am definitely still looking for my ideal home now (...) this external environment it does not feel like home for me. When I walk in the street, and I wear pink pants, even now I receive some crazy looks at me or people looking very different at me (...) that feeling of being able to feel completely free, completely myself, I am still looking for this feeling to fulfill"* (Sam, personal communication, digital platform, April 4, 2021).

> *"I would describe my perfect home by having a husband or boyfriend who accept me for who I am and doesn't look at my past or even think that I was born as a male, that they just accept me for the person that they first see. (...) also, living in a neighborhood where people see you for who you are and not investigate you about your past or anything, and not having questions like "why is your voice so rough? (...) so, if stuff like that can be cut out and the challenges of changing your name as a trans woman weren't that difficult then I would feel at home"* (Selma, personal communication, the Hague, March 25, 2021).

Lastly, Sesey defined his ideal home with hopes for the future, for what is about to come for him. Being in the uncertain position of not knowing if his asylum application will be accepted, Sesey dreams of the opportunity to find love in the Netherlands finally. His ideal home is also oriented to the future, where having a big gay wedding would not be impossible.

> *"My hope is that these people allow to make weddings. I want a heavy wedding, extravagant, Very nice. In Uganda people normally have their weddings of about 20 people on their home,*

put a ring (...) but no, I want a big one. I believe I would be happy. My perfect home would be having a partner with whom I am really happy." (Sesey, personal communication, the Hague, April 13, 2021)

The informant's narratives of the ideal home demonstrate that home is always divided into different temporalities, depending on the person and their particular life circumstances. Moreover, LGBQTI+ refugees and asylum seekers are constantly queering their homes by pursuing dreams and aspirations, embracing imagined places and scenarios, opening the possibility of multiple sexual and gendered expressions, and positioning against social conventions created around their SOGIESC (Vidal & Perteghella, 2018, p. 601).

I will conclude this subchapter with Faruku's quote, which I believe represents the essence of the homing desires of queer refugees and, eventually, all people:

"We just had dreams like everyone else. We have dreams as a typical Dutch person. The only difference between me and the Dutch person is that something terrible happened to me, and I couldn't be in my country to finish my dreams. Wherever I achieve my dreams, I would feel at home." (Faruku, personal communication, Utrecht, April 15, 2021)

6. Concluding remarks

With this master dissertation, I attempted to expose the multiple and multifaceted ways in which queer refugees understand the term *home*. The people who participated in the interviews already have a voice, and their voices are loud and clear. They show me their strength, vulnerability, triumphs, frustrations, and hopes. They also disclosed new ways of feeling at home that I never thought about, and by doing that, they not only answered my research question but also surpassed it.

I aimed to reflect on the homing of queer refugees living in the Netherlands through an intersectional and queer approach exploring the intricacies of attaching a sense of home while being queer and being a refugee. In order to achieve that, I framed a central question: *How do sexual orientation and gender identity interact with the homing of LGBTQI+ refugees in The Netherlands?*

In this chapter, I will elaborate my final remarks and answer this question using key phrases from the interviewee's narratives. Thus, these are not only my conclusions; they represent a summary of what the queer refugees have lived, felt, and thought throughout their homing journeys.

6.1 "I was used to hide"

The people that participated in this project came from diverse cultural backgrounds that included Africa, Middle East, and the Caribbean. They suffered SOGIESC persecution inflicted by their communities, relatives, and partners. For the majority, this circumstance

made them cover their queer identities to avoid discrimination, exclusion, and even physical and psychological violence. The concealment of their SOGIESC impacted their homing to the degree that they needed to flee their countries. For some, it was an abrupt and forced situation; for others, it was a preventive "decision" to not risk their lives anymore.

The narratives depicted in this research demonstrated that the oppression exercised within the "cis-heteronormative home" was one of the main reasons for the queer refugees lacking home attachments in their former countries. A significant group of interviews identified a sense of liberation by the act of fleeing, a trend that several scholars (Eng 1997, Sinfield 2000 as Fortier, 2003, Murray; 2015) describe as queer migration to liberation. However, the stories reflected through this text also showed that this was not the case for all the participants. For some, the act of crossing borders and settling in another country implicated a reconfiguration of distinct systems of oppression and inequalities that continued permeating their homing (Manalansan, 2003, in Luibhéid, 2008). These systems of oppression correlated with various aspects such as race, refugee status, or even continued linking with their SOGIESC differently than before. Thus, this group experience an unceasing battle against prejudices and discrimination, even when living in the Netherlands.

6.2 "You become like a fly on the wall, the spot on the white sheet"

Many of the refugees interviewed have found a home in the Netherlands. They expressed that the country has provided the freedom to display their SOGIESC without impediments. Notwithstanding, the intersection between queer and refugee identities played a pivotal role in the homing of the participants. Remarkably, the African and Caribbean refugees expressed their difficulties to feel at home in the Netherlands because of their visible ethnic phenotype. Being queer was not a significant issue anymore as being black. Many of them described how the internalized racism in the Dutch public had impacted their everyday life, feeling a similar pressure as the one suffered in their previous countries because of their queer identities. Thus, the intersection between their identities, socio-cultural norms, and the public discourses towards refugees have contributed to their marginalization (Crenshaw, 1987, Chadwick, 2017) and inhibited their sense of belonging and comfort in the country.

For other interviewees, the struggle to attach a sense of home in the Netherlands was linked to their gender identity and expression. There are institutional and social barriers established in the Dutch society that have made the homing for transgender refugees a difficult path in which they have to overcome bureaucratic procedures and the exclusion provoked by the visibility of their gender nonconformity (Alessi et al., 2017)

Moreover, several people who struggled to build a sense of home due to intersectional factors have opposed the suppression of their identities by acts of resistance and resilience. In this regard, some decided to voice out and embrace their refugee, black and queer identities with proudness. Others opted to exclude the events of discrimination from their homing (Koegler, 2020). Despite the challenges described, these approaches allowed them still to

develop a sense of home in the Netherlands.

6.3 "I am creating my home as I go along"

One of the main questions in this thesis was related to the credibility of queer identities during the asylum procedures and the possible effects it could have on the refugees homing when settling down in the Netherlands. The queer refugees' stories corroborated that, indeed, their SOGIESC credibility played a vital role in the success of their asylum claims. Many of them expressed that in their first asylum application, the Dutch asylum authorities exhibited a set of prejudices and stereotypes of queer identities, especially concerning appearance and lifestyle, which eventually resulted in the rejection of their asylum application. In this sense, it was found that the Dutch asylum system perpetuates the narrative of fleeing the heteronormative home for queer liberation, and the asylum applicants that do not fit with these narratives have more possibilities of rejection. This circumstance had a long-term effect on some queer refugees homing, whose aspirations and expectations of finding acceptance and belonging in the Netherlands were fragmented in their first asylum attempt.

Furthermore, the interviewees showed in their narratives that queer identities and the concept of home are unfixed and fluid categories that mutually construct each other. (Gorman-Murray, 2007). In addition, by describing their notions of home, they allowed me to explore the role of sexual orientation and gender identity in the four dimensions of homing: domesticity, spatiality, materiality, and temporality (Boccagni, 2017). For some, home was attached to familiar relationships and memories that conjured up images of their previous countries of residence. For others, home was described as more immaterial, connecting to abstract concepts such as acceptance and freedom. Regarding the immaterial aspect of home, certain participants moved away from the idea of home as a fixed geographical point and built their homing through their bodies and their present surroundings.

In contrast, a group of participants understood home as a geographical location, a place where they feel belonging. Hence, some began attaching their sense of home to the Netherlands since it provided a safe space to display their identities. Others divided their home attachments into two localities: the Netherlands and their previous inhabited countries. This last group of interviewees also emplaced their notion of home in the 'childhood home,' reprocessing and redefining it as an essential part of their homing (Fortier, 2003).

Finally, the SOGIESC of the participants were powerfully intertwined with their homing. During their interviews, some queer refugees depicted several attempts to queering the home by self-affirming their SOGIESC (Bryant, 2005). They are constantly transforming the home-like elements within their internal and external environments to fit their queer identities. In this respect, several LGBTQI+ refugees found in gender expression and queer interactions the anchors to subvert cis-heternormative patterns in their homing. They achieved this by being part of LGBTQI+ networks, developing queer interactions, and showing their queerness with clothes and accessories in public and private spaces.

6.4 "They want to see how happy LGBT people are"

The title of this segment is a phrase said by Simon when describing the people that assist the Gay Pride every year in the Netherlands. It shows a connection between the feeling of happiness and his current life.

Like him, several queer people have found in the Netherlands a place to be called home. In this respect, the Netherlands still stands as a welcoming place for LGBTQI+ individuals, despite the flaws in its asylum system and the social prejudice mentioned in many narratives. However, I must emphasize that these issues should not be overlooked and need to be further researched regarding their relationship with homing.

Besides, Simon's story does not represent all the homing experiences of queer refugees in this country. As remarked several times through this thesis, home and queer identities are fluid and mutable. Many queer refugees orient their homing towards the past, and others are still looking for their ideal home. What is more, some conceive their homing in all temporalities (Boccagni, 2017) or in imagined scenarios and utopias.

There is no right or wrong when it comes to defining the term home. All the stories and experiences explored in this thesis are unique and subjective. However, my intention was to understand the role of sexual orientation and gender identity in queer refugees homing. The narratives portrayed indeed evoked multiple interactions between SOGIESC and home, and they went even beyond, adding other factors that also contributed in those exchanges (e.g., race, refugee status, or HIV status). In this sense, I found that there are tangible influences of SOGIESC in the homing of queer refugees in the Netherlands. However, these influences are experienced and lived subjectively and cannot be entirely represented in an academic text. There will always be more to explore and discover in the homing of each LGBQT+ refugee and asylum seeker. What can be highlighted from this research is that queer refugees' identities can be sites of home construction. They certainly showed complex and little explored ways of homing, produced by their shared background as both queer and refugees.

Further research could engage in the many layers and nuances of the everyday homing of queer refugees in the Netherlands from other angles. Nevertheless, in this thesis, I focused on portraying the singularities of my informants' journeys while offering my interpretations of their experiences, making them part of my journey, of my story. I have learned from their courage, empowerment, compassion, and capacity to believe that there is always a home for queer people.

As Juliet said: *"Home is sweet when is queer."*

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Annex 1:

> ### Call for participants for participatory thesis research project 'Queer Homes'
>
> My name is Guillermo Ricalde, and I am a student of the African-European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR). For my Final Thesis Research Project, I am planning to interview LGBTQI+ refugees living in the Netherlands. The thesis project is called "Queer Homes," and it is developed under the supervision of the University of Stavanger, Norway (UiS).
>
> Home is a familiar word to which people usually attach meanings and emotional connotations. Home is also an invitation to recreate our past, live our present, and imagine our future. Moreover, home depends on our context and can be very different from person to person.

For this project, I am looking for LGBTQI+ refugees who would like to re-think the term home with me and engage in questions like What is home? What makes you feel at home? How does our sexual orientation/gender identity influence our feelings of home?

The interviews will be held in March (either online or in-person). If you would like to participate and you have more questions, please send an email to my personal email address: XXXXXX

I will send you an information letter with more details about the aims of the thesis project and how the information you provide in the interview will be used.

I am looking forward to meeting you!

Annex 2:

Information letter and consent form

Are you interested in taking part in the project 'Queer Homes'?

This is an invitation to participate in a master project with the purpose of gaining knowledge about **LGBTQI+ refugees' 'feelings of home' in the Netherlands**. Below you will find information about the aims of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose
This research is part of a master thesis project aiming to understand better LGBTQI+ refugees' experiences of home in the Netherlands. The project will focus on the refugee's experiences of home since they arrived in the Netherlands, their previous expectations, and how being part of the LGBTQI+ community might influence their perception of feeling at home."

Who is responsible for the research project?
The student, Jose Guillermo Ricalde Perez, via the University of Stavanger, Norway, is responsible for the project.

Why are you invited to participate?
If you are invited to participate in this project, you are considered to have a refugee background

and live in the Netherlands. I also contacted other people who are in the same situation as you.

What does it mean for you to participate?
Participating means that I will interview you (either in person or online) to learn about your home experiences in the Netherlands, both as a refugee and as part of the LGBTQI+ community. For example, I will ask you what the term "home" means for you, what makes you feel at home, how this relates to your sexual orientation and gender identity, and what differences you find between your home experiences before and after arriving in the Netherlands. The interview will last for about an hour, and I will ask for your permission to record our conversation on tape.

It is voluntary to participate
It is voluntary to participate in the project. Even if you choose to participate, you can always withdraw your consent at any time without providing any reason. All information that you provide me during the interview will then be anonymized. It will have no consequences if you choose not to participate or later withdraw from the project.

Your privacy – how your information will be stored and used
I will only use your information for the purposes described in this letter. I will process the data confidentially and following the Data Protection Regulations. I will be the only person who will have access to the information you have provided in the interview.

The data will be stored on a secure encrypted memory stick and locked up. When I publish or present the project results, it will be done anonymously, which means that your identity will not be revealed in any way.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The project will end in September 2021. At the project's end, the audio recordings and name lists will be permanently deleted. Transcribed interviews will be anonymized (which means that all directly or indirectly identifiable information about you will be entirely deleted) and stored on a private encrypted pen-drive, and only I will have access to this.

Your rights
As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right:
-       to know which information is registered about you,
-       to have your personal data checked and corrected by you,
-       to have your personal information deleted,
-       to obtain a copy of your personal data, and
-        to lodge a complaint with the Data Protection Officer or the Data Protection Authority about the processing of your personal data.

What gives me the right to process personal data about you?

I will process the information you share with me based on your written consent (please, see below). The NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the data protection regulations.

Where can I find out more?

If you have any questions about the study or would like to use your rights, please contact:

- The student responsible for the project: Guillermo Ricalde by email XXXXX or phone at XXXXX

- The University of Stavanger via the supervisor of the project: XXXXX by email XXXXX or phone at XXXXX

- NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by e-mail (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or phone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely

Project responsible
Jose Guillermo Ricalde Perez
MA candidate in the European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations (EMMIR)
University of Stavanger, Norway.

<center>**Declaration of consent**</center>

I have received and understood information about the project mentioned above and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to:

◯ Participate in an individual interview, and that my information is processed until the project is completed in September 2021.

_____

___/___/_____   (Participant's full name)

(place and date)

Annex 3:

Interview Guide

BRIEF INTRODUCTION.

Let them know that if they become emotional or if there is a question they do not want to answer, they can stop at any time. Explain how you will use the information before conducting the interview. Ask for permission to record the interview.

GETTING TO KNOW THE INTERVIEWEE

➢ **What do you remember about the country in which you grew up?**

- Did you have siblings? How was your relationship with them?
- Tell me more about your parents? How was your relationship with them?
- Did you have many friends in that area? Who was your best friend? What do you think made you best friends
- How was your school? Your teachers? Other classmates?
- Did you have any romantic relationships there? If so, could you tell me more about it?
- Until what age did you live in that place?

➢ **What is your sexual orientation/gender identity? / Do you identify with the LGBTI community?**

HOME

➢ **What does the word home mean to you at a personal level?**

- What makes you feel at home?
- What does not make you feel at home?

(Places, objects, people, body, animals, sensations, smells, memories, emotions)

➢ **Which practices help you to feel at home?**

(Activities, attitudes, routines, traditions)

HOMING BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

> **Do you feel at home living in the Netherlands?**

- - Could you explain or maybe give me an example of when you feel at home and when you do not?

> **Did you feel at home in your previous country?**

- - Could you explain or maybe give me an example of when you feel at home and when you do not?

- - In relation to that, have there been any changes after living in the Netherlands as a refugee?

  For example: How are your friendships and familiar relationships now? (Household practices, emotions, clothes, expressions)

QUEER-HOME-MIGRATION NEXUS

> Have you found difficulties feeling at home in the Netherlands because of being LGBTQI+? If so, can you give me examples?

  -How was life as an LGBTQI+ person in your previous country? (If they have already told me about it, ask: Have you found difficulties feeling at home in your previous country because of being LGBTQI+? If so, can you give me examples?

  - Do you find any changes living as an LGBTQI+ person after arriving in the Netherlands? (Household practices, emotions, relationships, clothes, expressions)

> Have you found difficulties feeling at home in the Netherlands because of being a refugee? If so, can you give me examples?

- - Do you think it is extra hard for you to feel at home in the NL if you compare your experience to other refugees or LGBTQI+ people you know? If so, could you explain or maybe use an example?
- -

IDEAL HOME

➢ **How would you describe a perfect home?**

    -    Have you found this perfect home, or are you still looking for it?

Annex 4

Declaration of authenticity

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted is my own and that all passages and ideas that are not mine have been fully and properly acknowledged. I am aware that I will fail the entire dissertation should I include passages and ideas from other sources and present them as if they were my own.

Name: _Jose Guillermo Ricalde Perez_

Date and Place: _28/08/2021, Berlin, Germany_

Signature: _____