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IN PLACE:

Visualising Migratory and Diasporic Home-making in Contemporary London



Figure 0.1 'My Home is a Forest (1)', Photoshop, September 2022

Claire Jing Wang

October 2024

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Westminster

Abstract

My project investigates how the visual depiction of domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes can represent the home-making experience of migrants and diaspora members in London and the contemporary urban environments in general. When looking at existing representations of migration and diaspora, it is noticeable that many link these topics with homelessness and rootlessness, while also presenting migrants and diaspora members as aliens and intruders of the receiving society, what sociologist Liisa Malkki (1995) terms as the sedentarist bias. Through the analyses of selected artworks by two visual artists based in London and of migratory and diasporic backgrounds based in London, installation artist Do-Ho Suh by artist filmmaker Alia Syed, I investigate how they challenge the sedentarist models and materialising migratory and diasporic home-making practices and, in doing so, provide more nuanced readings about migration and diaspora which reflect the current conditions of heightened globalisation and mass human flow.

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Please do not change.

Claire

September 2024, London

Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work. Every effort has been made to acknowledge correct copyright of images where applicable. No content from this thesis may be cited, copied or reproduced without the prior written consent of the author.

Definitions

Home-making activities: all situated and interactive endeavours for an individual does to establish their existence within the material space that surrounds and contains them and build up a set of meaningful relations with the materiality of the physical space.

Migratory/diasporic home-making: all endeavours that a migrant or a diaspora member does to reproduce the home experience in their receiving society.

Migratory/diasporic domestic space: the physical space that can provide migrants and diaspora members with a domestic sphere and a sense of homeliness during their migratory and diasporic experiences, usually also where they live daily. Not necessarily a house or an apartment.

Intimate cityscape: the parts of cityscape that are integral to the everyday home-making routines of a migrant or a diaspora member within a city's physical urban space.

Materiality: as Giuliana Bruno defines, the 'substance of material relations' (2014: 2) within a physical space.

We have been kings since the day we came in
A ship filled with hopes and plans for a new beginning
Well it did not turn out as a golden fortune
But a song of an emigrant that sang out of tune...
Come on!

The language of aliens with a long blond silk
Will not be respected because of mother's milk
So look back and find a virginal soul mate
The song of an emigrant will not change, it's too late!

I thank you welfare for always taking care
And how you made me a happy wannabe
It's not forgotten, your arms wide open
Those easy money - it's been a good time for me...

A man is supposed to support his woman
A father's job is to feed his children
So how can it be that the paycheck is wealthy
The song of an emigrant, it's done; the system is healthy!

I thank you welfare for always taking care
And how you made me a happy wannabe
It's not forgotten, your arms wide open
Those easy money - it's been a good time for me!

Czesław Mozil and Tesco Value – *Song of an Emigrant*

Prologue: 'A Song of an Emigrant that Sang out of Tune'

As an introduction to my research, I would first like to explain why the dynamics between migrants, diaspora members and their experiences with the notion of home, have become my primary research interest. For this reason, I would introduce some of my personal experience, which is also shared by many people who have moved to London from other parts of the world for more than a few years, at a historical moment which can be considered as the starting point of all my research interest in the last six to seven years: with only a little imagination, it is easy to guess that I am talking about the Brexit Referendum.

Like the song titled 'Song of an Emigrant' on the previous page¹, I would say that Brexit is the point where I started research because it is from here that the collective song of migrants and diaspora members in London and the UK started to drift severely out of tune. For many, it is one of the most crucial events in the recent history of migration and diaspora in the UK, or even the first sign of change of the whole socio-political climate of the British Isles into a more conservative and hostile direction in recent years. For us who were often not born with white skin, English-sounding names, the right to an abode and British nationality, it is also a significant turning point in their, and their families', private lives. This is not only an event that left a significant impact on immigrant groups from within the EU, but also proved to be the start of a more blatant racist and xenophobic era in British society.

It was late June of 2016, and I was spending my summer in Kraków with my partner, a young Polish professional who has lived and worked in London for more than a decade. I remembered how our social media newsfeeds were constantly bombarded by news about the campaigns from both the Remain and Leave camps. I also remembered that every time my partner read something online, he would start to talk about how concerned he was about the upcoming Brexit referendum almost every day. But from what I knew about British society at that time, I was not even sure why it should concern him so much, or if the British people really would vote to leave the European Union.

¹ I got the chance to interview Czesław Mozil, the Polish-Danish singer and musician who created and performed this song, in 2018. He told me poetically that migration is often about emotions more than anything else, which is among the things that inspired this project.

As someone who has mostly lived in a multi-ethnic environment during her time in the UK over the last decade or so, I knew what an important role people from European countries had played in British socio-economic development, and how close-knit the European community had become with members of British society. Like many other optimists at that time, I was confident that although the whole thing has been a major kerfuffle to everyone especially foreigners like us, British people would want to continue to remain in the international community they that had been thriving in. After asking him many times why he felt that way (the answers were often something like 'I have too much to lose now' or 'I have built a whole life in London and I might lose it'), I still could not figure what could make him so anxious as to fear for the worst...

After all, judging by everything from the way he makes a living and contributes to British society to his high level of integration, my partner can be regarded as a perfect example of a 'good immigrant' (Shukla, 2016), which is supposedly the type of non-British person who deserves to be treated in a friendly way or adequately respected by British society. He speaks immaculate English with no Eastern European accent at all. He has an honours degree from a reputable British university. He works in a decently paid white-collar job as a filmmaker for a prestigious music and visual art platform. He has never lived off the British welfare system since he moved here as a teenager: he does not claim benefits, he pays his taxes on time, and he has earned everything he has through honest hard work, through late nights and early mornings. He is well-mannered, non-threatening, friendly to anyone, and obeys all kinds of laws and cultural and moral codes in British society without complaint. So why would anything or anyone intentionally make him feel threatened even if Brexit actually happened?

However, my positivity was quickly proved to be naïve: On 24 June, early in the morning, we woke up to the Leave result of the European Union Membership Referendum, and learned from report after report that the UK we both loved and had known for a while, one of the most diverse, friendly and vibrant countries in the world, really had made the decision to leave their closest allies, under the impression that it would open up a wider world of opportunities; meanwhile, another major driving force behind Brexit was actually the taking

back of control for the nation, namely tougher restrictions on immigration and any other types of border-crossing activities and policies that make the life of all who are not British but live in this country more difficult. I watched my partner's uneasiness continue to develop for the rest of that summer: after hearing about a few different incidences of people being attacked because they looked or sounded Eastern European, he told me that he was too afraid to go to a pub and watch the Polish national team playing in the European Championship. And his fears were, sadly, reasonable and justified.

Although I was in China for the rest of that summer, I still frequently read in the world news on the other side of the Eurasian landmass that, after the referendum, there had been a sharp rise in hate crimes in the UK (BBC, 2016 (a): n.p.). The Polish community in the UK, as one of the representatives of the EU's commitment to the freedom of movement for workers and a major source of cheap labour with relatively high quality (Drzewiecka et al., 2014), naturally became a major target. Among all the incidents, and even hate speeches from public figures like Nigel Farage, one of the first cases that made me feel scared for the people I care about and love occurred on 26, June 2016, merely three days after the referendum: the POSK Polish Social & Cultural Association was vandalised by large amount of graffiti which were obviously racially motivated (Aspinall and Myers, 2016: n.p.). The POSK is a grand building located on King Street, a bustling main road in the affluent inner-London area of Hammersmith, with some of the biggest Polish communities in London nearby, and that incident caused distress to many Polish Londoners; many Poles I knew were even too afraid to speak their own languages on the streets. After that, harassment notes which suggested that Poles should be 'no more' in the UK, called them 'vermin' and asked them to go back to Poland after the referendum were also found in different locations (ibid.). And the Poles were not the only ones who suffered. Many other people, including Europeans, Asians and people who dressed as Muslim or Sikh, had some unpleasant encounters during that time; and most of the racists were yelling something which directly or indirectly included the implication that people who do not satisfy the conditions of being white and of British nationality at the same time should 'go home' or told them that they 'don't belong'.



Figure 0.2 'Go back home, Polish scum', unprovoked xenophobic sign on someone's vehicle (SWNS/The Mirror, 2016), with broken Polish

After reading through many news reports on these racially charged or xenophobic incidents, apart from feeling concerned and angry towards what had been going on in London and many other places in the UK, some other odd things also caught my attention. I found out, in most situations, that the offenders seemed to display an obsession with asking people to 'go home'. This left me deeply intrigued for a very long time and still does now. Many migrant groups and diasporic communities, including both immigrant groups and diasporic communities, have existed peacefully in the UK for a very long time. Some of the members of these communities have likely been living in London and the UK for generations. It is also more than possible that many people have established their whole social network here, obtained their education in British schools and universities, built their careers here and also paid into the British public services system while using it. They might have started families and bought their own places to live. Their children might be born and raised here, assimilated into British culture more than the xenophobes and racists themselves, and have British passports. So what exactly do they still need to do before being allowed to call London and Britain 'home'? Where exactly is the 'real home' they are supposed to have to go back to? Why do some people believe that, regardless of their statuses, all people who

are not British both 'by blood' and 'by birth' at the same time need to go back to a 'home' at some point, instead of being a part of British society here? In what ways does this way of thinking reach so many people, and why does it seem to be so effective at indoctrinating people's minds? Considering these issues during that post-Brexit summer led me to think that it is necessary to provide an alternative to the existing way of perceiving everything related to migration and diaspora, and eventually this became what I regarded as the beginning of the development of my PhD research today. As Britain's capital, Europe's former centre and the city that embraced me with open arms just less than a decade ago, London became the primary platform for me to start my investigation, and also inspired me to use the creative experience of artists and filmmakers who have the experience of working and living in London, or had produced works about London to shape my research. After witnessing the rise of populism and xenophobia in different nations all over the world, it is also my hope to use this investigation into migrants, diaspora members and their experiences as a scope for the portrayal of other cities and countries all over the world.

Introduction

0.1 Towards Migratory and Diasporic Home-making: Research Development



Figure 0.3 Ngoc Minh Quan on the bus, *The Foreigner* (2017), Mark Campbell, video still

After the 2016 summer of post-Brexit chaos, I started my training as a filmmaker and an anthropologist and formally began to develop my interest in the lived experience of migrants and diaspora members in contemporary London. My research started with a series of investigations into the post-Brexit surge of xenophobia and racism, and how both migratory and diasporic people and people without this type of background have been living through it. At this stage, I discovered that even though many Londoners without migratory or diaspora background do not actually hold any hostility towards Londoners who are migrants or diaspora members and even think highly of them, they would still consider migration and diaspora as a less-than-ideal state, leading to a state a rootless or homeless and creating people full of secrets and uncertainties. Because of my educational background, what first caught my eye was that this way of thinking in the portrayal of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved has been frequently seen in

narrative cinematic practices, including fiction films and narrative documentaries. One of the films I had been pondering during 2016 and 2017 was New Zealand director Mark Campbell's *The Foreigner* (2017). As an immigrant, the film's main character, Vietnamese Ngoc Minh Quan (Fig. 0.3) plays an important role in the demolition of an entire IRA cell in London and the revealing of a corrupted politician behind it in seeking revenge for his teenage daughter. However, he is put under surveillance by Scotland Yard after the incidents, and the police only reluctantly decide that they would not take any further action against him. This is the reason why, for a very long time in the earlier stage of my project, I placed my focus on the fixed and bound representations in films.

It was not until much later that I found that the cinematic investigations of relevant topics and subjects can be put under what Anna Pritchard and Nigel Morgan termed 'popular culture media forms', including 'the visual and textual content of documentaries and movies; art and museum exhibitions; trade cards, video games, and animation; photographs, slides, video, and postcards; travelogues, blogs, and other websites; guidebooks and tourism brochures; coffee table books and magazines; literature; advertising; and quasi-scientific media like *National Geographic*' (1998, cited in Salazar, 2009: 51). Coming across this definition enabled me to expand my research interest to all cultural and visual representations, and how they 'typically reflect and reify stereotypes of groups' (Leavitt et al., 2015: 40) in terms of helping the construction of the general public's perception of migratory and diasporic people and ethnic minorities. My observation has also been echoed by many others. For example, even before the referendum, writer Alastair Campbell had already worriedly written on 12 March 2016 that many right-wing and centrist media in the UK had turned into 'propaganda sheets of one side of the argument' and 'large chunks of the press have totally given up on properly informing the public', which may have a catastrophic impact on how "'public opinion" is formed' (2016: n.p.). And the reality since that year has proven his statement to be correct.

During this time, I started to read Finnish-American anthropologist Liisa Malkki's 1995 essay titled 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things'. As she explains, in a historical period when human mobility was not as developed, and displacement was not as common, it was the norm for people to have only one static home,

and any form of displacement, including both migrating to another place for any reason and being born into a place that is not the origin of a person's ethnic group, are considered abnormal and harmful. This outdated is based on the idea that home and homeland can only be one static location and a flawed ideological tendency that is 'toward rooting rather than travel' (Clifford, 1998: 338, cited in Malkki, 1992: 34). It is essentially a flawed 'sedentarist analytical scheme' (Malkki, 1995: 509) that unavoidably leads to the 'sedentarist analytical bias' (Malkki, 1995: 508), which considers a rooted lifestyle as more preferable than one that is migratory or mobile. These frameworks view society as a closed system, displacement experience as 'a priori to entail not a transformation but a loss of culture and/or identity' (Malkki, 1995: 508), and consider anyone who travels instead of putting down roots in one static location as homeless, 'intruders' and the Other. To explore an alternative perspective to this, it is first necessary for me to discuss from a theoretical perspective how a new perspective that can be manifested visually and looks at migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved is indeed plausible. As mentioned previously, my project argues that the most important ideological root for the hostile attitude towards migrants and diaspora members is the sedentarist bias, as identified and defined by Malkki (1992, 1995). Since all their lifestyles are considered as an abnormal and often temporary state which involves the uprooting of oneself and the invasion of another's home (Malkki, 1992, 1995), it is no wonder that it would connect migrants and their experiences with the imageries of abnormality, homelessness and rootlessness. Malkki's discussions explain why, even in the contemporary age of mass human flow and increasing globalisation, a lot of cultural and visual practices related to migratory and diasporic experiences and people who are migrants and diaspora members would still reflect or even cater to the mindset of xenophobes and racists, and frame these people as being disruptive to the receiving society's order. Informed by Malkki's insights, I located the core issue with the existing perspectives towards migrants, diaspora members and their experiences as equalising most if not all kinds of migration and diaspora experiences to homelessness and placelessness, and chose to establish an alternative to it by reimagining the relationship between the bodily existence of humans, their everyday migration or diasporic experience and the home or homeland.

The long-term dominance of sedentarist bias in relevant discussions is the result of a fixed and bound idea of the home which considers it as a geographical location (Cancellieri, 2016), and also reflects the historical tradition of settled communities trying to control the movements of others and exclude migrants from around 600 CE (Fisher, 2013: 27). In the contemporary era, it has become possible for people to 'invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases' (Malkki, 1992: 24) due to the development of the globalisation process, while the dominance of sedentarist bias has also been challenged. In the development of postcolonial studies and the expansion of globalisation and human flow during this period, scholars like Bhabha (1994, 2011) and Brah (1996) have been extensively proposing the idea that living a mobile life is not a gesture of abandonment, a state of disorientation or an activity of invasion. For example, Brah suggests that migration and diaspora is not only an action of uprooting, but also a process of eventually settling down and putting roots 'elsewhere' (1996: 182). More recently, Boccagni also suggests directly that home is essentially a 'special kind of relationship with place' (2016: 4) or 'a set of social practices, values and symbols' (2016: 5) instead of a fixed geographic location, while migration can be considered as a process of home-making (ibid.). Similarly, Bhabha considers home as a 'thereness' (Stierstorfer and Bhabha, 2015: 14-15) of one's existence, that is to say, a home is made when one has established one's existence at a certain physical location. Based on these discussions, home-making under a migratory context can be generally regarded as the process of a migrant establishing their existence in a certain society and building up a set of relationships with the physical space that is the most intimate to them over time, which can be summed up as migration as home-making. Meanwhile, although diaspora members can be regarded as part of the local community from a legal perspective because they tend to possess all the necessary paperwork to prove their citizen status, it would still need a lot more effort than people without any migratory and diasporic backgrounds for them to establish a comfortable existence in, and build a homely relationship with their surrounding environment through the conscious or unconscious forms of racism and xenophobia. As Brah argues, the idea of home in diasporic communities can be considered the result of the reconciliation of the 'mythic place of desire' and the 'lived experience of the locality' (1996: 188-189). From this perspective, it can be said that home-making will always take place in both migrants' and diaspora members' everyday lives in one way or another, which is the reason why both contexts can be

incorporated into my research. Meanwhile, the visualisation of home-making is also a theoretically-backed route to the achievement of a new understanding of migration and diaspora which is not under the fixed and bound framework Malkki described.

According to Boccagni, the home is a 'mundane but invaluable venue to study, from the grassroots, the household-based reproduction of power relationships and inequalities, and the attendant social representations along lines of gender, age, social class, ethnicity and so on' (2016: 34). Boccagni's statement first directed me to look at migration and diaspora from the materiality of migratory and diasporic domestic spaces. Regardless of whether they have a fixed address to live in or not, these people's home-making activities will have a focal point, which is usually their domestic space (Long, 2013). But my discussion involves not only domestic spaces under the strictest definition, such as a room, a flat or a house, but also all locations that can provide migratory and diasporic people with a domestic sphere, as well as the homely feelings of comfort, security, familiarity, stability and sense of belonging, which I term as the intimate land/cityscape. However, no matter what shape they take, as Tally (2014: 2-5) states, all spaces, especially the ones that are occupied by humans and intimate to humans are embedded with narratives, while these narratives re-organise and mobilise spaces, and affect how people visually perceive physical space. In this way, the spatial narratives all play an important role in representing migrants and diaspora members, as well as telling stories about their experiences. Indeed, although many existing cultural and visual practices have shown a biased perspective in terms of perceiving the relationship between the home and the migratory and diasporic people, a few other visual art genres have already made attempts to apply a more nuanced perspective towards migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved by reconsidering the home in a way that reflects Boccagni's theory. Firstly, there have been some attempts at exploring this link in artists' moving image practices, such as Irish filmmaker Vivienne Dick's *London Suite (Getting Sucked In)* (1990), which is a portrayal of London's cultural diversity through the portrayal of the filmmaker's friends, their everyday life, the way they talk and the topic they talk about. Another visual art genre that has seen some attempts at providing alternatives to the existing homeless and placeless perception of home and migratory and diasporic experiences is installation art. For example, Mona Hatoum's sculptural series *Mobile Home* (2005) and Afghani-American artist Lida Abdul's video installation *Housewheel* (2003) both

explore the possibilities of making one feel at home in an unsettled and mobile state through the portrayal of domestic spaces (Lauzon, 2017: 1-2, 104-105). Both artists are refugees forced out of their countries of origin, who tend to face enormous difficulties in articulating their experiences due to their conditions. They are also most frequently smeared and dramatised by the nation states in existing visual representations, especially those coming from a sedentarist or nationalist perspective. In addition, these artists also both use spatial approaches to translate displacement into spatial concepts related to the home and domestic spaces, making them especially meaningful in the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making.

Based on these studies, the home-making efforts of migrants and diaspora members can be embodied in the materiality of their domestic spaces. I also built my project upon case studies of artworks from two more experimental cultural and visual practice genres with significant creative experiences of exploring meanings and stories embodied in physical spaces, installation art and artists' moving images. Installation artist Do-Ho Suh and artist filmmaker Alia Syed are introduced as case studies for my research because these two artists are of relevant backgrounds (including one migrant and one diaspora member of mixed heritage), are currently fully or partially based in London and have produced artworks related to London based on their own experiences. As an international artist who has been living outside his origin of South Korea for more than three decades, Suh is capable of moving around different nations and building a home for himself based on his, and his family's wants and needs. His life experiences represent the contemporary global citizens who live what Polish sociologist Magdalena Nowicka (2006) calls a 'plurilocal' lifestyle: they navigate between multiple cultural, social, and geographical contexts to construct their unique transnational identities, and are often able to develop meaningful connections to various places. Informed by his own life experiences, Suh's creative practices visualise his traces within a domestic environment to reimagine contemporary migration experiences from a perspective that does not consider it as a state of homelessness, placelessness and disorientation, which, based on the previous introductions, are highly informative to my research. Meanwhile, as a pioneer British filmmaker of Pakistani and Welsh descent, Alia Syed draws on her unique heritage and cross-cultural experiences to offer a rich wealth of moving image practices that reflect the complexities of contemporary diasporic life in the

UK. The juxtaposition and fragmentation between sound and images in her films disrupt the singular, fixed narratives of cultural belonging. Instead of proving the Britishness or Otherness of the British diasporic communities, she invites viewers to think about the fluid and contingent nature of identity formation and the 'thirdness' (Bhabha, 2011) or ambiguity of diasporic spaces and diasporic experiences, which again has the potential to lead to a non-sedentarist perspective towards migration and diaspora.

As seen from this development process of my research project, I set the scope of my research as 'migratory and diasporic experience' and 'migrants and diaspora members'. Based on Boccagni's statement that the home is an important venue in the study of social reproduction and representation and is shaped by different factors, I have defined the terms 'migratory and diasporic' and 'migrants and diaspora members' in their broadest senses throughout the whole thesis. These generalist terms refer to migrants and diaspora members from various cultural and ethnic groups, financial backgrounds and social classes who migrate voluntarily or involuntarily and have different home-making experiences. These people have different mobility levels and different capacities to establish a sense of security during mobility. Despite that using those terms in this way would bring about the risk of flattening the differences in the migratory or diasporic experiences of people from different backgrounds, I would argue that looking at these experiences through the lens of home-making enables me to see their differences more closely in the distinctive materialities of their domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes.

A current limitation of the thesis was the depth to which I was able to explore the more extreme types of migratory experiences, such as those of refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants. Whilst a discussion of their representation forms an integral part of the discussions about the sedentarist tendency in existing narrative cinematic practices in Chapter 2, further sustained analysis of works by different artists is needed to address the representation of their home-making practices in greater depth. Further studies of this aspect of migrant home-making representation will be carried out in the next stage of my research based on this project's outcome.

0.2 Aim and Objectives

The arguments of Malkki and other contemporary scholars such as Avtar Brah, Homi Bhabha, Adriano Cancellieri and Paolo Boccagni mentioned above suggested to me that the most fundamental reason behind many popular xenophobic and racist opinions is the persistence of sedentarist bias within different kinds of visual representations. This observation eventually became the starting point of my PhD research project, and fundamentally shaped my idea of what research questions I want to ask with this project and what answers I might be able to find. This project aims to investigate how I can use my research to propose a new perspective for telling stories about migratory and diasporic experiences and portraying people who are involved in them on a theoretical level. As a city that has been regarded as one of the major destinations of transnational human movement for centuries and the location of my own home-making experience as an immigrant, London is chosen as the main location for my study. Whilst my research mainly examines the particular characteristics of migratory and diasporic experiences in London in the late 20th- and early 21st-century context, the particular history of migration and diaspora in London was taken into consideration during my research process.

I asked the following questions:

- 1) How has the fixed and bound idea of the home been shaping how migratory and diasporic experiences and migratory and diasporic subjects based in London and other contemporary cosmopolitan cities are portrayed?
- 2) Why is an alternative to the existing narratives needed for future cultural and creative practices and what is an adequate methodology with which this alternative can be realised?
- 3) How have some visual artists' practices reflected on the home-making experiences of the migrants and diaspora members of London, and can this challenge the existing perception of migration rooted in the fixed and bound notion of home?

As will be deliberated in Chapter 3, a psychogeographic framework is used in the analysis of case studies. French philosopher Guy Debord defines psychogeography as the study of the

dynamics between the materiality of physical space and human behaviour. (1955, cited in Souzis, 2015: 194). Psychogeographic explorations are characterised by the geographer's activity of walking and making sense of their relations with both other people and the space(s) that surround them, an 'urban affair' and an 'act of subversion' (Coverley, 2018: n.p.). Migratory and diasporic home-making can be considered as migrants and diaspora members making sense of their surrounding space while establishing their unique presence within the receiving society. The process involves lots of interactions between people and space which results in a set of meaningful relationships being built, making it possible to be regarded as a type of psychogeographic walking. Therefore, using psychogeography to understand the case studies first responds to my research question by providing an alternative to the sedentarist narrative that migrants and diaspora members are rootless and placeless in their receiving society, while the materiality of the domestic spaces or cityscapes presented in my case studies is the result the interaction between human activities and emotions and the physical space during this walking. Besides, it also helps me by providing a framework to analyse and articulate how migratory and diasporic experiences are manifested in both my case study artists' creative practices, as well as challenging the fixed and bound notion of home during the process.

0.3 Setting the Scene: Super Diverse London

London has historically been a global destination for human flow, and this naturally led to the establishment of various immigrant and diasporic communities in the city. People from outside the British Isles and their descendants have been an integral part of what has become today's London for centuries. For example, during the 17th century, almost a quarter of London's population was made up of foreigners (Wrigley, 1967, cited in Hamnett, 2003: 95). The first major wave of Chinese people (the ethnic group I myself belong to) came to the UK, settling in London during the second half of the 19th century, and mainly lived around the Soho area of central London by the time World War II occurred (Eade, 2000: 73). According to Chris Hamnett (2003: 95), from 1801 to 1901, the huge rise of London's population from one million to 6.5 million was also largely fuelled by people who came to the UK from other parts of the world. Over the course of the 20th century, London gradually gained the status of one of the very few 'global cities', as defined by Dutch-American sociologist Saskia Sassen. According to Sassen, these types of cities can exercise a 'massive

impact upon both international economic activity and urban form' and 'concentrate control over vast resources' (2001: 16). They are the products of a series of changes including 'the dismantling of once-powerful industrial centres in the United States, the United Kingdom, and more recently in Japan; the accelerated industrialization of several Third World countries; the rapid internationalization of the financial industry into a worldwide network of transactions' (ibid.). While discussing the 'dangers of the dominance of the finance sector and its surrounding constellation of activities' (Massey, 2007: 8), British geographer Doreen Massey also echoes this point by pointing out that as a result of the significance of the finance sector, London's influences and effects have 'spread nationally and globally', and the city has become a 'seat of power' (2007: 14) to the political, institutional, economic and cultural fields worldwide. This leads to the next point of London's importance in the map of contemporary population flow all over the world.

Even now, London's global influence also keeps the city a hotspot for human flow in the 21st century. According to Massey (2007: 14), the British capital is one of the centres of control, direction and coordination in the development of globalisation in the contemporary world, and also represents one of the pinnacles of the material development of neoliberal civilisation. In other words, London has the potential to satisfy all kinds of personal development needs, and a relatively post-nationalist and liberal environment which appeals to many people from authoritarian or previously authoritarian nations, such as Eastern European countries like Poland, which were previously directly or indirectly under the control of the former Soviet Union (Garapich, 2015: 148). As a result of the social, economic and cultural appeals that few other cities all over the world can compare, it is indeed no wonder that London has become both what Massey terms 'a focus of migration', or a major hub of migrants; and a 'home to astonishing ethnicities and cultures', or a city where lots of diasporic community exist (2007: 15). In general, contemporary London is a city which hosts people who have all kinds of ethnic, socio-cultural, economic and educational backgrounds and varied skill levels, and who work on different types of jobs and live different lifestyles (Massey, 2007: 9-10; Kershen, 2015: xvii). Although the flow of various kinds of population from smaller towns and rural areas to major cities and other richer countries is happening everywhere in the world, London and the other few global cities have brought the level of diversity of London's population to another even more astonishing level. In London's case,

anthropologist Steven Vertovec first uses the term 'super-diversity' (2005: n.p.) to describe London's multi-ethnic population in a highly influential article he wrote for the BBC. In 2011, the Decennial Census conducted by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) also revealed that almost three million out of the eight million population of the British capital were born outside of the country, which saw an increase of one million compared to the previous decade (Census, 2011, cited in Kershen, 2015: 13). Besides, as researcher Anne Kershen says, for many people from major migrant origins like Central and Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union member nations, Africa and most areas of Asia, London is not only a 'promised land' that can provide most of the things migrants and potential migrants are after, as outlined above, but also can be regarded as an 'accessible promised land' (2015: 13): on top of its leading economic, cultural and educational resources and English-speaking language system, London also has a relatively convenient location for many migrants of major origins to travel to compared to other locations such as North America and Australia.

However, despite the close-knit relationship between transnational human flow and the socio-economic development of both London and the UK, the British media and government have always retained a hostile attitude towards migrants and diaspora members. According to Ken Lunn, since the 1960s, despite the many efforts in the UK to 'outlaw forms of discrimination and racial abuse', there has also been 'an upsurge in race awareness and the creation of legislation to control immigration' (2018: n.p.) at the same time. Similarly, Malini Guha also points out that there has been a long string of narratives from the British government, politicians and conservative media which suggests that the existence of migrants and diaspora members in Britain has been continually considered a 'social problem' that needs to be 'solved' (2015: 126). One of the earliest and most influential examples is politician Enoch Powell's notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968), which suggested that allowing foreigners to come to the UK and allowing descendants of foreigners to be born in the UK would fundamentally change British society and deprive native Englishmen of their economic benefits. He termed the incoming of migrants 'preventable evils', which would end up with the white British population 'made strangers in their own country'. Right after that, during her three terms as UK prime minister, Margaret Thatcher and her government also kept pushing a series of largely xenophobic and racist policies and regimes. For example, in her interview on the British current affairs programme *World in Action* (1963-1998) in

1978, she explicitly proposed the idea that the British native population should reclaim certain British areas that have a larger non-native population than other areas (Lunn, 2018), and this narrative is still influential in right-wing narratives even now. In recent years, these racially inspired hostility and xenophobic representations of both migrants and diaspora members in the UK led by the government and the media were also some of the most important reasons behind the success of the Vote Leave campaign built upon the slogan of taking back control, the result of the Brexit Referendum and the Windrush scandal (Versi, 2016; Free from Torture, 2020).

Under such historical and socio-political contexts, it is no wonder that despite its appeal to migrants, the global, ethnically diverse city of London is more often portrayed as what Guha referred to as an 'out of reach' 'imaginary' (2015: 148) in a lot of visual representations. What is equally noticeable is that these films are often made by British filmmakers or filmmakers who are migrants or diaspora members living in Britain. As Guha eloquently articulates on the basis of arguments from other scholars such as Murray Fraser, under this common, or even official imaginary of the city's 'high', 'official' and 'shiny' side and its illusions as the 'promised land', there is always a 'dark', 'low' and 'invisible' underworld London (2015: 137-138), which is inhabited by the marginalised Other, most importantly migrants and diaspora members living in the city. When discussing the concept of 'object-oriented plotting', Marco Caracciolo points out that narratives are traditionally considered as the reflection of 'human beliefs, values, and even the cognitive and physical makeup of our species' (2020: 45), and it is therefore reasonable to put humans at the centre place of all narrative actions. Based on this argument, the two-fold imagery of global London's urban space is also a reflection of the historically xenophobic attitude of British society towards the migratory and diasporic people mentioned above. This in turn explains why, as Guha (2015: 127-143) states, it is always the marginalised underworld of London – the city's lesser-known side and less portrayed regions which are impoverished or even full of irregularities and crimes – that narrative cinematic practices tend to situate their characters in. It also provides some explanations about why the relevant visual representation practices have very often followed one of the two stereotypes that will be discussed later in Chapter 2: the first type is the pre-modern, which can be understood as those who do not have the capacity to integrate due to a lack of adequate education or skill; the second type

is the terroristic, which can be understood as the ones pose a threat to the order of the British society due to the irregularities in their movements and activities (Bhabha, 1999: x)². Sometimes, migratory and diasporic subjects are portrayed as being both at the same time. Very often, these people would be forever confined to networks of crime and exploitation in the underworld of London. And if they are not able or unwilling to be completely swallowed by this dark and brutal side of the city, the urban space of global London often appears to be one 'of transition' (Guha, 2015: 162) or even 'transitory' (Guha, 2015: 168) for them, becoming the witness of how their home-making efforts eventually end up in vain and how they leave London for their origins or another global city, being reshaped and remade through the process (Lurey and Massey, 1999).

One of the fields that sufficiently reflects the discussions above in London is narrative cinema. For example, in British director Basil Dearden's *Pool of London* (1951), the Black sailor Johnny, who is a decent and upright person, is charged with a robbery and a murder he did not commit soon after his ship docks in the city, thus being involved in the low-life London underworld and becoming a terroristic being. It is also because of this that he gets away from London without any hesitation at the end of the film. In *Last Resort* (2000) by Polish director Paweł Pawlikowski, after being tricked into coming to the UK without sufficient financial means and legal documents by someone she meets online, young Russian mother Anya and her son are forced to claim political asylum and live in a detention centre in Kent right after arriving in London. Although she used to have a decent job as an illustrator back in Moscow, she is also met with hostility in the UK because of not being viewed as having the potential to contribute to British society. Eventually, she also leaves the country, although the British man they have been befriended by, Alfie, hopes they will stay. Similar destinies of escaping from London or being swallowed by the city are also found in migrants and diaspora members who come from the UK through regular means, live a regular lifestyle and do not pose any apparent threats to British society. In *London River* (2009) by French-Algerian director Rachid Bouchareb, after the London underground suicide bombing, the two main characters, British white farmer Elizabeth Sommers and Francophone Black Muslim Ousmane, meet each other when searching for their children

² Not to be confused with terrorists – more discussions on the concept can be found in Chapter 2.

who were secretly a couple living together and victims of the suicide attack. Although this story displays a certain degree of universality in its attempt at dealing with topics like parental love and understanding between different groups within humanity, the whole story is still based on the offscreen fact that the innocent young cross-national couple, whom the audience never had the chance to know more about, are practically swallowed by the dark, dangerous side of London. Ironically and sadly, the reason behind their tragic death is another ethnic minority: the suicide bomber behind the crime, Hasib Mir Hussain was a Leeds-born British-Pakistani Muslim young man who was only 18 years old when he committed the horrendous crime.

Apart from its history of hosting migratory and diasporic people and its importance in today's transnational human flow landscape, compared to many other possible locations for which I could have conducted research, London also has its own characteristics, making it a unique location to situate my project in. Indeed, like other typical cosmopolitan cities such as New York and Paris, there has long been an essential conflict between the super-diverse population and socio-cultural landscape of global London and the hostility to migrants from a considerable part of the British government, media and natives, and this has been reflected in various existing visual representations of migratory and diasporic experiences and the Londoners who are involved. However, the recognition of London's diverse population's cultures and the transcendence process of 'national, gender and cultural perimeters' (Amine, 2007: 71) in British society are both unique. Laila Amine views the evolution of British nationhood as coming from a 'colonial model for British colonies' to a 'composite national identity in Britain' (Amine, 2007: 72), where the constructed boundaries between the coloniser and the colonised, the superior civilisation and the inferior one and the natives and the Other are often broken down. Amine's discussions shed light on the difference between the status of the cosmopolitan London built upon the former British Empire in the imperial era as one of the most important colonial powers in the world, and the colonial order introduced above, and today's London as a global city. This observation is further developed in Thomas Elsaesser's analyses, which also explain the paradox between London's global city status and the UK's attitude towards migratory and diasporic people. As a global city which is formerly an old imperial metropolis, London is 'haunted by its colonial past', and would insist on 'returning' to its past 'in the shape of angry entitlements and

violent militancy' (Elsaesser, 2016: 22), such as rebuilding the colonial order and restricting the activities and status of migrants and diaspora members. In other words, xenophobia and racism in contemporary British society are rooted in the country's earlier colonial history, and have always been latent in British national narratives and nationalist behaviours. Elsaesser's opinion echoes discussions about the foreigner and the Other from earlier generations of scholars such as Kristeva, that London and other imperialistic European cities are different from their counterparts in the Americas because 'each (of the ethnic groups in the society) is fated to remain the same and the other – without forgetting his original culture but putting it in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side by side but also alternate with others' culture' (1991: 194).

Apart from its differences from non-imperialistic multi-ethnic or cosmopolitan cities, the physical structure of London's urban space also makes London a unique example among cities with an imperial past. According to Guha, unlike many other cities in which 'migrant areas of settlement ... correspond to a centre-periphery model' (2015: 14), such as Paris, London has historically been a city with no definite centre and margin, which helps to get the 'imaginary of post-imperial London' to spread 'out across the city', while the shape and boundary of its 'official' 'high' side and the underground, 'unreferenced' London bears little obvious correlation to the development process of London's topography (2015: 14-16). This provides a less segregated environment for the coexistence of different social and ethnic groups and a more complex structure to its 'underworld' (2015: 15). On one hand, this structure of London's urban space can be regarded as an exterior manifestation of decolonisation and globalisation in the city, which makes London more of a contemporary global city than many of its equals, such as Paris, and an ideal backdrop for my investigation of how to shape a new perspective for the representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved in them; on the other hand, it also brings about unique issues about the visibility of migrants and diaspora members in the city that these people are largely rendered invisible in the city's iconic landscape, regardless of whether they wish to be seen or not.

As mentioned above, despite London being a city with few visible traces of racial segregation, many existing visual representations of migratory and diasporic Londoners and

their experiences still stick to the perception that these people are unable to make their own home in the city, or to build any meaningful relationships with the physical space of the city that surrounds them. Therefore, it would be reasonable to approach the reimagination of migratory and diasporic experiences in London by investigating how the home-making processes of migrants and diaspora members are taking place in the people's domestic spaces and their intimate cityscapes of London's urban space. To achieve this target, I would attempt to move away from the conventional narrative practices which are centred on human activities and human values (Caracciolo, 2020: 45), shedding light on how to use the visual explorations of the materiality of migratory and diasporic domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes to shape an alternative to the sedentarist perspective.

0.4 Thesis Design

My project argued that the materiality of domestic spaces provides a nuanced perspective to the visualisation of migratory and diasporic home-making. As the settings for most to all migratory and diasporic people's home-making activities, the locations where they work, study, worship and socialise on a daily basis in contemporary cities including London can also be considered as a type of intimate space for them, and can be included in the discussions of domestic space's role in generating more nuanced readings of both migration and diaspora, and people who are involved in them. Therefore, I decided to build up a comprehensive theoretical context based on studies from different fields, as mentioned before. Starting from them, I use my project to investigate the links between the bodies of migrants and diaspora members, their experiences and the intimate spaces that surround them to construct a nuanced perspective that can be applied in the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 gives an in-depth analysis of the notion of sedentarist bias, which I have established as the root of the existing mode of the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved and introduces its significance in relevant theoretical discussions for most of the 20th century. Chapter 2 goes on to use narrative cinematic practices as an example to investigate how nationalism and sedentarism are reflected in existing cultural and visual practices, and further establishes the importance of my research project. Chapter 3 addresses how an

alternative perspective can be provided through exploring migratory and diasporic home-making, then uses this exploration to inform the choice of case studies and the analyses of the chosen case studies in this project. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, two artists, Do-Ho Suh and Alia Syed and their selected works are studied to respond to the two aspects of the research aim respectively. Chapter 4 analyses how the materiality of domestic spaces in Suh's selected works can be used as a manifestation of migrants' bodily existence and their home-making experiences in their receiving societies. After that, Chapter 5 refers to a selection of Syed's works to further demonstrate how diasporic home-making efforts can also be considered as a process of people building relationships with the intimate cityscape that surrounds them, or to say the focal points in urban spaces that are closely related to their home-making routines. Discussions about Syed's creative practices would also provide a nuanced angle towards my research aim by highlighting what I perceive as the in-betweenness of the diasporic people's life: born and raised in Britain and having British nationality, Syed's paternal side of the family is from Pakistan, and there has always been an abundance of influences of South Asian culture and traditions in her life growing up. In an interview with me, she also considers herself a member of the British South Asian community who is different from her white peers. As a diasporic woman, she has also gone through numerous negotiations between different parts of cultural heritages like migrants who move from one nation to live in another after they were born, but in a way different from Suh who was born in his country of origin and migrated later in his life. Besides, considering that class 'is hardly less relevant than ethnicity or migration background' (Boccagni, 2016: 88) in home-making under these contexts, I also picked my case studies from two different social classes to investigate how, just like the differences in their genders, identities as a migrant or a diaspora member or the field of visual art they work with, this difference is reflected in their practices. My thesis makes the case that Syed's works are of great significance in exploring the intimate spatial dimension of migratory and diasporic home-making experience.

Indeed, using my own creative practices to demonstrate how creative practices may visualise migratory and diasporic home-making through exploring the storytelling potential of migrants' and diaspora members' domestic spaces and their intimate cityscapes would be a more straightforward way to approach my research aim. However, I also noticed that the

lack of non-sedentary perspective towards migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved exists not only in the existing visual explorations of these topics, but also in the majority of theoretical discussions and frameworks about different cultural and visual practices, such as narrative films. By choosing this more theoretical route, I would be able to respond to the relevant contemporary creative landscape and existing literature, thus providing a strong sense of contextuality and coherence to the research. Meanwhile, case studies of relevant artworks also enable me to better test the relevance of my theoretical exploration of migratory and diasporic home-making in different types of cultural and visual practices. Through these analyses, it will first be made evident that migratory and diasporic experiences as home-making are not only relevant in social science research and ideological and political debates on these topics in the future. Besides, it will also be argued that it is possible to develop a creative strategy that can assist the development of a new perspective for the visual representation of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences. The two case study chapters will be concluded with a discussion on how this new perspective can be informed on a theoretical level and applied in different types of cultural and visual practices.

Chapter 1: On Sedentarist Bias

1.1 The Static, Spatial Home as the Theoretical Root of Sedentarist Bias

As I have argued in the introductory chapter, I have found that sedentarist bias has always been one of the primary reasons behind the complex attitude of a considerable proportion of the British general public's attitude towards the migrant groups and diasporic communities in London and the UK. Meanwhile, the long-term domination of sedentarist bias in turn explains the reason why many existing cultural and visual practices tend to portray the life of migrants and diaspora members in London as a state of instability, homelessness and rootlessness and represent these people in London as criminals, intruders and social burdens who the British general public have seldom had the opportunities to interact with and understand. Since this notion has a crucial place in my project, it is necessary that I provide a thorough review of the ideological and theoretical roots behind it, then give a detailed introduction to its meanings, as well as how migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved in contemporary cosmopolitan and global cities, especially those in London, have been perceived under the influence of sedentarist bias.

Due to the development of globalisation, mass human flow has become an important research topic in many different social science fields, including sociology, anthropology and human geography, while migration and diaspora studies have also become a well-integrated but independent field of research over time. However, as Adriano Cancellieri points out, across all these different fields, there has also long been a similar tradition to consider the home as a 'fixed and bounded place to protect' (2017: 50) since the research into migration and diaspora gained significance. Some of the most important roots of this tendency are interpretations of the writings about the power of humans' attachment to place from philosophers including Gaston Bachelard and Martin Heidegger (*ibid.*), who regard both the home and general concept of place as static geographic concepts. For example, according to Bachelard, the notion of home is constructed upon humans' imagined sense of 'outside' and 'inside' and connoted sense of 'rootedness' and 'belonging' (1994: 211-231). Another philosophical concept that is often used to discuss the link between humans and place is Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling', which is also often understood as a 'unifying phenomenon pointing toward a place where things gather into ... an abiding wholeness' (Roy, 2017: 29),

or 'to remain' and to 'stay with things' (Long 2013: 333). Similarly, Jeff Malpas also suggests that Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' or 'to reside' is tied to the idea of 'being-in' or 'being-somewhere' (2006: 74-76), which is always tied to certain geographical locations. Based on these discussions, dwelling has often been linked to confined spaces that people are familiar with, most importantly houses and any other forms of closed domestic spaces. This characteristic made it an important concept in the discussions of home experiences, but also unavoidably contributed to the tendency of considering home as a static, spatial concept in many social science fields for a considerable period.

As an important location for dwelling to happen, the house, or the domestic space is the centre of what researcher Joanna Long terms the 'domestic sphere' (2013: 329), which means that of all the different types of spaces, people's houses or homes have the strongest ability to inspire the 'feelings of comfort, security and belonging' (ibid.). Long (ibid.) also points out that when the notion of the home is considered a static concept, it is first and foremost defined from a spatial notion. As she points out, this tendency is first reflected in the fact that when trying to express the meaning of 'home', English speakers often mix up the word with 'house' (ibid.). Similar situations can also be found in a few other languages I understand: in Polish, 'at home' is 'w domu', which literally translated as 'in house'; in French, it can be translated as 'à la maison', which has the same meaning; in Chinese, although 'zài jiā', or 'at home' cannot be directly translated as in one's house, people also usually only say that they 'zài jiā' when they are actually in their apartment or house, or want people to think that. As a result of the philosophical thinking of considering home as fixed and bound, this logic in turn strengthens the opinion that home is a static concept which cannot be transferred or moved, and that this static realm is highly important to people's everyday life and identity as a private realm where people can feel a sense of security and order, shape their identity and connect with other people and the public world from here (Mallet, 2004; Dovey, 1985: 33-64). The idea that home has a deeper meaning than a residence for people is further explored by Alexandra Staub. According to her (2016: n.p.), the use of space is an important means of expressing social ideals, while deciding that there exists a difference in the power of shaping domestic spaces between two different communities in a society is fundamentally an implication that these two communities are in an imbalanced power hierarchy. Fundamentally speaking, at the heart of this ideal in the

use of space, there is 'a desire for cultural representation in the broadest sense' and 'an assertion of one's identity as a defining idiom' (Staub, 2016: n.p.); in the discussion of my research topic, it is also reasonable to say that the different identities of different social groups are used to determine their access to a home, while their different access to a home greatly influence how they are represented. Staub's discussions explain the reason why the extent of migrants' and diaspora members' access to home and the limits in their ability to home-making is a core issue in the debates about their rights, as reflected in the introductory chapter of the thesis, which is also the reason why I chose to approach the visual representation of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences through the lens of home and home-making.

1.2 The Nation State, Nationalism and Sedentarist Bias

The static spatial notion of home has also played an important role in shaping the discussions and visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved for a considerable amount of time, and practically led to the fact that sedentarist bias has been one of the most dominant ideological tendencies in relevant researches and discussions for a very long time. Many modernist scholars have also associated the idea of a static, spatial home with the exercise of control and stability. Take British anthropologist Mary Douglas for example: although she insightfully points out that home 'is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space', she also suggests that home 'starts by bringing some space under control' (1991: 289). In his discussions, Gregor Arnold also reflects on her words, noting that Douglas considers the core of this control provided by the home as a sense of stability by defining it as a physical location where 'regular behavioural patterns and communicative practices are realised' (Arnold, 2016: 161). This logic of regarding home as 'a place and a source of individual identity' (ibid.) is essentially reflected in the idea introduced by Staub in the last section, that having a home is equal to having access to a type of exclusive identity; meanwhile, only the people who have certain exclusive identities can have the right to own a place and live in it. Politicians often exploit this loop to propose racist and xenophobic policies (Cancellieri, 2017), as can be seen in the public speeches and policy-making activities of conservative and right-wing politicians in post-Brexit Britain. For example, during an election three years after the Brexit Referendum in 2019, multiple Brexit Party MEPs were caught on video heckling British Sikh MEP Neena Gill shouting that she

should 'go home' (Jankowicz, 2019: n.p.), most possibly because she is a coloured woman of Indian descent. After an aggrieved Gill called out these people's 'far right' and 'racist' behaviours, the hecklers even angrily shouted back, 'How dare you call us fascists!' (ibid.)

Lebanese-Australian Anthropologist Ghassan Hage is one of the most notable academics who has carried out in-depth studies on how the idea that access to a home is considered an assertion of one's identity within a society and a type of exclusive right reserved for certain members of the society would contribute to the development of the contemporary nation state society, and eventually, nationalism. In his discussions on the relationship between the imaginaries of nation states and the development of nationalism, he starts from a socio-historical perspective to define nation states as special types of organisations which are brought together and built up on 'physical practices such as joining together certain geographical areas and setting up boundaries or imposing specific modalities of law and order and communication networks inside those boundaries' (1996: 465). With all its 'recognizable constituting elements' such as unified language, ethnic group and geographical areas, the nation state also provides ground for the 'symbolic existence as unified categories' (ibid.) of its members, thus giving them directions on how to treat the ethnic and cultural Other and their Otherness in the process of nation building (1996: 463). In other words, the nation state provides a strong sense of recognition between its citizens as members of the same social group or community, and therefore can be considered a type of 'public cultural expression' that 'both defines the ideal community' and 'traces the outlines of a threatening challenging otherness' (Staub, 2016: n.p.), as well as the practice of a 'symbolic unity' (Hage, 1996: 465). This practice of symbolic unity necessarily requires a 'symbolic conjuring up' effort by the authorities of the nation state which 'legitimise[s] its physical and symbolic annexation' in the practices of nation-building, such as the 'construction of a common history' and 'making the population willing' (ibid.) to become part of the state. These nationalist practices are most importantly characterised by the hostile attitudes and actions towards, or even eradication of, the Other and their culture in the form of racial cleansing and genocide, which nationalists themselves often consider to be righteous and necessary (Hage, 1996). These efforts often are always the reflection of nationalist ideologies: from a nationalist perspective, a nation is never able to 'reach a stage where they can just "exist"' (Hage, 1996: 465) because the nation-building activities are

crucial in bringing the symbolic unity of a nation state into existence. As a result of this ideology, nationalists are always invited to 'do more' (ibid.), or perform nationalist activities that may often have extreme results to enhance the national belonging within its members. Hage (1996: 467) describes how, as a kind of imaginary spatial concept, nation states are constructed upon four different modalities of national belonging: homely, governmental, sovereign and functional. Of these four types, the 'homely national belonging', which makes national subjects feel that the nation is 'a place they "fit into" and "feel at home in"', is considered to be 'the most common of all national discourses' (Hage, 1996: 468). This concept is related to the dimension of 'communality and territory' of the existence of nation states, which is fundamental to the concept of 'homeland' (ibid.). Based on Hage's definitions, it can also be said that the content of the homely national belonging is similar to Long's 'domestic sphere', which, as introduced in the last section, includes 'the feelings of comfort, security and belonging' (2013: 329). Considering that the static spatial notion of home has always been considered as something that should be protected and controlled (Cancellieri, 2017), it is no wonder that a lot of nationalists literally view migrants and ethnic minorities as the invaders of nation states that they consider to be theirs, thus conducting various forms of nationalist practices to make the life of all the targeted groups difficult. Meanwhile, although diaspora members are legally recognised as members of their society, from a nationalist perspective, they are also very frequently considered too impure for nationhood because diaspora culture 'is treated as being inseparably intertwined with mother culture' (Supriya, 2008: 197) from the nationalist perspective, making them often subjected to racist and xenophobic activities. On top of that, the existence of diasporic communities in a multi-ethnic society can also 'foster an uninterrupted or exaggerated identification with the native land' (Melas, 2008: 105), resulting in nationalists feeling threatened and encourage them to spread the tendency of nationalism in native communities through the groupings of cultural and ethnic minorities and the growth of social status and economic power of these groups.

In general, the conservative idea of home and nationalist practices of nation states can reflect a tendency of both romanticising and essentialising the home or homeland (Cancellieri, 2017), saying that people can only have one home and one homeland, and that a home or a homeland can only belong to one community of people who are from the same

ethnic and cultural background. This tendency is reflected in how different kinds of cultural and visual practices, including media coverage, cinematic narratives, literary works and earlier narratological research, deal with the relationship between place and identity. According to Christopher Raymond, Gregory Brown and Guy Robinson (2011), the majority of existing research related to identity practices tends to use two interconnected concepts of 'place identity' and 'place dependence' to measure this attachment: place identity refers to 'the mixture of feelings about specific physical settings and symbolic connections that define who we are', while place dependence can be defined as 'the functional or goal-directed connections to a setting' (ibid.: 325). In the establishment of place attachments which are influenced by this interpretation, the equation of 'home = exclusionary identity' (Cancellieri, 2017: 50) is often made. Rejecting the dependence between identity and place in these practices is the main root of what Nicolas Parent describes as 'anti-sedentarism' (2022: 12) in recent anthropology studies. Between the 1980s and early 1990s, there has already been a tendency that 'critiqued foundational terminology—the "field", "place", "culture", "identity"—and the emerging global studies perspective that explored delocalization and deterritorialization' championed by scholars like Arjun Appadurai (Parent, 2022: 13). As one of the most influential early representatives of this wave, Liisa Malkki advances this 'intellectual currents of the mobility turn' (Parent, 2022: 11) in anthropology by clearly defining the term of 'sedentarist analytical scheme' in her critique of contemporary refugee and displacement studies in anthropology, suggesting that 'the homeland or country of origin is not only the normal but also the ideal habitat for any person ... the place where one fits in, lives in peace, and has an unproblematic culture and identity' (Malkki, 1995: 509). The sedentarist analytical scheme is the root of what she further terms the 'sedentarist analytical bias' (1995: 508) or 'sedentarist bias' (1995: 509), which is a crucial concept that has led me through every stage of the development of my research, as discussed in the introductory chapter. In Malkki's (1995) reflective writings, sedentarist bias is defined as an ideological tendency in contemporary anthropology and many other social science fields to conduct studies from the perspective of people who are native or indigenous to a certain society, put discussions under a context that focuses on how human flow impacts the native communities, and view societies as closed systems and see people who come into the closed system from outside as intruders. As she explains, 'it has long come naturally to us' that the theoretical systems in many social science subjects

such as sociology and anthropology have had a strong focus on locality 'as opposed to studying the movement and traffic of people' (Malkki, 1995: 508). She also argues that sedentarism enables the 'elaboration and consolidation of a national geography that reaffirms the segmentation of prismatic, mutually exclusive units', and binds the sociological and anthropological concepts which are used to define and discuss a group of humans, such as 'peoples' or ethnic groups and 'cultures' into 'national soils' (1992: 31). Based on these introductions, Malkki (1995) then indicates that from a sedentarist perspective, any national border-crossing activities and displacement experiences are all thought to eventually result in the loss of homeland and will naturally end up in a loss of culture and/or identities for both the migrants, diaspora members and the native people. Even now, this kind of mindset is still shaping how migrants, diaspora members and their experiences have been represented and portrayed in contemporary cultural and visual practices. This influence is reflected in various fields including narrative cinematic practices such as fiction films and narrative documentaries, which will be analysed in detail in the next chapter. However, as she also points out, we are currently living in an era when people are 'chronically mobile and routinely displaced' more than ever before, and traditionally spatial concepts such as 'homes' and 'homelands' are reinvented 'in the absence of territorial, national bases-not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit' (Malkki, 1992: 24). Under these circumstances, more and more people identify themselves with deterritorialised 'homelands', 'cultures' and 'origins' (ibid.), while researchers who are dealing with the not-so-new topic of human movement are required to look for a new analytical framework which is different from the traditional one which considers concepts such as 'boundaries' and 'borderlands' to be 'invisible peripheries or anomalous danger zones' (Malkki, 1992: 25). This point in Malkki's observation is echoed by Thomas Hall and P. Nick Kardulias, who hint that the large-scale human migration that has been going on since the latter half of the 20th century is largely linked to 'industrialization, urbanization and globalization' (2010: 23), which then leads to the increase in transnational human flow worldwide.

Under this context, many researchers and creators alike have become aware that sedentarist bias has turned into an extremely outdated perspective. The traces of this new reality can also be recognised extensively in many cultural and visual practices in this period,

and narrative cinematic practices, including both fiction films and narrative documentaries, are again an important example. In narrative cinematic practices about migrants, diaspora members and their experience all over the world including London since the late 20th century, although there are no well-defined theoretical frameworks on how to provide an alternative to the sedentarist readings of migration and diaspora and its focus on the transitional and rootless aspect of migration, it could be argued that filmmakers have indeed been pushing at the inconsistencies of the old narrative in different ways, which will be analysed thoroughly in the next chapter. However, despite the efforts of pulling away from the sedentarist framework, none of these efforts from filmmakers so far has really broken away from the idea that migrants and diaspora members are unable to have homes in the same way as natives of a society, which eventually prompts me to use my research project to shed light on a new perspective towards this topic. In Chapter 2, I will point out that when reflected in cultural and visual practices, sedentarist bias considers it almost impossible people who live a migratory lifestyle to build a relationship with the place that surrounds them, or are unable to make a home in their receiving society. Therefore, throughout the whole project, what the notion of home and being at home, or the redefinition of 'what it means to be rooted in a place' (Malkki, 1992: 26) should be in the contemporary era characterised by a higher-than-ever level of globalisation has played a crucial part in the exploration of my research topic, which fundamentally lies in the development of nuanced ways of visualising the often intimate dynamics between migrants, diaspora members and the places that surround them.

Influential as it is, Malkki's theory is not without its controversies. According to Annika Lems, in many social science fields, there has recently been a 'radical shift from stable, rooted, and mappable identities to fluid, transitory, and migratory phenomena. Rather than being bound by a timeless and unmovable place, people are now thought of as moving continuously through flexible, open-ended, and contested *space*' (2016: 317). This tendency, which researchers like Nicholas Parent terms as 'anti-sedentarism' (2022: 11), is notably built upon and expanded from Malkki's analysis of sedentarist bias and the outdatedness of the 'naturalized representations of territoriality, nationality, and rootedness that underlie the category of "refugee" and conceptualizations of "people on the move"' (Parent, 2022: 1198). It has now been around four decades since anti-sedentarism first came into shape

and there has also been some notable critiques about it, which mainly come from the concern in its lack of 'firm groundedness' (Parent, 2022: 16), thus resulting in the trap for social science researches under the 'mobility turn' to start 'to somewhat fetishizes movement, not realising that this is perhaps an elitist worldview' (Friedman, 2002, cited in Parent, 2022: 16), while 'thoughtfully engaging with neither the facts of widespread immobility, nor its violent form of forced displacement' (Parent, 2022: 16). In other words, this tendency risks 'depolicizing the migration process' and 'overlooking important material manifestations of power' that contribute to the shape of the 'refugee reality' (Parent, 2022: 17). Borrowing Blu's research on North American Indians and how their land right claims are dealt with, as well as his own observations, Parent (2022: 17-18) points out that asylum seekers and other most vulnerable groups of migrants and other minority communities often need to rely on certain kinds of sedentarism and stereotypical imaginary to articulate the legitimacy of their unique identity, personal history and circumstances and argue for their rights. As a response to this reality, Malkki herself also rightfully argues in a later article that 'refugees have now become, precisely, thinkable as a ("problematic") social category in the national order of things' (2002: 356). In other words, refugees are a result of the nation state society, while the intervention in the ongoing refugee crisis in different parts of the world is essentially more of an order-making on the international level within the nation state regimes (Malkki, 2002). Based on her statement in the same article that the 'national order of things depends on disciplining (selectively enabling or preventing) the movement of people across borders' (2002: 353), it is also reasonable to say that anti-sedentarism is still relevant and informative in today's investigation of how can migratory and diasporic experiences be viewed, while the general concept of transnational human flow can also be reconsidered from a non-sedentarist perspective³ without being glorified from an elitist or out-of-touch worldview. My research does so by considering migratory and diasporic experiences as a process of home-making,

³ I acknowledge the fact that many sedentarist representations of migration and diasporic experiences are the reflections of migrants' and diaspora members' struggles in the nation state society. These practices do not intend to defend or promote sedentarist bias and nationalism, which is the reason why, instead of completely replacing sedentarist representations of migration and diaspora, I consider the new framework I propose to be an alternative to it which provides a new perspective to the topic. This is the reason why, unlike the word 'anti-sedentarism' used by Parent for the description of theories from Malkki and other academics who hold similar stances, my thesis uses the term 'non-sedentarist'.

which, based on Boccagni's and other scholars' research, can be defined as a process of humans building a set of meaningful relationships with the place. This will be deliberated in Chapter 3.

1.3 Sedentarist Bias in Discussions of Migration Since the 20th Century

1.3.1 Exile and Homelessness as a Common Destiny

When we review the discussions of migration, diaspora and the people who were involved throughout the 20th century, exile, which has played an essential part in the writings of the likes of renowned postcolonial scholar Edward Said and philosopher Hannah Arendt, is undoubtedly an essential notion that all researchers cannot ignore. However, although the state it describes is valid and truthful for a lot of people worldwide, the way this notion perceives the relationship between migrants and diaspora members, the home and their experience is essentially a reflection of sedentarism. According to John Barbour, the original meaning of 'exile' can be defined as 'banishment, the political action that forces a person to depart from his own country' (2007: 293). Similarly, Said himself also argues that exile is a state that can be most importantly described as an 'unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home' (2000: 173). In general, here Said considers people's native place as their one true home, then suggests that being unable to live in this true home would cause devastating results to people's state of mind and state of life. This is also a main theme in his other discussions on exile.

One of the most significant characteristics of exile according to Edward Said is that it is 'a way of dwelling in space with a constant awareness that one is not at home' (2000: 173), which suggests that migrating from one's native place is an act of uprooting and living as a migrant or diaspora member is a state of rootlessness. Uprootedness, Said says, produces the 'need to reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities' (2000: 494) for migrants as a result of the abrupt upheavals in their lives, and would naturally cause insurmountable and eternal loss. This is indeed the case for many migrants, especially those who are forced to migrate due to political turbulence or war, as mentioned above. It also provides a valuable framework for those who migrate involuntarily and suffer various hardships in their experiences to articulate themselves. However, due to its strong emphasis

on how migration and even its aftermath after generations causes discontinuity in personal identity and a sense of belonging instead of reconstructing them, it is not difficult to observe that exile theory has indeed contributed to the enforcement of sedentarist bias in the discussions of contemporary migrants, diaspora members and their experiences when we include voluntary migration in the discussions. Barbour also suggests that at the centre of exile is an 'implicit travel narrative' (2007: 293). In general, an exile always bears memories of a 'difficult journey away from home' (ibid.), which involves a sense of 'disorientation' and 'out-of-place-ness', or 'feeling lost or at odds with one's immediate environment' (Barbour, 2007: 293-294). At the same time, a person in exile will also always look forward 'to returning someday', which involves a sense of orientation, or 'being pointed toward something distant' (ibid.). This is indeed a valid and truthful perspective when Said used it to reflect on and discuss his personal experiences, which also gained considerable recognition in several generations of 20th-century intellectuals and audiences who often share his experiences of being forced out of where they live as a result of political turbulence and war. However, based on the points made in the previous section, it is firstly reasonable to say that for Said, the home is a static spatial notion; meanwhile, although the reasoning behind his statement and the speeches and activities of contemporary British nationalists are strikingly different, their perspectives towards the relationship between migrants and the home are also largely the same. Therefore, exile can be construed as a reflection of the sedentarist bias, which regards any form of migration experience as the loss of identity, culture and root, and the invasion of the home of others.

According to Peter Fritzsche, since the start of the modern age, exilic experiences have been 'represented and repossessed in new, formative ways' (2001: 1588), while exile has also become the most significant form of displacement of this period. In his famous essay 'Reflections on Exile', Said himself also eloquently argues, 'Our age - with its modern warfare, imperialism and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers - is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration' (2000: 180). T. J. Demos then sums up this perspective, which was not only held by both Said and many other 20th-century exilic philosophers and scholars as 'modernity-as-exile' (2013: 1). When using this perspective as a scope to look at the age, he argues that 'the dislocating ravages and alienating effects' and 'the psychic disequilibrium of traumatic *unheimlichkeit*' (ibid.) are

two of the main characteristics of the age of modernity. Due to the influence of the modernity-as-exile perspective, Pramod Nayar suggests that these theories around exile presuppose that all migrants and even their descendants tend to 'carry their physical, psychological and cultural baggage with them' (2015: 75) regardless of their reasons for migration and their state of life, which explains the basis of Said's writings about exile and those of many other scholars of his generation. These 'burdens' they carry will lead to them experiencing the trauma of dislocation in the nation state society. Personal reflections on this complex legacy of migration from an exilic perspective are also one of the most notable themes of works by many 20th-century artists who have themselves been exiles in at least one period of their lives, from writers like Nuruddin Farah, who is of Somali descent and currently living between the United States and South Africa, to filmmakers such as Atom Egoyan, who is of Armenian descent and currently working and living in Canada. One example of how migrants, diaspora members and their experiences are represented through an exilic eye is Egoyan's 2002 film *Ararat*. In the film, an Armenian-Canadian young man, Raffi, gets involved in the production of a film about the Armenian genocide by Armenian director Edward Saroyan. During the production, he becomes at odds with the Turkish-Canadian actor Ali, when the latter states that the Ottomans may feel that the genocide is necessary in that historical period, and they should all try to move forward and leave history behind. However, despite feeling offended, all sides feel the need to admit that historical facts can indeed be understood and translated from different perspectives based on their own lived experience and the indoctrinations they received, and none of them actually have any concrete proof that the version of history they always believe is true. Here, the identity refraction and memory discontinuity of contemporary Armenians abroad, especially exiles of the Armenian genocide and their descendants, are manifested in the dilemma of how their everlasting traumas from the collective history of their nation and their ethnic group should be expressed in an era when the historical era has long passed, and truth can no longer be rediscovered no matter how the characters are to make their film. However, as Barbour points out, the concept of exile is now 'used interchangeably to refer to people displaced from their original home, even when they leave it willingly' (2007: 293); in other words, all kinds of migratory experiences can now be essentially considered as exile. Similarly, Demos also points out that in the contemporary discussions and visual representations of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences, it is also necessary

for us to move away from the concept of exile with its 'associations with empires, tragic banishments, and harsh penal sentences', and embrace a 'more impartial term with allowances for voluntary movement and self-willed acts of mutability and becoming' (2013: 3). This is where issues with the wide application of this theory in many cultural and creative practices, including visual practices such as narrative cinematic practices, start to rise.

Firstly, although exile would still be relevant in the portrayal of certain types of migratory experiences such as political exile or asylum-seeking, the representation of these experiences through the lens of exile is also often troublesome. Indeed, exile as a framework of thinking allows space for what Robert Spencer describes as the 'open discussion, sensitive scholarship, unprejudiced cultural contact' regarding 'the persecuted, the marginalised, and the dispossessed' which social science researches 'routinely overlook', thus promoting a 'tolerant regard for the equality and diversity of human life' (2010: 390). However, the value of exile in instigating open discussions about the marginalised groups of a nation state society and encouraging contact between different cultural and ethnic groups can often lead to its glorification as a liberating journey of self-reflectivity and a state that can inspire creativity in the arts and literature, and this has also long been regarded as ethically problematic by many academics. According to Said, although numerous poets, artists and other intellectuals have attempted to 'lend dignity' to this notion by talking about its influence on their creative and ideological works, essentially speaking, exile is still a condition 'legislated to deny dignity' and a severe form of 'contemporary political punishment' (2000: 175). Said's statement is especially true for a lot of exiles who escape their homeland for various reasons; exile leaves them lost, invisible, and 'without a tellable story' (Said, 2000: 175-176), at least for a significant amount of time in their life. A life-long exile himself, Said also considered his own life as 'provisional, temporary, precarious and vulnerable' (Barbour, 2007: 300). As he points out, for the millions of exiles who spend years of 'miserable loneliness' away from their origins, of all the issues about exile status, the cruellest is that it denies 'an identity to people' (2000: 176). The life of those who are forced out of their own land, as he puts it eloquently, is a 'life led outside habitual order', 'nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal' but 'never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure' (2000: 186). As a result of this focus on the sufferings of migrants, diaspora members and the abnormality of their experience, exile is reflected in what Ana Elena Puga defines as the

‘migrant melodrama’ (2012: 355), a type of practice which ‘assumes virtuous suffering as the price of inclusion in the nation-state, or even to win rights within the states’, or holds that ‘migrants have not yet suffered enough, or have not suffered in the right way’ when ‘used to deny migrant rights’ (2012: 360).

Moreover, even in the types of experiences that fit the stricter definition of exile, the people who are involved still try to make their exile location their home and achieve different levels of success instead of never being able to have any sense of security or belonging, and this is the second issue with exile. As Demos argues, the ‘modernity-as-exile’ perspective considers dislocation experiences as exclusively sombre or chaotic, ‘as if its identity were metaphysically rooted’ (2013: 3). His statement suggests that the overuse of exile reflects sedentarist bias, which is artistically uncreative and unproductive in providing any new insights to the social, cultural and political discussions about migration, diaspora and the people who are involved in them. Based on the definitions of exile introduced above, it can also be easily seen that the construction of exile and exilic status is fundamentally associated with nationalism (Said, 2000: 176). As explained previously, emphasising a symbolic unity and asserting a sense of belonging is at the core of all nationalist practices (Hage, 1996; Said, 2000: 176), which naturally pushes out people who do not conform to this standard of unity and other communities and groups which are less able to assimilate, most importantly the ethnic and cultural Other on the margins of society, and causes them to become homeless or keep suffering in a lingering sense of precarity. This does not mean that the validity of exile as a way of looking at migratory experiences can be denied. First, this narrative is a direct product of its practical roots, namely the personal experiences and perspectives of a group of scholars who were forced out of their home and homeland due to external forces such as war and political persecution and suffered the agony of exile themselves. Besides, despite the influence of sedentarist bias on its inner logic, the exile theory is also comparably progressive because it is empathetic to exiles instead of holding a nationalistic stance which is racist and xenophobic, and gives these displaced persons an opportunity to articulate their existences and identities. However, after being overused in creative practices, exile essentially regards the vast majority of migratory and diasporic experiences as the loss of home or homeland, culture and identity, which is not very different from sedentarist bias. According to Demos (2013: 3), influential modernity-as-exile

writings have led to a widespread melancholic and chaotic attitude towards all kinds of migratory and diasporic experiences even in the contemporary age of globalisation in both theoretical discussions, artmaking and cinematic production. As Iranian-American film theorist Hamid Naficy (2001) points out, this attitude can be equally frequently found in works from both migrant or diasporic filmmakers and filmmakers without these histories and identities, while homelessness and longing for homecoming make up the themes of a vast majority of films about migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved. In Chapter 2, I will introduce in detail how it is reflected in a wide range of films by filmmakers and directors from different parts of the world.

To demonstrate how migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved in them are represented from an exilic perspective, one particular example this research will specially mention again is narrative films, especially films about the in-betweenness and disorientation of their identities since the 1980s, especially diaspora members who are the descendants of migrants and are of foreign or mixed heritages. As Isolina Ballesteros points out, one of the most significant characteristics of this type of film is that it regards the status of a 'diasporic immigrant' as struggling, wandering and being 'suspended between two identities and two communities' (2015: 207), and this generally puts these migrants or diaspora members into a place of exile within the society they were born into. In terms of the visual representations of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences in London, this struggle for a sense of belonging within the negotiation of their unique existences between different societies and cultures is strongly reflected in Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985). In the film, the bodily harm inflicted on second-generation immigrant Omar by British white man Johnny's far-right gang indicates that Omar is not accepted by the white natives of the far-right organisation, who represent a part of British society that holds strong nationalist beliefs; meanwhile, after Omar and Johnny secretly fall in love, Omar has to hide his relationship with Johnny, because the British South Asian community still views same-sex relationships as taboo (Jaspal and Ferozali, 2020). In general, as a British-Pakistani closeted gay man, Omar is not only stigmatised by the receiving society, but also faces exclusion from the cultural and ethnic group that is considered his root and origin from a nationalist perspective. Omar and Johnny's situation is a natural result of a largely sedentarist, heteronormative society and civilisation. Their relationship (Fig. 1.1),

despite being portrayed in a highly dramatised style, can be considered as a gesture of pushing against this system on an individual level.



Figure 1.1 Johnny licks Omar while hugging, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), Stephen Frears, video still

Regarding the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved from an exilic perspective, one particularly notable thing is that it can be found in many films by a range of filmmakers and directors from different countries and of different backgrounds, and many of whom are, or have been, migrants or diaspora members themselves. Some famous examples include French director Claire Denis, who grew up in Africa; Polish director Paweł Pawlikowski, who lives between the UK and Poland; Scottish scriptwriter and producer Armando Iannucci, who is of Italian ethnicity; French-Tunisian director Abdellatif Kechiche, and British-Tunisian-Cypriot director Metin Hüseyin. Using their works to acknowledge the existence of migrant groups or diasporic communities in society and the hardships they are facing in their everyday life, they often place their characters, especially diasporic characters, as being constantly in a conflicted state as a result of their dual identities, while treating their living space as a space outside any habitual orders and in a state of abnormality, which especially migrants are expected to escape from through giving up one part of their identities. Moreover, there is also a migratory tendency in aesthetic practices of artists like them in various fields, including arts, filmmaking,

photography, cultural theories and environmental studies (Durrant and Lord, 2007: 11), which I consider to be a type of creative exploration one step further from sedentarist bias by recognising the existence of the in-between ground in the middle of people's places of origin and their receiving society. This concept, coined by Dutch artist and academic Mieke Bal (2007: 23), attempts to create a much-needed sense of mobility and fluidity in the art and ideology world in an age of globalisation and movement. However, I would argue that it is actually still a continuation of the sedentarist treatment of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences in cinema, which is also discussed in detail in the next chapter.

1.3.2 The Other and Otherness

As introduced in the first section, sedentarist bias is a direct result of the tradition of considering the home as a fixed, bound and spatial notion in philosophical studies related to space, and this in turn lays the foundation for the nation state society and nationalistic practices. As the product of nation states and nationalism, even today, the Other and Otherness remain two very important concepts where migrants and diaspora members are often described as the Other in their receiving society, while any characteristics that are unique to them are considered Otherness. As French philosopher Michel Foucault puts it, since the 19th century, in terms of how to analyse human history, there has always been a structuralist obsession to 'establish, between elements that could have connected on a temporal axis, an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other – makes them appear, in short, as a sort of configuration' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986: 22). These introductions explain how sedentarist bias makes many researchers use the idea of the Other and Otherness to describe the reality experienced by migrants and diaspora members in their discussions of both migration and diaspora. Foucault's discussions are echoed by British artist David Bate, who coined the term 'alienation of identity' (2020: 12) to explain how the differentiation of the Other and the construction of Otherness gradually become commonplace as a result of the dynamics between people's consciousness and unconsciousness from a Lacanian perspective, also taking shape in social and political discussions because the existence of foreigners and their Otherness indicates that 'we' are often 'fundamentally incomplete, porous, and other to ourselves' (ibid.). The psychology of the alienation of identity and uncertainty about one's own identity can be regarded as one of the reasons why, despite

the development of globalisation, the ongoing mass transnational human flow and the changes in social science discussions, the sedentarist perspective is still shaping the discussions and investigations of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved in contemporary social science research and cultural and creative practices in different ways. Two of the most significant examples of how the Other and Otherness are constructed in these practices, the journey and journeying narrative and the migratory aesthetics are introduced in the next chapter, while narrative cinema is used as an example for the discussions.

On top of that, the alienation of identity also explains the relationship between native and foreign communities within the context of the nation state society, which is often full of tension and hostility. Take British history for example: according to Mark Amodio (2013: 434), the distrust and fear of otherness has been a frequent theme in literature since Anglo-Saxon England, when the threat of being invaded by other ethnic groups or nations posed very real threats to England. Since then, the fear of outsiders and the portrayal of their savagery has always been an important theme in English literature in both direct and indirect ways (*ibid.*). Similar mindsets and reasons can also be found in many other nations. For example, although Americans have ‘historically believed’ that the principles of open immigration and citizenship are universal (Ritter, 2021: 1), the earliest waves of America’s nativist movement were already appearing between 1840 and 1860 because of ‘the rapid influx of roughly 4.2 million European immigrants’ (Ritter, 2021: 2). This reflects how the idea of the Other and Otherness has always been a result of the sedentarist bias and have influenced how people all over the world think about and describe the reality that surrounds different kinds of migrants and diaspora members. Even today, this problematic tendency of pitching the Other against the native due to their Otherness still widely exists in many parts of the world, by people with all kinds of backgrounds who hold different stances regarding relevant topics. In this part, a series of poststructuralist theoretical analyses about the Other and Otherness by various scholars will further reveal how sedentarist bias has been shaping existing visual explorations of the topic.

Poststructuralism is seen as a ‘thorough disruption of our secure sense of meaning in language, of our understanding of our senses and of the arts, and of our understanding of

identity' (Williams, 2014: 4). As Jon Murdoch argues, it 'brings significant opportunities for the further development of relational approaches' because it has a 'concern for space', namely bringing together 'social and natural entities within specific spatial formations' (2006: 3). By investigating the relationship between migrants and diaspora members, the space where their home-making process happens and their identities for the relevant research and visual explorations in the contemporary nation state society, I argue that a poststructuralist theoretical discussion of the Other and Otherness can significantly contribute to the development of my project. As discussed previously, the order of nation state is constructed upon a fixed and bound notion of the home and looking at the home from that perspective is the foundation of sedentarist bias. As French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1994: 82-83) explains, sedentarisation is essentially about establishing stability in a place, while national rootedness is first born out of the memory or the anxiety of a displaced or displaceable population. When migrants cross the border of the space or land of a nation state, they unavoidably bring negative impact to the sedentarisation level of the overall population of that space, thus becoming enemies of the state that, from a nationalist perspective, should be alienated. As a result of this alienation process that forms the basis of nation state society, which is often led by government and authorities, both migrants' and diaspora members' presence is often heavily jeopardised and scrutinised, and this can be regarded as the fundamental reason behind the persistence of sedentarist bias in relevant discussions and representation practices. Similar points are also deliberated in Kristeva's discussions on the experience of the Other in modern society, which clarify how and why people who are considered foreigners from a nationalist perspective are jeopardised and scrutinised from different aspects. As she (1991: 20) points out in her famous book *Strangers to Ourselves*, in the nation state society where the subjects of almost every country live in the anxiety of being invaded by others, it is only natural that the existence of migrants and diaspora members in the receiving society raises questions in the natives' minds: with the presence of migrants and diaspora members among them, are they really at home? Are they really who they think they are? Is it possible that at some point in the future, the foreigners who came to the society from other parts of the world will become masters of the land that does not belong to them? When these questions escalate to a certain degree, they ultimately provoke regressive and protectionist rage towards the Other (ibid.), which can find its influence in Bate's idea introduced before. Kristeva's highly

concise arguments form an explanation of why and how sedentarist bias and the distinction between the native and the Other come into being in a nation state society context; in addition, they also explain why nationalism is often characterised by slogans like '[Name of social/ethnic group], go home' (Malkki, 1995: 509), or even violent actions like mass deportation or eviction, or even ethnic conflicts, racial wars, and genocide (Hage, 1996). Similar observations can also be found in Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's critiques. According to him, the anxiety towards the Other can be defined as a mindset which thinks 'There are always too many of them', or any migrants and diaspora members, and there are 'never enough of us' (2004: 34), or natives, because from a nationalist perspective, the existence of the natives will always be threatened by foreigners.

Since the end of the 20th century, the alienation of the Other and the focus on their Otherness has been taking another form. According to Ihab Saloul (2007: 111), the history of (de)colonialisation, liberation movements and global diasporas throughout the 20th century has destabilised the idea of homogeneous identity, which is the basis of all nationalist practices and nation states. From that time, debates over these topics have moved ever forward. As Vietnamese writer Trinh T. Minh Ha observes, 'the theorization of racial and sexual otherness has become ... a legitimate area of investigation' (1991: 186) both theoretically and academically. However, the perceptions of migration as the abandonment of one's own homes, migrants as invaders who themselves are homeless and diaspora members who are not pure enough to be regarded as actual members of a nation state recognised under sedentarism and nationalism have persisted in various cultural and visual practices about relevant topics up until now; meanwhile, as the Other of their society, migrants and diaspora members are still regarded as homeless, placeless and a disruptive force to the receiving society which should only exist outside the receiving society's habitual orders. This tradition is continually reflected in the visual representations of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences, which will also be deliberated in the discussions of the journey and journeying narrative and migratory aesthetics in the next chapter.

As Trinh also points out, since the last few decades of the 20th century, this mixture of different signals for both critical discussions and creative practices of minority ethnic groups and non-West, non-white art and culture has created a new era with a situation which is

both 'very exciting and extremely alarming' (1991: 185) for everyone who works on the topic and members of the Other. Meanwhile, for the Other themselves, the situation allows them to enjoy the benefit of being noticed and studied, while at the same time reminding them of their status as 'foreign workers', 'migrants' or 'permanent sojourners' (Trinh, 1991: 186). Trinh's discussions form a very simple but powerful summary of how migrant and diaspora members as an Other become both visible and invisible in a new era when they are not outright ignored or shunned by the system of the nation state society: they have indeed become highly visible in the academic world, films and many other platforms, with a considerable amount of research and creative interest being focused on them; however, these attentions paid to the Other are often fixated on certain premade tags related to their ethnic background and mother culture, and force them to accept their designated Otherness (Trinh, 1991: 186), as well as their designated inability to make a home in the receiving society. This can be viewed as what Demos terms the 'gradual institutionalization of multiculturalism' (2013: 9), a 'paternalistic, top-down solution to the "problems" of minorities ... a new way forward to a politics of "recognition" and "authenticity"' (Mohanty, 1989, cited in Demos, 2013: 10); due to their lack of authenticity, migrants and diaspora members will always be in the position of the Other in the societies they live in, and will never actually gain the recognition of the nation state system. If we examine these scholars' statements from a poststructuralist context, it can be seen that they are talking about the main implications of the Other and Otherness here: these notions essentially consider it impossible for migrants and diaspora members to get used to and be familiar with the receiving society, and presumes that they will never feel comfortable about the receiving society (Trinh, 1991: 194), which is the reason why they are often portrayed as an Other which is homeless and outside the habitual order of the receiving societies in many existing cultural and visual practices about relevant topics. However, although the visual art practices that reflect these notions have often made critical and intimate investigations of the hardship experienced by them, these practices have seldom touched the fundamental reason behind their homeless status, that under a nation state context, they are always deprived of the opportunity to actually get to know the environment that surrounds them or to feel at home and make a home for themselves (ibid.).

In general, the notions of the Other and Otherness confine both migrant groups and diasporic communities within certain designated spots, either outside the receiving society's habitual order or back at the places where they are originally from. Based on what researcher Claudette Lauzon says about home in contemporary visual arts, culturally and ideologically speaking, the persistence of the Other and Otherness in discussions and representations of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved can be regarded as the result of a 'culture of insecurity' in the West (2017: 62), which was developed from the quest for an 'existential exile' (2017: 29) in modern art from the early 20th century and took shape as a result of the Cold War (2017: 61-62). Combining these discussions and the static perception of the home introduced previously, the protection and fortification of the home can be regarded as an important site to reflect our anxiety about belonging on a personal level (Long, 2013; Lauzon, 2017: 68). As explained previously, on a national level, this sense of insecurity is reflected in what is pointed out by Hage (1996), that nationalist practices and the very existence of nation states are both essentially about the enhancement of a symbolised unity, which may be threatened by the Other; similarly, in Bauman's opinion, this anxiety of belonging and obsession about the home leads to the distinction between 'us' and 'them', and points towards the necessity of protecting 'us' against 'them' (2004: 34) in a nation state society context. This anxiety about enforcing a symbolic unity also shaped how the idea of the home has been perceived under a sedentarist perspective: according to Lauzon (2017: 31-32), as a result of protectionism, nationalism and the fear and hatred towards foreigners and people from different cultural and ethnic groups behind the geopolitical development of the world since the beginning of the 20th century, it makes the home into a symbol of oppression for a large chunk of the population in society such as women and migrants, and this attitude is also reflected in the art world. Modern and contemporary Western art has, for a considerable period, been encouraging new models for visualising the tendency towards departing from the home and domesticity or turning from rootedness to rootlessness (ibid.). One of the creative approaches that reflect this tendency of 'conceptual nomadism'⁴ (Lauzon, 2017: 31) is migratory aesthetics, which will be analysed in detail in Chapter 2. Indeed, conceptual nomadism has undoubtedly undermined nationalism and xenophobia to a certain extent by

⁴ Not to be confused with the 'artistic nomadism' introduced in Chapter 3.

ridding many of the restrictive and oppressive characteristics of the home and the nation. However, by rejecting home and domesticity in favour of a sense of borderlessness and universalness (Lauzon, 2017: 31-32), it has also unconsciously strengthened the hostility towards migrants and diaspora members in cultural and visual practices to date by indicating that there is no way for them to make a home for themselves.

From the explanations and discussions in this chapter, it can be seen that I recognise the fact that the frameworks that reflect sedentarist bias in one way or another, such as migration as exile and migrants (and their descendants of diaspora members) as the Other, are the product of certain historical contexts and relevant visual representations which are generally realistic, valid and meaningful as the product of the unique perspectives of their creators and the particular eras they are from. However, I am now using this project to suggest a new perspective towards the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved in them because what they tell the audience is not, and should not be, the only version of these stories.

Chapter 2: Sedentarist Narratives in Contemporary Visual Representations: Take Cinematic Practices for Example

2.1 Narrative as a Human Practice: Talking about Narrative Cinema

Despite the developments in social science discussions about migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who have been involved in them since the 1990s, narratives of sedentarist nature are still common in contemporary cultural and visual practices⁵. In this chapter, I will deliberate on how the relevant perceptions of displacement introduced in the previous chapter have been reflected and challenged in contemporary cultural and visual practices such as narrative cinematic practices, including fiction films and narrative documentaries, through their storytelling.

As an important ideological tendency in perceiving the issues around transnational human flow and how it shapes the identity of the people involved, sedentarist bias is widely reflected in different kinds of cultural and visual practices as a result of the nature of storytelling. As Caracciolo points out, narrative is ‘a human practice that reflects human beliefs, values, and even the cognitive and physical makeup of our species’ (2020: 45); on the other hand, as ‘inherently social animals’, humans also tend to ‘use stories to model everyday interactions among human subjects’ (ibid.). Similarly, speaking from the field of cognitive narratology, David Herman also argues that narrative practices such as films can be considered as ‘a means for making sense of experience’ and ‘a resource for structuring and comprehending the world’ (2009: 1). In the context of my project, these discussions indicate that how the relevant stories are told is as important as the act of telling these stories itself; in other words, the approaches of visually telling the stories and conveying meanings are as important as the content of stories and meanings themselves. When investigating narrative practices from a psychological perspective, Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley state that, as an important type of narrative practice, essentially speaking, all narrative fiction is about the ‘autonomous intentional agents and their interactions’ (2008: 174). Moreover, they also state that narrative fictions are a ‘simulation of selves in the social world’ instead of ‘flawed empirical accounts’, which means that they ‘function to abstract

⁵ For example, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, the intense media propaganda from the Vote Leave campaign and the targeting of migrants by certain politicians have surely left a significant impact.

social information so that it can be better understood, generalised to other circumstances, and acted upon' (2008: 173). Based on the arguments of these scholars, Caracciolo also points out that narrative is 'geared toward the representation of intersubjective experience—the complex blend of cultural knowledge and cognitive skills that constitutes our engagement with other subjects' (2020: 45). In the contemporary age when the order of the nation state society has been increasingly disrupted by the development of globalisation and the increase in transnational human movement, it has become undoubtedly possible for migrants and people with a migratory lineage to make a home in their receiving society or even maintain homes across different locations at the same time. Therefore, it is also both possible and necessary for us to look beyond this framework for the visual representation of both migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved in them.

Indeed, as renowned Black-British filmmaker John Akomfrah says, 'When you valorise and overcelebrate the in-between, the interstices, you have to realise that it has dark sides and the implications are not always necessarily productive ones for people who have to inhabit that space on a daily basis' (2007, cited in Malik, 2010: 134), and reflecting on the 'dark sides' of this reality is what many films with a sedentarist stance attempt to achieve. However, as 'critiques of multiculturalism become more intense in the United Kingdom and across the rest of Europe', the framework's overt focus on the 'underbelly of the hybrid, transcultural, diasporic experience' (Malik, 2010: 134) would push relevant visual representation practices into a melodramatic storytelling tradition. The migrant melodrama is obsessed with the sufferings of the displaced people and the chaotic, disruptive and dark side of their experiences (Puga, 2012), which is reflected in many films that will be analysed in this chapter, such as British director Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002). Like the residents of the Baltic Hotel in the film, a lot of migratory characters are also homeless and placeless, namely without a proper place to live permanently in the urban space and the receiving society's habitual order partly due to the intention to reveal the dark sides of migration. The tendency has the potential to influence the audience's perceptions of migrants and their experience negatively, while homelessness is seen as a crucial link between them and criminality. This is why, despite that the use of these narratives is often justified and the works that use them frequently intend to reflect reality and call attention

to the injustices in migratory and diasporic people's lives, they are also causing negative impacts including the perception that people do not have any links or dynamics with the material space they live in. These representations are very different from the development of social theories on migration and diaspora since the 1990s, which will be introduced in the next chapter.

As can be shown from the examples above, this perspective is most significantly reflected in films about migrants. However, the sense of homelessness and placelessness is not only reflected in existing visual representations related to different types of displacement experiences, but also shared by those about diaspora members, or people who are born and raised in a society but are from an ethnic group which originates from another part of the world. As introduced in the beginning, despite their legal status as full members of a nation state, they are still often considered the Other of a certain society due to their unique cultural and ethnic heritages. One of the most significant types of visual representations that reflect this is again narrative films, especially films about diasporic youths. Take European cinema for example. As Daniela Berghahn (2010: 235) points out, communities like the Asian and Black communities in Britain, Turkish in Germany and North African in France have all been featured in films about young people's identity struggles and a sense of being lost growing up in European countries as a diaspora member, as well as the intergenerational cultural conflicts that happen within different generations of their families, such as Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Many of the characters also have bad endings, like inner-London Black boy Ricky in British director Saul Dibb's 2004 film *Bullet Boy*, who gets killed in gang violence. The prevalence of this type of storytelling in cinematic practices is also a result of regarding diaspora members as what Kristeva (1991) terms 'foreigners' or 'strangers' instead of recognising them as an integral part of society, which puts diaspora members in a precarious place that render them more powerless than those who are not from a migratory and diasporic background, and excluded them from establishing strong and meaningful relationships with the space within the receiving society.

To sum up, the conflicts between the home-making efforts of migrants, diaspora members and the often-harsh realities they face in the nation state societies are the result of how nation state societies have systematically responded to the development of globalisation

and these people's existence. Although the stories are not always accurate in an empirical sense and are often prejudiced, the existing sedentarist perspective can also be considered as a simulation of how the displacement experience of different individuals in certain social contexts and how the issue of transnational human flow in the nation state society is understood and perceived by the creators and many members of the public. In the rapid globalisation since the end of the 20th century, more and more people have become 'displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases' (Malkki, 1992: 24), while the ideas of home and identity are increasingly considered as 'mobile, and often deterritorialised, intersections over space and time' (Blunt, 2005, cited in Arnold, 2016: 160). How can visual representations that can present all kinds of migratory and diasporic experiences in a new and more positive light without ignoring the downside and hardships in them, reflecting the actual lived experiences of different migrants and diaspora members and exploring the perception and imagery of their existences both by themselves and by people who have never been displaced and do not come from this type of background. Due to their significant narrative nature, fiction films and documentaries have been taken as the main case study type in this chapter. Based on the discussions about the role of narrative in the representation of intersubjective experience introduced above, my discussion will mainly focus on the narrative side of the films discussed instead of their sound and visuals.

2.2 The Journey and Journeying Narrative

2.2.1 Introduction

In general, sedentarist bias suggests that foreigners who live in a society other than their place of origin will, and should all finally return to where they come from at some point in the future. It considers the return of all foreigners the only way to preserve the homogeneity, purity and habitual order of nation states. As a result, migratory experience is frequently regarded as a journey, while the action of moving away from one's place of origin, regardless of the reason and the rationale, is an act of journeying. This narrative has also been used in many existing cinematic practices focusing on migration and migrants. It is also reflected in many other films about diaspora experience and diasporic people which focus on the negotiation of their selves between two cultures. Relevant narrative cinematic

practices from all over the world, including the ones about London have reflected this tendency in one way or another. As will be investigated in this chapter, the films that use this narrative are usually not supportive of sedentarist bias itself, but reflections of the reality faced by many migratory and diasporic people in the nation state society which is built on it, as well as nationalism and xenophobia. One of the most in-depth discussions on how the journey narrative influences relevant cinematic practices comes from renowned Iranian-American film theorist Hamid Naficy. Although he wrote his book *An Accented Cinema* more than two decades ago and there have been a lot more recent researchers who have made informative investigations into this field, I still choose to begin my research from Naficy's discussions because I found his concept of 'journey' and 'journeying' and his discussions about them to be highly relevant and useful.

Borrowing from the discussions of Janis Stout (1983: 3, cited in Naficy, 2001: 222), Naficy argues that the literary tradition of the United States, which has a strong focus on the portrayal of journeys and travelling, is strongly reflected in American cinema in genres such as Westerns and road movies (Naficy, 2001: 222). Since these genres and the contemporary migratory and diasporic cinema both place focus on people who move from their origins to other locations, he eventually extends the scope of this narrative and puts it under the highly globalised and contemporary perspective of 'accented cinema' (ibid.) which was prevalent in the early part of the millennium. Naficy's notion of accented cinema is a significant concept used firstly to study films about migrants, displaced persons and diasporic communities made by filmmakers and artists who are also from these backgrounds. As he points out, the globalisation of capital and media globalises the 'local' by providing the audience with the opportunity to challenge their 'received notions of national culture and identity, national cinema and genre, authorial vision and style, and film reception and ethnography' (2001: 8, 222). Meanwhile, the 'fragmentation of nation states' (Naficy, 2001: 10) and the 'massive scattering of people' (2001: 222) also transform the meaning of 'global' at the same time by creating a 'new and critical imagination in the global media' (2001: 8). He then suggests that a cinema which is both 'of exile' and 'in exile' can be an important part of this 'new and critical imagination' (ibid.), which is considered by sociologist Arjun Appadurai (1996: 31, cited in Naficy, 2001: 8) to be of great significance in the construction of a new, possibly less totalised global order, and this is what he finally

terms 'accented cinema' and 'exilic and diasporic filmmaking' (Naficy, 2001). Moreover, the exilic and diasporic cinematic practices within accented cinema, which are defined as cinematic works created by exilic and diasporic filmmakers and are focused on displaced persons and experiences of displacement, are also 'in constant contact with compatriot communities' and 'poised at the intersection and in the interstices of other cultures' (Naficy, 2001: 8, 222). Therefore, it can be said that these works already naturally contain a 'deterritorializing' and a 'reterritorializing' journey and an activity of 'journeying' by nature (Naficy, 2001: 222). They are not only portraying border-crossing in the physical and geographical sense through their cinematic narratives, but also the crossing of 'psychological, metaphorical, social and cultural' (ibid.) borders. However, the border-crossing here actually takes place in a sense that is very different from the approach that would be incorporated in the new perspective this project develops. This is because unlike their claim of territory in a creative sense, these practices often consider being a migrant or the descendant of migrants as homelessness and rootlessness, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

Naficy divides the filmmakers of accented cinema into three categories: exilic filmmakers, like Canadian-Armenian filmmaker Atom Egoyan; diasporic filmmakers, like British-Indian filmmaker Gurinder Chadha; and postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmakers who are from the postcolonial era since the 1960s and maintain a considerable connection with their home country, like Chinese-American filmmaker Wayne Wang (Naficy, 2001: 10-17). The focus of Naficy's work is to highlight the creative practices of members of these particular groups, and this work is tremendously valuable in shedding light on how the accented filmmakers' works can be stylised, and how they form an interstitial space 'of social formations and cinematic practices' (Naficy, 2001: 21), thus bringing what used to be at the margin of the society and visible to the majority into the centre of the stage. Based on my own research, I have also found that his insightful discussions not only suit the works of filmmakers who are covered in the original context of accented cinema as introduced above, but also apply to the works of filmmakers who work with the topic while not being displaced or marginalised themselves in any form due to their ethnicity, cultural background, identity or accents, such as British director Stephen Frears. Although his discussions are quite dated in terms of the time they were produced, I consider them to be even more relevant in

today's world when xenophobia, nationalism and tension between nations are on a rapid rise, and one of the concepts that I found useful is the 'journeying, border crossing and identity crossing' (Naficy, 2001: 222) narrative. The importance of this narrative in the whole migrant and diasporic cinema has also been echoed by other more recent scholars. According to Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, in contemporary Europe, different types of journeys and border crossings, including 'journeys of quest', "'homebound" journeys' and 'the genre of the road movie' all 'occupy a privileged position in migrant and diasporic cinema' (2010: 31).

According to Stout (1983, cited in Naficy, 2001: 222), depending on their motivations, migratory journeys can be divided into different forms including exploration, pilgrimage, escape, emigration and return, while the latter three types make up the majority of journeys in cinematic stories related to these topics. Naficy further explains that these three major types of cinematic journeys of human flow are based on how they interpret the relationship between characters who are migrant or diaspora members and their homeland or origins: the first is the 'outward journey', or the escape, which is characterised by the seeking and founding of a home different from the characters' origin; the 'journey of quest', or the emigration, a type of homeless wandering which is mainly characterised by an overwhelming sense of 'lostness'; and the third is the 'inward journey' of homecoming or returning, in which characters often choose to go back to their origin with the hope of getting rid of the sense of lostness they cannot avoid outside their homeland (2001: 223). I found all these three types of cinematic transnational journeys are similar in how they perceive the relationship between migratory and diasporic characters and their homes: firstly, they all consider these characters' places of origin as their one and only home, which reflects that they are all essentially sedentarist; secondly, they all suggest that their unique identity as migrants or diaspora members and migratory/hybrid lifestyle is the main reason why the characters lose touch with their geographic origins and fall into a life of struggle, disorientation and homelessness; lastly, films with all three journeys all often show them being defeated by or leaving their receiving society towards the end of the film. Many examples will be introduced later in this chapter.

Of these three types, the journey of seeking and finding a home is the only one that does not regularly consider the migratory journey as an imminent failure. However, the only type of stories that this mode tends to be associated with is the 'triumphalist, progressive, and melioristic' (Naficy, 2001: 223-224) westward movement and the Western film genre in the United States. Apart from Westerns, there are very few other films which apply this highly optimistic narrative. For example, a small number of film depicts African-Americans' south-to-north journey towards industrial civilisations, freedom and life opportunities which are not available to them in the South since the American Civil War, such as Black-American director Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) (Naficy, 2001: 224), which charts the journey of three generations of Black women in the Peasant family from the American South to the North. There are also a limited number of road films which romanticise the wandering lifestyle, like Chinese-American director Chloé Zhao's *Nomadland* (2020), where the journeys of homelessness produce salvation, spiritual freedom and self-discovery. However, based on my discussions from the previous chapter, this is once again a reflection of how exile and homelessness are romanticised into a spiritual journey. Apart from these, the journeys seldom make either the character's own life or the general situation in both the sending society and receiving society completely better than before (Naficy, 2001: 223-237). One strong example of this predicament is Japanese director Kei Kumai's *Sandakan No. 8* (1974), a film that reflects on how Japan's militant actions in East and Southeast Asia during World War II, an event that led millions all over the world to migrate (Fisher, 2013: 107-109), has left a long-lasting traumatising impact on civilians. In the film, an old woman Osaki tells her life story to historian Keiko Mitani: as a teenage girl, Osaki is tricked into travelling to Sandakan, Borneo after being told that she can become a maid and make money, which can be considered as a form of home-seeking, but is then quickly forced into prostitution in a brothel called Sandakan No. 8. After that, she constantly her home-seeking in different locations, but all in vain. Osaki eventually makes her home-coming journey back to Japan, but still cannot find an actual home to settle down because despite accepting her money, her remaining family members consider her an embarrassment. After the interview, on a visit to the cemetery for many other Japanese sex slaves who are buried in Sandakan, Keiko realises that they all choose to turn the back of their tombstones to Japan (Fig. 2.1). This is a symbol that although Sandakan is not their home, Japan is also not their home, and, like Osaki, the lives of these women have been a journey of homelessness. Even in the more

uplifting films which are related to home-coming and with less peculiar contexts, such as Hong Kong director Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile* (1990), the main character Cheung Hueyin's home-coming journey of learning to accept her heritage and reconnecting with her family is only the start of reconciliation. There is still a long way ahead until all personal, socio-political and historical issues in her life as a long-term migrant of mixed heritage can be resolved. In general, this type of representational practice reflects the tendency to overuse Said's notion of exile, as introduced in the last chapter, which will always consider any form of migratory or diasporic experience as an essentially sad state which entails the feelings of disorientation, lost, homelessness and placelessness.



Figure 2.1 Keiko prays at the tombs of Japanese sex slaves, *Sandakan No. 8* (1974), Kei Kumai, video still

The notion of exile also shapes the journey of homecoming, which is the reason why Naficy observes that 'home and travel, placement and displacement are always intertwined' (2001: 229) in the constructions of cinematic migratory experiences in existing narrative cinematic works: in other words, being put into exile or displacement will necessarily stir up longings for home and the desire to go home in the displaced people (Barbour, 2007). One of the

most extraordinary examples is Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (Nostalgia) (1983). In the film, while travelling through Italy, Russian poet Gorchakov meets a strange local man named Domenico and feels attracted to him. The latter asks him to cross the waters of a mineral fountain with a candle flame, then sets himself aflame after giving a speech to the locals, calling for them to return to a simpler way of life and treat each other like brothers and sisters. Gorchakov completes Domenico's request and dies outside Russia. On the first look, this ending seems to be the opposite of a returning journey to one's homeland. However, the returning from exile is not simply going back to their physical home country. Meanwhile, nostalgia, according to Stephan Schmidt, is a desire to 'reinforce one's identity as "in place"' (2016: 32), as opposed to out-of-place or alien. Following this rationale, when Gorchakov collapses after finishing Domenico's last request, that can be regarded as a moment of finding orientation and destination, building a spiritual connection with other soul(s), and ceasing to be lost and self-absorbed. Nostalgia stops at that moment, and in that way, the film can be considered an ultimate homecoming journey.

2.2.2 The Journey of Homelessness

In an era characterised by the emergence of global migration – that is, the phenomenon that 'large numbers of people now move in all directions' (Spickard, 2011: 456), and which came into being during the last forty years, largely the same period as the emergence and development of global migration. People who participated in global migration are called global migrants by scholars like Guha and Amine, and the dark side of their migratory experiences has been featured frequently in contemporary narrative cinematic practices. In general, since there exists a strong clash between the sharp increase of globalisation and tightening regulations of human flow from nation states worldwide, the paradox here will naturally enhance the division between the natives or self-proclaimed natives of a society and its migratory and diasporic members, making the former perceive the latter as threats while making more of the latter place themselves as the victim or in an inferior position. In such a context, filmmakers also tend to portray the existence of global migrants and all kinds of migrant groups and diasporic communities as marginalised, muted, and invisible in contemporary global cities, such as contemporary London in *Dirty Pretty Things*, which will be analysed in detail in the next section. This is why I consider the journey of homelessness to be the most important in the representation of contemporary migratory and diasporic

experiences and the people involved in these experiences among all kinds of journey narratives.

As Naficy (2001: 225) points out, the story of nomads is the most straightforward journey of the homeless or wandering outside the homeland/origin. Further to his definition, I argue that this type can also include the story of those who live a rootless lifestyle, and might never be regarded as fully belonging to any specific society (Naficy, 2001: 226). One example of this is British-Chinese filmmaker Xiaolu Guo's *She, a Chinese* (2002), in which the rose-tinted dreams and hopes of the main character, a young Chinese woman named Li Mei, gradually get crushed by brutal reality. In this film, Mei is attracted to London due to its charm and opportunities, but must rely on a sham marriage with an elderly British man, Mr Hunt, to stay there, and then develops an affair with Mr Rachid, the local takeaway owner. After Mr Rachid gets her pregnant and then goes back to his own country, Mei is left to face a future full of uncertainty all by herself. This type of story can also be found in films about others who live outside the habitual order of their receiving societies, such as refugees and international criminals, like Canadian David Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* (2007) and the BBC crime drama series *McMafia* (2018) created by Hossein Amini and James Watkins. Other homelessness journeys are more transformative. The characters tend to choose to go on their journeys with a certain target in mind, but they lose their target through certain incidents and find they have nowhere to return to (Naficy, 2001: 2005). A representative of this journey format is *Sandakan No. 8*, as introduced previously. Greek director Theo Angelopoulos's *Topio stin Omichli* (Landscape in the Mist) (1988), which is about young Greek siblings, Voula and Alexandros's journey to Germany to seek out their father, is another example. At the end of the film, with no knowledge of either German society or its language, they do not know where their father is or whether he actually exists or not, and are left to fend for themselves in a strange country (Fig. 2.2).



Figure 2.2 An embodiment of Voula and Alexandros's future: They are left to fend for themselves in a strange land and face great uncertainty, but still have hope and will live on, *Topio stin Omichli* (1988), Theo Angelopoulos, video still

The journey of homelessness is firstly a type of deterritorialisation which naturally moves beyond the restrictions and indoctrinations of nationalism. However, at the same time, this deterritorialisation has also prompted many to 'seek the "security of dogma"' (Robinson, 1994: xvi, cited in Naficy, 2001: 188) by unconsciously showing their preference for the 'closed form' of representation of social systems, continuing the obsession with 'sites of confinement' and 'narratives of panic and pursuit', and placing emphasis on the 'discontinuity and rupture' that the activity of moving away from their own places of origin can bring to their lives and identities in both their origins and receiving societies (Naficy, 2001: 188). As Naficy suggests, although filmmakers attempt to use it to 'embody the exiles' protest against the hostile social conditions in which they find themselves' (2001: 190), this approach reflects a 'collective siege' (ibid.) mentality which envisages the characters being persecuted unjustly by reality (Burgin, 1994: 232, cited in Naficy, 2001: 190).

2.2.3 People in the Homeless Journey: Two Stereotypes

What Naficy terms as the collective siege mentality comes from the fact that ‘a presentable determination of locality, the topos of territory, national soil, city’ (Derrida, 1994, cited in Bhabha, 1999: ix) has been heavily disturbed by media and technology in the contemporary era. Under this context, the ‘national rootedness in the West’, with its roots in ‘the memory and anxiety of a displaced – or displaceable - population’ (Bhabha, 1999: x), has become prominent and clearer than ever (ibid.). Therefore, even in their large numbers and diverse compositions, contemporary migratory and diasporic people are still frequently perceived in a negative light because they are considered a destabilising force of the nation state society. Bhabha argues that these people are most frequently perceived through two stereotypes as either being ‘premodern’ or ‘terroristic’, which are rooted in the mindset that ‘nationalist awareness and authority has been brutally asserted on the principle of the dispensable and displaceable presence of “others”’ (ibid.).

In this section, I will investigate how Bhabha’s two stereotypes have been reflected in existing visual representations. Two films about global migrants in the last twenty years or so, documentary and performance art project *Your Day is My Night* (2013) by American artist Lynne Sachs and thriller film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) by British director Stephen Frears, will be used as my case studies.

2.2.3.1 The Pre-Modern

According to Bhabha, the ‘pre-modern’ type of the Other is considered ‘dispensable’ and ‘undeserving of nationhood’ (1999: x). The main reason why they are considered this way is an ethnocentric belief (Higgins et al. 2009), which considers them as less able to contribute to the economic development of the receiving society and less able to integrate; meanwhile, a typical pre-modern Other is from a cultural background or an ethnic group which is less developed than that of the receiving society. In short, this type of people is considered as not having the necessary characteristics valued by the language of national belonging, what Manolis Pratsinakis defines as the ‘nationally valued social and cultural preferences and behaviour’ (2018: 14), especially those from a non-Western cultural and ethnic background. For them, domestic spaces act as an embodiment of their physically confined lifestyle and

isolated and alienated social status after arriving at the more developed and modernised (also often Western) receiving society.

An example of the cinematic representation of 'pre-modern' type of migratory or diasporic people is American artist Lynne Sachs's experimental documentary *Your Day is My Night* (2013). In this project, the artist incorporates seven Chinese migrants aged 58 to 78 to 'play' themselves in the film through a combination of communicational approaches that she defines as 'autobiographical monologues, verité conversations, and theatrical movement pieces' (Sachs, no date: n.p.). The participants are invited to talk about various subjects which brought them to America, to New York and to the space they live their everyday life in, but are considered to be 'not often documented' by the artist in the form of monologues and conversations (ibid.). These subjects include the historical and political upheavals they experienced in China, their experiences of moving from China to America to live on a long-term basis which often involves unimaginable loneliness and hardship, their relationship with China and their families back there, and their everyday situations in America. Here, although New York is the place they want to be and where they are settled, this status still does not make the city a home for them, and they are on a homeless journey all the time despite all their attempts to build a sense of being settled around them. All the dialogues and movement pieces are almost completely set in a crowded shift-bed apartment in New York Chinatown with a lot of bunk beds crammed into one small room, which is shared by Chinese immigrants of different personal backgrounds (Fig. 2.3). A shift-bed is a type of accommodation in which occupants share beds with other random people and take turns to sleep in the bed and live their everyday life on different time schedules, hence the project title 'Your Day is My Night'.



Figure 2.3 Chinese immigrants crammed in the shift-bed apartment, *Your Day is My Night* (2013), Lynne Sachs, video still

Throughout the whole film, the everyday life of the residents in this shift-bed apartment is thoroughly and almost gently observed, but from what the audience can see, everything in their life mainly happens in the residence and around New York Chinatown, and the links between them and the New York urban space is lacking. This further confirms that the film put its characters under the definition of pre-modern Other. For characters like these, their home is different from the definition of the home in a traditional Western discourse, which defines home as a living space that can provide its inhabitants with comfort, a sense of belonging and security (Long, 2013). As the place where humans rest their bodies, and safeguard themselves before the activities of the following day, a bed can be regarded as a central part of a home. In the words of Sachs herself, the bed is also an 'extension of the earth', which 'takes on the shape of our bodies' and allows us to 'leave our mark for posterity' (no date: n.p.), and ultimately provides the human who sleeps on them with a sense of homeliness. However, as a space where complete strangers are crammed together and mix their shapes and marks, the apartment cannot entirely fulfil any of the basic purposes of the home. The shift-bed apartment, which is not even able to provide each of its residents with a bed of their own, is not only deficient in intimacy, privacy and security, but also highly unstable and not nurturing as the physical structure of the home for the shift-bed dwellers. In general, they are more of a 'borrowed place to sleep' (ibid.) than a

home. In the project, they act as a 'stage' (ibid.) for the Chinese migrants who are the Other of the American society to perform their personal and collective experiences and histories which are unimaginable to the general audience who are often natives of their own societies including America, and usually non-Chinese speakers with little to no knowledge about China and Chinese migration and diaspora. According to Ronald Green, this crowded apartment environment is a 'bridge' which leads the audience through the 'well-hidden within-ness' (2014: 17) of being hidden in one of the most crowded neighbourhoods of one of the most crowded cities in the world, takes a peek into the enclosed structure of the characters' lives and ultimately reaches this part of the Chinese-American community which is unknown to many. Even the Puerto Rican flatmate, who is also presented in the film is there to provide another pair of eyes to look at the shift-bedders from the perspective of an outsider, which affirms the pervading their Otherness and the alienated status of their life (ibid.), as well as repetitively emphasises their dysconnectivity to the general American society and their pre-modern status.

2.2.3.2 The Terroristic

The 'terroristic' Other is considered 'unworthy of a national home' (1999: x). The word terroristic here is more of an indicator that they disrupt nation states' border regulation and habitual order instead of committing terroristic activities. If we connect Bhabha's definition with Guha's (2015: 163) discussion about global migration, it can be found that rather than actual terrorists, this type of the Other more often includes people such as undocumented migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and criminals who flow to super-diverse and opportunity-rich global cities like London through unauthorised and unregulated border-crossing activities for different reasons including seeking economic and career opportunities, escaping persecution and applying for asylum to settle in the global city and pursue a safer or less impoverished life. They almost always need to overcome great difficulties only to get absorbed by the receiving global city's underworld, where one type of danger replaces another, and poverty continues. These people are put under the label most importantly because they pose uncertainty to a series of questions that are related to the foundation of nation states, most importantly what Maria Montoya refers to as the 'very meaning of the word "community"' (2011: 348), such as issues like who can be considered a member of a

certain community and who cannot, as well as who is allowed to define community membership and what standards should be used.

In relevant cinematic practices, while these 'terroristic' Other are regarded as posing uncertainty to the anxiety of belonging in the contemporary globalising Western world, they are at the same time constrained to one area of the global cities and deemed not to exist by the majority of the society (Guha, 2015: 126-162). The reason behind this perspective can be found in Kristeva's statements. As she (1991: 96) argues, when the constructions of social groups and legislation are defied, the externality represented by foreigners will not exist. Therefore, the terroristic Other is inevitably considered not having access to the opportunity of assimilation, or to say turning from 'outsiders' to 'insiders' (ibid.). It is in such a way that they become threats or even enemies to the order of 'national peoples' (Bhabha, 1999: x), and are regarded as 'inherently criminal' (Hiatt, 2007: n.p.), or significantly increase crime rates of the receiving society (Higgins et al. 2010). The labels of these people come from the power of national borders, which, as argued by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, is to 'establish multiple points of control along key lines and geographies of wealth and power' as a medium of inclusion that 'select and filter people and different forms of circulation' (2013: 7). It can be said that their writing suggests that borders are not just physical boundaries of nation states, but also political and socio-economic constructs that intersect with various axes of identity and power, determining the access to rights, resources, and opportunities between different social groups. This film is a strong reflection of their argument.



Figure 2.4 Okwe and Senay having dinner together in their shared flat, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), Stephen Frears, video still

For example, in British director Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), the Baltic Hotel in London is set as the main location of the film. This hotel, staffed with both legal and illegal migrants, is where the seemingly impossible duo who are the main characters of the film cohabit in one flat every day (Fig. 2.4): Nigerian illegal immigrant Okwe, who is an adult male; and Turkish Muslim female asylum seeker Senay, whose culture and belief highly value female sexual purity. To keep in line with Turkish cultural norms, they share one room while taking turns to stay and rest. This living arrangement can be considered another form of 'shift-bed', which prevents either of them from forming a deep domestic relationship with the room. This shady hotel is also the lair of the Spanish hotel manager Juan's black-market business, in which desperate illegal migrants trade their organs for fake travel documents and IDs. Therefore, the Baltic Hotel can be considered what French anthropologist Marc Augé refers to as a 'non-place', or a space 'where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions...where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing...a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporal and the ephemeral' (1995: 77-78). This temporality is also reflected in the film's soundtrack, when American singer David Byrne sings directly, 'Glass and concrete and stone/It's just a house/Not a home'. Guha points out that the hotel, as the backdrop of all these stories, is most notably

perceived as 'invisible' (2015: 136), 'out of sight' and 'labyrinthine' (2015: 163), and framed as such with eery, discomfoting lightings (Fig. 2.5). It is not the place where these immigrants can start to make the city their home, nor is it fully a part of the official imagery and habitual order of British society. Instead, it is a 'space to negotiate who is or is not welcomed into Britain' (Gibson, 2006: 693) where the 'border struggles' around the 'ever more unstable line between... inclusion and exclusion' (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013: 13) manifest. It is also an embodiment of the characters' exploited, muted, and hidden status within the city's invisible dirty side unknown to most members of the public in British society (Whittaker, 2011), including both British natives and the migrants and diaspora members who possess regularised and documented status in the British society. In general, this choice of location has already indicated that despite all their efforts and all the hardships and injustices they endure, their home-making efforts in this unknown and invisible corner of London will never come to fruition.



Figure 2.5 The narrow long corridor in the Baltic Hotel, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), Stephen Frears, video still

The experiences of the two characters in the hotel are also typical for the terroristic Other who are trapped in the global city's dark invisible side. After he is discovered to be a former doctor, Okwe is forced to join Juan's business to conduct highly dangerous operations and remove illegal immigrants' organs for him. Meanwhile, Senay, who is a virgin and comes

from Turkey, is threatened by immigration control authorities and sexually exploited multiple times. Considering that the London urban space in films like this one tends to be full of stories that take place across national borders, which are irrelevant to British histories. This is also why British writer Iain Sinclair terms the cinematic London in this film as 'unreferenced', 'amnesiac' and full of stories that 'point to elsewhere' (2002), making the city less homelike and strange to the people who are born and raised here and consider themselves knowledgeable about the city and the nation. In other words, the experiences of these characters in London and the space where they happened can again be said to be unknown to many if not most audience members. In a sense, the film makes everything and everyone who belongs to 'the minority, the exilic, the marginal and emergent' (Lauzon, 2017: 70) group which 'ought to have remained ... secret and hidden' and all the previously invisible margin spaces in the city finally 'come to light' (Bhabha, 1994: 14-15). It forms a postcolonial portrayal of contemporary London as a post-national global city and gives an empathetic look at the global migrants stuck in its unofficial side. However, as Guha (2015: 134-135) says, these spaces are the manifestation of the characters' inability to actually assimilate into the mainstream of socio-economic life in the receiving society. The migratory characters who inhabit these spaces almost always end up leaving the global city, while breaking out from these trauma-inducing spaces and experiences almost always requires criminal approaches (Guha, 2015: 169) and becoming what Bhabha defines as disruptive to the order of 'national peoples' (1999: x). In this film, Okwe and Senay manage to break away from the hotel together by drugging and killing Juan, selling Juan's kidney, raising enough money and obtaining the necessary documents for Okwe to return to Nigeria and Senay to continue travelling to New York to further pursue her global dreams. This again reflects how the relationship between the terroristic Other and their homes is defined, enhancing the idea that they are unworthy of a home in their receiving society.

2.3 The Migratory Aesthetics

2.3.1 Introduction

As mentioned previously, researcher Claudette Lauzon's observation suggests that there has long been a 'culture of insecurity' (2017: 61-62) in Western nations as a result of the Cold War. This insecurity is only the most recent factor that makes contemporary Western artists

who do not want to be confined by the repression and restriction of the home reject any ideas of home and domesticity, and choose to strive for a sense of borderlessness and universalness in their works instead. In terms of the representation of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences, this 'conceptual nomadism' (Lauzon, 2017: 31) can be considered an important step away from fixedness and staticity in a sense because this rejection of the home has transcended the restrictions on people's freedom including freedom of movement set by the nation state society, which I will analyse in greater detail in the next chapter. However, on the other hand, it also unintentionally strengthens the stereotype that migratory and diasporic people do not have a home or a root, cannot take care of themselves and the land that surrounds and contains them, will unavoidably pose disruptions to border safety and order of nation states, and will eventually succumb to an eternal pain of disorientation and rootlessness, which reflects the fixation on uprootedness and homelessness of the exile notion because it was rooted in a desire for a 'permanent state of essential exile' (Lauzon, 2017: 29). This tendency has been developing for almost a century (ibid.). In the contemporary art and culture world, one of the most important reflections of it is the so-called 'migratory aesthetics', or a type of aesthetic practices which gain 'their force' through 'their contestation of constraint and the assertion of a certain freedom of movement' (Durrant and Lord, 2007: 11). As the initiator of this concept, Dutch cultural theorist and visual artist Mieke Bal defines an 'aesthetic that is migratory' as one that 'endorses and explores the mobility of the current social world', and an aesthetic which is 'relational', 'empathic' and 'help[s] us understand possibilities for art to be politically active' (2007: 23). However, although migratory aesthetics offer an important way to offer another perspective which is different from the existing prevailing images of migratory/diasporic people and their stories, it has not managed to go far enough from the intertwine between the mobile and hybrid lifestyle and homelessness.

Indeed, the subjects and topics that migratory aesthetics can cover are not limited to migratory and diasporic people and their experiences, and many artists and researchers have used it as a 'politically effective' (Bal, 2007: 24) framework for their explorations on topics such as history, trauma and collective memories. Bal (2007: 24) suggests that migratory aesthetics does not limit itself to topics in the field of migration and diaspora or regard itself as being necessarily qualified to do so. However, it is still undeniable that this

framework can be used as the representation of different types of dislocation experiences and dislocated persons in the era it was created during the early millennial globalisation two decades ago. Its traces can also be found in more contemporary practices, which will be demonstrated through a series of examples later in this section. Just as it was argued in later writings about migratory aesthetics from researchers such as Jill Bennett, as a mobile aesthetic which focuses on 'connectivity and relationality', migratory aesthetics can be understood as 'a response to the limitations of identity politics in both institutional and aesthetic terms' (2011: 109). It can 'shift "identities" out of a static place into a dynamic set of relationships' (ibid.). In the representations and discussions of migratory and diasporic people and their experiences, migratory aesthetics fundamentally creates a series of alternatives to the sedentarist and nationalist perceptions of the home or homeland, national identities and the role of migratory and diasporic people in both their origins and receiving society by normalising the mobile status of people's lives (Bal, 2007: 24-25). Bal herself is also a practitioner of migratory aesthetics in her art practices. For example, in the early short film *Glub* (Heart) (2004) which she produced with the Iranian-born installation artist Shahram Entekhabi, the artists explore how the consumption of seeds, as an icon of a type of Arabic and North African culture, has been translated into the 'everyday aesthetic of another place to a Western context' (Aydemir and Rotas, 2008: 22). Bal also indicates in an exchange with Irish researchers Siún Hanrahan, Niamh-Ann Kelly, Emma-Lucy O'Brien that migratory aesthetics has a positive impact in enabling 'the integration of the memories of the countries and communities of departure' (2008: 94). By doing so, migratory aesthetic practices can be 'understood as a response to the limitations of identity politics in both institutional and aesthetic terms' which 'promotes new ways of understanding intercultural and transnational histories as well as new ways of imagining the future' (Bennett, 2011: 109). Meanwhile, a migratory aesthetics encounter usually takes place 'on the basis of ... the mobility of people as a given, as central, and as at the heart of what matters at the heart of the contemporary', or to say a "'globalized" world' (Bal 2007: 23-24). Apart from the discussions by Bal and her direct collaborators outlined above, other scholars such as Katja Frimberger also suggest that migratory aesthetics creates the creative space in which aesthetical and creative activities can be 'shaped through the various manifestations of contemporary, migratory experiences' (2018: 12), which again proves that migratory

aesthetics is one step closer towards a non-sedentary perspective in the representations of migratory and diasporic people and their experiences.

An important argument of migratory aesthetics is that the world centre is no longer the West. In fact, Bal states that its current centre 'is nowhere' (2007: 25), which indirectly indicates that the movement of humans is a given and nobody should be considered an outsider in any part of the world. And this centreless state is also reflected in contemporary experiences of displacement. For example, in the contemporary era, there is a type of people who can establish homes in multiple places at the same time without being exclusively bound to any of them, and this type of relationship between their physical existence and the home experiences in their life undoubtedly makes their lifestyle one that is highly decentralised. The first case study of my research, Korean installation artist and sculptor Do-Ho Suh, not only belongs to this community himself, but also reflects migratory aesthetics to a great extent by suggesting that home is a type of experience that can be repetitively reproduced and re-established throughout their whole migratory experiences. In her discussions on migratory aesthetics, one notion Bennett focuses on is temporality: for her, the migratory situation is both 'the situation of our time' and the 'multiple, heterogeneous' experiences of time, because subjects are likely to be subjected to different experiences of time, such as 'the time of haste and waiting; the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling, provisional present' (Bennett, 2011: 213) at the same time. This is also the reason why Bennett (2011: 112-113) herself even suggests that one of the biggest developments of migratory aesthetics is 'the shift from identity to relationality, and toward an exploration of communality as a process ... in terms of political aesthetics' (2011: 112). As indicated in this argument, migratory aesthetics has a focus on breaking the boundaries established by the nationalist framework and striving for a sense of relationality and connectivity through normalising homelessness and mobility. This makes it a highly flexible framework: it not only has the capacity to be involved in the portrayal of those who are able to be mobilised successfully, but also can be triggered from the experience of the 'subject on hold' (Durrant and Lord, 2007: 2), such as asylum seekers. Due to the development of globalisation and transportation technologies, a "globalized" system of asylum-seeking' (Mayblin, 2017: 23) has gradually come into being. In recent years, the UK has also seen a remarkable increase in asylum applications, and asylum-

seeking has become an important part of human flow into the UK in the contemporary age of global migration (ibid.). As a result, despite the fact that they are not two terms that are linked very often, it is important to consider how home-making happens in asylum-seeking actions directed to London in my project, and make sure that my new perspective can cover different types of migrants, diaspora members and their various experiences. This topic will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, which is about my second case study, that of Alia Syed.

From both a theoretical and a creative perspective, migratory aesthetics can also be used to draw attention to how aesthetic works can be constructed by and through the migratory or diasporic experience (Durrant and Lord, 2007: 2). By placing this status of mobility, temporality and uncertainty at a central place in the discourse of migratory aesthetics, Bal argues that these conditions are no longer the exception of 'the standard', the unified or the sedentarised, but are a means of 'becoming the standard' (Bal, 2007: 23) instead of staying a minority in this globalised world. A migratory aesthetics discourse, as Bal indicates, should be able to help us answer the question of how researchers and artists can 'be culturally specific in our analyses of cultural processes and artefacts, without nailing people or artworks to a provenance they no longer feel comfortable claiming as theirs' (Bal, 2007: 32). This is the reason why, speaking from a theoretical perspective, migratory aesthetics in visual arts can indeed be regarded as a positive development from the journey and journeying narrative, which has been shaping all kinds of visual representation practices about migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who participate in them. For example, British artist Lily Markiewicz's explorations around the notion of dwelling, which is often linked to the feelings of 'being in place', 'a making of space' or 'feeling at home' (2007: 37), is especially linked to my project and also interests me the most. Self-identified as a 'wandering Jew', she (2007: 42) considers artmaking as a space that provides her with a 'sense of belonging', but also thinks of artmaking as 'an activity that is neither bound to a specific geography, nor to a sense of home or belonging' (Markiewicz, 2006: 22). For example, in a short video entitled *Cold Comfort* (2009)⁶, she recorded snowflakes falling from the sky in a winter night. It is a common sight in winter, not specific to any special location. Throughout the whole video, snowflakes keep falling from the sky and are in a

⁶ See: <https://vimeo.com/26570817> [Accessed 28 Apr 2020].

migratory state of movement and uncertainty. However, as the artist herself writes in the video's introduction, it is this kind of 'poetic evocation of uncertainty' that 'invites questions about a sense of place and belonging' (Markiewicz, 2009: n.p.), such as how people can find comfort and homeliness in a state that can be considered unstable or mobile. In terms of long-form British films, the migratory aesthetics is also reflected in many works including John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* (2010), which combines the unpredictable landscape of Alaska in winter with large quantities of archive footage to portray the experience of South Asians and African Caribbeans who came to the UK in the 1960s. Considering a sense of homelessness and an intention to find comfort in the homelessness that exists in the life of both the Jewish and the post-World War II migrants to the UK, the use of aesthetics with a migratory nature makes sense in both artists' works, and can be considered as an attempt to look at the subjects from a new scope existing beyond the nation states. However, just like the notion of exile in Chapter 1, the use of this aesthetics would not exactly be adequate under some other contexts.

When we apply migratory aesthetics in our visual representations of contemporary migrants, diaspora members and their experiences, one issue that needs to be taken into consideration is how migratory aesthetics puts the mobility of people at the centre of its aesthetical discourses. In my view, when it comes to reflecting on migratory and diasporic experiences, this overt focus on the migratory process as a rootless state still draws a clear line between the members with a migratory or diasporic history in a society and its natives from a nationalist perspective based on how mobile their lifestyle is. In general, migratory aesthetics is therefore still tightly connected to what Saloul terms the 'cultural-political expressions of the unity at the heart of identity' (2007: 111). Indeed, migratory aesthetics practices try to normalise the status of being mobile and the existence of people who live a mobile and hybrid life or have a diasporic history worldwide. However, instead of acknowledging the various home-making efforts of these people and portraying the various results of these efforts due to their different genders, ages or socio-economic statuses (Boccagni, 2016: 7), this ideological root still determines that they are different from those who are native to a nation state both by ethnicity and by nationality, thus indicating that their everyday lifestyle is presumably different from that of the natives. According to Trinh, in the existing cinematic practices, artworks and socio-political discussions, migrants and

diaspora members are constantly reminded that they are away from their places of origin and where they 'should be' (1991: 186), and that they do not belong to the land they actually live in. Besides, as an important representative of migratory aesthetics, Markiewicz suggests that a homely feeling can simply signify a sense of 'being used to something, being familiar ... feeling comfortable with what one knows' (2006: 21). Although this seems to be similar to Boccagni's statement of home as a set of relationships, she then goes on to use French writer Edmond Jabès's words to indicate that the homely feeling for the people who are from a migratory or diasporic background is more like 'being at home in homelessness' (ibid.), which is still a reflection of the spatial, static notion of home which is the foundation of sedentarist bias. As Bennett (2011: 112) suggests, the moving away of migratory aesthetics from identity politics in creative practices about migrants, diaspora members and their experience is a way to achieve connectivity, disrupt the narrative that people who live a migratory life or come from a diasporic lineage and people who do not are different, and eventually achieve multiculturalism by constructing a narrative in which these two types of people are equal and similar. However, borrowing from anthropologist Renato Rosaldo's words, although this type of opposition of identity politics always uses the rhetorics of a 'common good', it 'fails to name who participates in the process and who is included and excluded from discussions that determine the content of the common good' (2006: 119). In general, it is actually a reflection of an overly utopian vision of how a democratic, multicultural and multi-ethnic society is supposed to be from a theoretical perspective, instead of what the society is actually like (Rosaldo, 2006: 120), especially when nation states still exist and the power imbalance between people who are migratory or diasporic and people who are not is still prominent, which is also the reason why I argued previously that its exploration is not far enough. I will explain how these points are reflected by existing visual representation practices through a series of examples in the following section.

2.3.2 The 'Traffic-Based' Approach

As an important visual representation platform, recent narrative cinematic practices, including fiction films and documentaries, have also seen some changes. Based on my reading, there have been a lot of films that follow the migratory aesthetics discourse according to my reading, including documentaries such as *Extranjeras* or films such as *His House* and *Angst Esse Seele Auf*. The most significant characteristic of these films is that they

attempt to normalise the migratory and in-between status of migrants and diaspora members by normalising their relationship with home, domestic space and domestic life to a certain extent. In terms of the creative approaches of these films that I consider to be under the influence of migratory aesthetics, one of the most noticeable tendencies in these practices is that they frequently present migratory and diasporic people and their experiences in the materialities of their domestic space, and visually represent their domestic spaces in a comparatively intimate and detailed way. This can also be regarded as a relatively partial approach to the theoretical framework of migratory and diasporic experiences as home-making. According to Michelle Shepherd, these works focus on telling the general audience about the 'truth of immigration' (2012: 103), or present migrants, diaspora members and their experiences in a less dramatised manner and pay more attention to real-life situations in their everyday lives. These films satisfy the audience's need for unpolished visual information, transparent portrayal and the original voice of certain migrant groups or diasporic communities, especially underrepresented female migrants and diaspora members (Costa-Villaverde, 2007; Shepherd, 2012), while there have already been a great number of these films which have touched on the domestic lives of the Other of the Spanish society in general, regardless of their age, gender and cultural and ethnic background, such as the handful of case studies this section has conducted. Since the 2000s, some female Spanish filmmakers, especially non-fictional filmmakers, frequently use this approach of highlighting the dynamics between migratory and diasporic people and the space they live in to tell stories about their experiences, and investigate the general status of their local migrant groups and diasporic communities. Two examples include Helena Taberna's documentary *Extranjeras* (Foreign Women) (2003), a documentary that focuses on migrant and diasporic girls and women of different ages in Madrid which I will analyse later in this section, and Ariadna Pujol's documentary *Aguaviva* (2005), which follows the everyday life of immigrant families in a small town called Aguaviva.

Since the 2000s, there have also been several fiction films which use migratory and diasporic people's domestic spaces as (one of) the main locations to tell stories about or which are related to migratory and diasporic experiences of everyday life as a person

involved in these experiences that reflect migratory aesthetics⁷. One of the latest examples of this type of fiction film is British director Remi Weekes's *His House* (2020). In the film, the two main characters, Bol and Rial, are two refugees from South Sudan who are assigned a shabby house on the outskirts of London. When they struggle to assimilate and make their home in that place, an evil being enters their house and starts to haunt them about their past: in order to flee their place of origin they had to get on a bus, which only accepted people with children, so they snatched a young girl named Nyagak and pretended that she was their daughter, resulting in Nyagak's real mother being shot by the local militia and Nyagak herself drowning when crossing a rough sea, most possibly the Mediterranean or the English Channel. As a result, the couple is in debt to the evil being and constantly haunted by it, leading Bol to eventually decide to sacrifice himself to the being to repay the debt of snatching Nyagak and causing her death, thus making Nyagak come back to life. In the end, Rial, who has been clinging to their mother culture and traumatic past, decides to save Bol, and it is in this way that they overcome survivor's guilt and actually start their home-making process, that is to say, they start to experience a sense of stability and strive to build certain dynamics with the space that surrounds them, in the strange and not necessarily friendly country of the UK. At the end of the film, the couple are surrounded by the ghosts of people who died in the war or at sea (Fig. 2.6), indicating that they can never really escape their past. Meanwhile, the audience will never know what awaits them in the future, but what is clear is that although their journey onwards will still be difficult, they start to settle in London from that moment. In an interview with the BFI, Weekes suggests that writing a film about someone is fundamentally about humanising them, extracting them from official, standardised narratives and restoring them as human beings (Latif, 2020). In this film, the manifestation of the couple's fear and regret for the evil being can be regarded as an attempt to help the general audience gain a better understanding of their displacement experience by giving it a human character. These films are valuable attempts to put the people who are viewed as the Other from a nationalist perspective and their life in an actual home instead of on the road, which recognises their status as part of the society they live in, which distinguishes them from the practices that approach the representations

⁷ Despite not being directly related to transnational human flow, the depiction of Cleo and other Mexican women's placeless status in Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* (2018) can also be considered as a reflection of migratory aesthetics.

of migrants and diaspora members based on the inner logic of the nation state society and regard them as aliens and intruders that are unworthy of, or do not deserve, a home in their receiving society. Through the use of elements such as ghosts and the haunting of home, the film is also a strong example of how the idea of uncanny, which can be roughly understood as the opposition to the feeling of Heimlich which invokes the sense of 'agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house' (Freud, 1997: 197), can be used in investigating the hardship and injustices suffered by contemporary migratory and diasporic people in their home-making efforts.

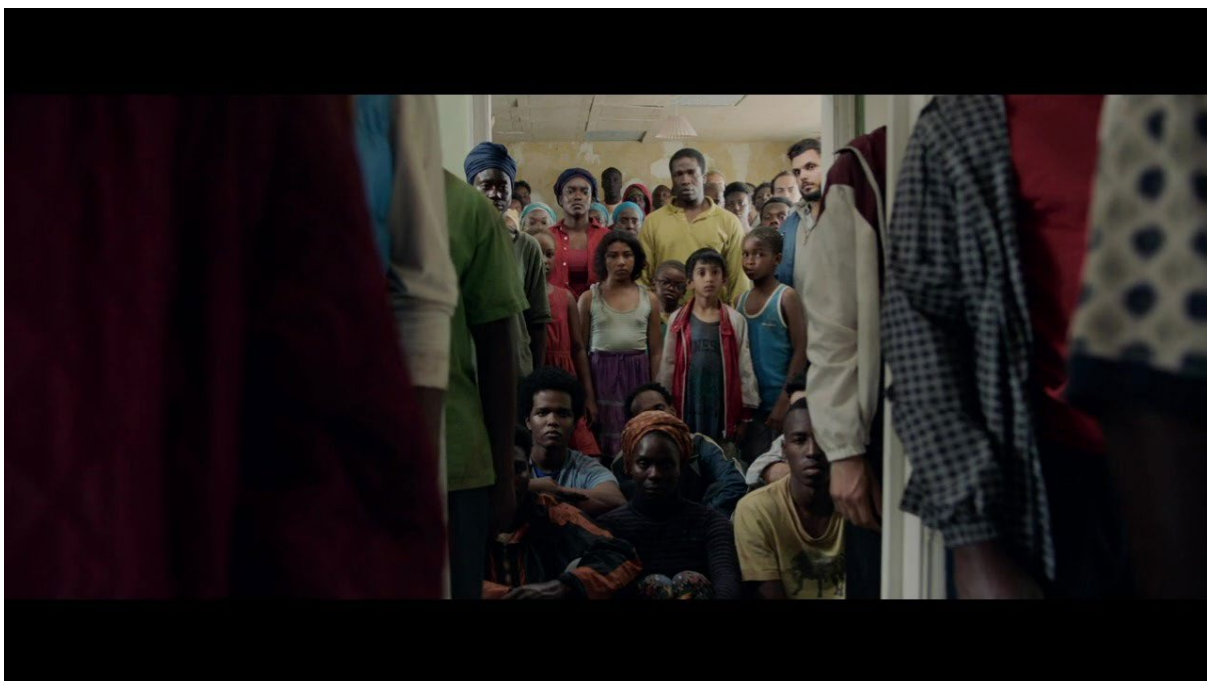


Figure 2.6 Bol (man in yellow polo shirt) and Rial (woman in headscarf and red shirt) surrounded by the ghosts of refugees and migrants who died in war and at sea worldwide, *His House* (2020), Remi Weekes, video still

However, in these practices that use a migratory aesthetical framework, filmmakers can be observed using an approach which shares two important characteristics with the journey and journeying narrative to visually construct migratory and diasporic experiences and portray the people who are involved. The first is the dramatic and sometimes extreme representations of conflicts, struggles and identity crises which are part of many of these people's everyday life, while the other is the Otherness they display naturally when living side-by-side with native people in a society. In general, these people's status as the Other of a society and 'a "problem" that generates or aggravates whatever social problems there are',

then are 'collectively used as scapegoats' due to 'the immediate association established between the immigrant and the delinquency or derivation from the norm' (Ballesteros, 2005: 3). This is a reflection of the 'news-framing' effect, which refers to a 'central organising idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them' which can 'affect an individual by stressing certain aspects of reality and pushing others into the background' (Lechler and de Vreese, 2018: 3). The news-framing effect is the result of what Yamila Azize Vargas terms 'traffic-oriented approach' (2004, cited in Ballesteros, 2005: 4), which holds that 'the global displacement of people is fundamentally due to clandestine and criminal operations headed by international mafias that deceive and exploit the displaced subjects' and 'ignores immigration's real roots and motives: the need of paid work, subsistence, and the search for a better quality of life. Ignoring the real motives leads to a simplistic and binary reduction of the situation in terms of evil mafias versus their victims: the good poor immigrants' (Ballesteros, 2005: 4). The traffic-based approach simplifies the imagery of immigrants' way of life and rendered in a melodramatic manner which dwells on the appeal of the 'us' and 'them' of a society (Puga, 2012: 356), thus enhancing their Otherness and the melodramatic perception of their lifestyle during the process. Based on Clara Guillén Marín's argument, migratory aesthetics has indeed led to an increasing number of films which consider their visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved as realistic and truthful, or as attempts to 'give voice' to them and 'bring them closer' (2017: 38) to the general audience. However, considering the possible impacts of the reality in the contemporary world which is still made up of nation states on filmmakers' perceptions, it is highly likely that these representations, which claim to give voice to the Other do not actually shift the space of Otherness into a platform from where they can speak. From this perspective, it can be said that despite the labels they put on themselves and the filmmakers' aspirations, these films also hide their often-unconscious fantasies and imaginings of the collective Otherness of migratory and diasporic people to re-present and eventually enhance and normalise the same portrayal of their Otherness and the hostile social environments which surround them, instead of actually portraying migratory and diasporic experiences from a different perspective. In general, the traffic-based approach and that of migratory aesthetics are only different from the existing perspective in that they

do so through a documentary realism type of technique and a more intimate angle and in a more domestic environment.

The portrayal of the dynamics between migratory and diasporic people and their domestic spaces with migratory aesthetics is often voyeuristic, using the domestic space, domesticity and other aspects of their private lives as a platform to highlight the Otherness in these people and their placeless and disoriented status. For example, in Helena Taberna's *Extranjeras* (Foreign Women) (2003), the audience watches a wide range of foreign girls and women who are of different ethnicities and age groups and who live in Madrid talking to the camera about their different experiences, including migrating to Spain to live or being born in Spain as a member of a diaspora and living their everyday life as the Other in the cosmopolitan Spanish capital. This film indeed gives an innovative and compassionate look at its subjects, and offers a new perspective towards them that is different from many other cultural and visual practices built on the two stereotypes of the displaced people introduced in Bhabha's (1999) critiques, as have been discussed in detail in Section 2.2.3. The most important reason behind this observation is that the domestic spaces being filmed in it are all represented in a more homely manner: in general, the filmmaker situates her subjects in their flat, house, school, workplace, where they go to connect with each other in their cultural and ethnic community, and lets the audience know that these people are an organic part of the city and Spanish society, instead of being crammed in a dark and invisible underworld which many audiences will not have the opportunity to see or to get to know. As Guilén Marín points out, the film can surely be regarded as a 'reassuring journey of multicultural discovery', providing a diverse but non-threatening landscape of a multi-ethnic cosmopolitan city by focusing on girls and women especially, and the filmmaker herself also claims that it is 'a successful attempt to focus on domesticity and motherhood in order to bring all women together' (2017: 38), that is to say, it universalises the experience of displacement in contemporary Spain through a highly gendered perspective. However, the main problem of looking at these experiences through a highly gendered perspective is that the link between all these domestic spaces and female migrants and diaspora members again makes domestic space an exclusive domain for these girls and women living in Spain (Trinh, 1991: 103-104). By putting only women in this environment, the filmmaker is also practically using traditional female familial roles which are not usually emphasised in the

relatively modernised Western society, where women tend to be more involved in a public life outside their domestic space, more educated and more likely to have a personal career (Costa-Villaverde, 2007). In the film, these often-ignored traditional female roles such as mother, daughter, nurturer, and housekeeper work as the most apparent and significant link between all the characters, and essentially emphasise their otherness as both the Other of the Spanish society and women (ibid.), even though many participants appearing in the film have already migrated to Spain at a very young age or are second-generation diaspora members. Besides, as Trinh points out, to achieve the objectives of revealing 'one society to another' and approach their experiences from the subjects' own point of view, documentary filmmakers tend to race for 'hidden values' (1991: 66-67) behind the content of their interviews and the materialities of their surrounding spaces. It gives rise to legitimised but unacknowledged voyeurism and subtle arrogance by putting filmmakers in the position of thinking that they can read minds and gain knowledge about the subjects of which the subjects themselves are not aware (Trinh, 1991: 67).

The combination of this 'obtrusive interiority' which spectacularises the life and culture of the Other with an 'obnoxious exteriority' (Trinh, 1991: 67) which puts the Other in an exiled position is also reflected in German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Angst essen Seele auf* (Ali: Fear Eats the Soul) (1974). The film tells a story which revolves around the romance and marriage between 60-something German widow Emmi, who is a cleaner, and Moroccan *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) Ali, who is exactly 25 years younger than she is. As an elderly widow, Emmi is already unconsciously alienated by the community around her, which can be seen from the reaction of the barmaid and customers when she walks into the pub where she meets Ali. The audience also understands that her dead husband Franciszek is a *Fremdarbeiter* (forced labourer) who came to Germany from Poland during World War II (Patterson, 1999), and can only imagine their experience during the War: she may have already been constantly alienated by the majority of the local German community, not for her age and appearance but for her contact with those foreign labourers from a country defeated by Germany. After she and Ali fall in love and get married, the two build a home together in Emmi's rented apartment. Considering the flat used to be owned by Emmi only, it is also possible to read the plot about them moving in together as a metaphor for how migrants like Ali arrive in Germany and become an integral part of German society, and how

German society has become prosperous since the last few decades of the 20th century through the help of numerous migrants who are muted and ignored by a nationalist ideology (Slater, 2014). Therefore, although this film is set slightly earlier than the period in which my research and theoretical foundation are based, its discussions actually set up a precedent in how interracial home-making might be presented. Its attitude towards the experience of migrants, which Slater describes as ‘melodramatic’ (2014: 94), is also reflected in the depiction of the main characters’ domestic space and home-making activities. Indeed, Emmi and Ali desire strongly to build a home together, while Emmi’s apartment is undoubtedly more homely than the shift-bed accommodation in *Your Day is My Night* or the crime-infested hotel in *Dirty Pretty Things*. However, due to the huge differences in their socio-cultural background, ethnic background and age, after they get married, Emmi and Ali are rejected, discriminated against and doubted by the people around them, including both Germans and Moroccans. Notably, when inviting her grown children over to meet Ali, one of Emmi’s sons even smashes her TV in an angry outburst while the other calls her a whore, and her daughter also remarks that her flat is a pigsty, all in denial of the legitimacy of her home-making efforts with Ali and even Ali’s very existence in Germany. By the end of the film, after a series of hardships, they have a heart-to-heart conversation over a dance and decide to stay together, but Ali is then rushed to hospital because of a stomach ulcer. As their home, the flat can be regarded as what Jô Gondar considers a ‘space of testimony’ (2017: 52) in psychoanalysis: a place which unites the characters and gives them a sense of belonging amidst all the hardships, while at the same time separating them from the people around them by seeking to ‘integrate and give belongings’ within while admitting ‘an untouchable singularity’ beyond (Gondar, 2017: 61), which can be considered as a recognition to all migrant and diasporic communities’ paradoxical status in their receiving society. However, rather than seeking to fix it, these spaces of testimony support the paradoxes rather than trying to fix it. In this film, the main characters’ flat also serves to highlight their Otherness, loneliness and alienated status rather than bridging it: despite being the physical embodiment of their love, with narrow spaces and an obstructed inner structure of their flat and residential block (Fig. 2.7–2.8), the particular way Fassbender visually portrays their living environment in this film can be regarded as the embodiment of the characters’ segregated and isolated status. As film critic Andrew Male concludes, the couple ‘care for each other’, but ‘have nothing else’ (2017: 112) because they are deeply

financially deprived, then totally alienated and rejected by the communities around them. And this over-reliance on each other in turn pulls them apart and puts a strain on their love for each other. The director also purposely achieves the reestablishment of distance and otherness between the two main characters with this cinematographic approach to suggest that even they themselves will feel alone and disconnected from each other (Shepherd, 2012; Guilén Marín, 2017).



Figure 2.7 The obstructed view in Emmi and Ali's residential block, Angst essen Seele Auf (1974), Rainer Fassbinder, video still



Figure 2.8 The secluded structure of Emmi and Ali's apartment, *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974), Rainer Fassbinder, video still

Indeed, this visual representation of Emmi and Ali's domestic space fits the theme of the film perfectly and forms an empathetic look at the life of the vulnerable minorities and the Other of German society at that time. The carefully maintained flat reflects the characters' painstaking home-making effort, but this effort is still rejected and easily destroyed by the Germans who do not mingle with foreigners and even despise or loathe them. Meanwhile, they also receive similar attitudes from the Moroccans who, similar to any other groups of people with foreign heritage and origins, form what Kristeva defines as a 'paradoxical community' of 'foreigners who reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners' (1991: 194-195). Indeed, the film offers a compassionate look at the life of migrant workers and underprivileged society members in post-war Germany, and mercilessly reveals the xenophobic and racist atmosphere and the hostility towards migrants within German society at that time. However, in terms of the interpretation of the dynamics between migrants, diaspora members and their domestic space, the film does not go much further than the news-framing effect as a result of its melodramatic stance. I consider that this home constructed by Emmi and Ali is actually a home (to Emmi and Ali) without a home (a place in mainstream German society). Instead of a visual manifestation of

how the two main characters' home-making takes place in the receiving society, Emmi and Ali's domestic life perceived by a traffic-based approach is actually an indicator of their homeless status despite being viewed through a compassionate and reflexive eye. This eventually places them in the position of the 'them' and Other compared to the 'us' of German society.

Chapter 3: Project Design

3.1 Undoing Sedentarist Bias: a New Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 The Importance of Migratory and Diasporic Home-making

The previous two chapters identified the issues with sedentarist bias and used narrative cinematic practices as an example to reflect on how it has shaped how migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved have been visually represented. Following those discussions, this chapter provides a different perspective on how migration and diaspora can be reimagined in an alternative way, and analyses how this new framework can be used to inform a different type of cultural and visual practices. I would argue that the visualisation of the dynamics between migratory and diasporic people's bodily existence and the places intimate to them, including both domestic spaces and the intimate cityscapes that are integral to their everyday routines and home-making activities, has an important role in enabling the audience to look at the migrants, diaspora members and their experiences from a nuanced perspective. Works of various artists, such as my case studies Do-Ho Suh or Alia Syed, have proved so.

According to Staub, nation state societies tend to maintain a power hierarchy within them by distinguishing which group can have the highest level of the right to an abode (2016: n.p.). This delineates a difference in abilities to establish domestic spaces, and domestic sphere, or to make oneself feel at home both physically and psychologically between its members who possess an 'exclusive identity' as the natives and the community it deems to be the Other. Based on Staub's argument, it can be said that from a sedentarist perspective, the most significant difference between migratory and diasporic people and people without these histories and identities lies in their different levels of home-making capacities. When comparing sedentarist portrayals and representations about migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved to the alternative ones proposed by my research, I would argue that the main difference between them is the different understandings of the establishment of home and belonging while being "'systematically away" or mobile' (Boccagni, 2016: xii), and their identifications with places in general. According to Stuart Hall, culture is 'concerned with the production and exchange of meanings' or 'the "giving and taking of meaning" - between the members of a society', while its production 'depends on

its dependents interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and “making sense” of the world’ (1997: 2). Since new meanings are also negotiated and exchanged in home-making, I would argue that it can be considered a cultural process. As Gillian Rose (2001: 6) argues, the visual has a central role to play in cultural construction in the contemporary era. Therefore, it is firstly important to look at the visual representation of migratory and diasporic home-making; moreover, it is also possible to use the materiality of the intimate spaces of migrants and diaspora members for this aim.

In his aforementioned critiques, Cancellieri (2017) points out that the tendency to romanticise and essentialise the home into a symbol of unity and stability which excludes any type of impurities and differences comes from certain interpretations of the writings about place attachment by philosophers such as Bachelard and Heidegger. However, in recent decades, researchers have already suggested different ways to understand these discussions, which provided a theoretical foundation for a new perspective on the relationship between migrants and diaspora members, their experience, and the concept of home. Take Heidegger’s famous concept of ‘dwelling’ for example. Firstly, dwelling is indeed a spatial notion, and it and the physical built environment that surrounds and contains the humans are ‘related as end and means’ (Heidegger, 1971: 144). Charles Bambach’s scholarly observations into Heidegger’s theories also suggest that Heidegger finds the Otherness of certain communities threatening, while dwelling is something that happens in the reaffirmation of ‘the provincial, the native, and the narrowly “national”’ (2013: 56). As introduced in the first chapter, there are also other researchers who have made the same observations, such as Satarupa Sinha Roy, who points out that a ‘dwelling’ is always ‘pointing toward a place where things gather into’ (2017: 29); and Long, who describes ‘to dwell’ as ‘to remain’ and ‘to stay in a place’ (2013: 333). However, these two researchers have also both extended the analysis of the notion of dwelling beyond the sedentarist framework. Roy points out that Heidegger’s definition of this word does not equate it with sedentariness, and ‘does not connote stasis’ (2017: 29): the concept never specified that there can only be one physical environment instead of multiple of them and never said that the physical environment of the dwelling cannot change. Long (2013) also argues based on Heidegger’s own discussions that the philosopher did not mention the duration of dwelling time and whether the dwelling location is static, leaving space for later generations of

researchers to argue that one can actually dwell in motion and achieve the state of dwelling or building attachment (homely feeling) during migration and all other kinds of displacement experience. This dialectic tension between mobility and rootedness gives the theory of dwelling a nuanced type of understanding by offering a ‘vocabulary of belonging without an over-emphasis on movement or connotations of rootedness conjured by “home”’ (Long, 2013: 329-330), instead of describing all migrants and diaspora members as collectively homeless. This is the reason why this type of interpretations to dwelling and the home is highly influential in contemporary discussions of migration and diaspora

Discussions on the dialectics between movement (uprooting) and settling down (rooting), like the ones listed in my introduction chapter, have been the main driving force of disrupting the sedentarist norm in social sciences discourses and studies⁸. Also as mentioned previously, the 1990s first saw a significant burst of non-sedentarist investigations into migration and diaspora from scholars like Brah, who observes that all migratory and diasporic experiences can be divided into different phases: the first phase is leaving one’s place of origin and going on a journey, while the second is arriving in the receiving society and establishing an existence, which is ‘essentially about settling down, about putting roots “elsewhere”’ (Brah, 1996: 179). When it comes to how migratory and diaspora experiences can affect migrants and diaspora members psychologically and emotionally, Brah also notes that although the ‘separation and dislocation’ (1996: 190) within migratory and diasporic experiences almost definitely involve traumas, their ‘settling down’ (1996: 179) aspect is indeed a highly potential site of ‘hope and new beginnings’ (1996: 190). Similarly, Long states that this process of breeding hope and new beginnings demonstrates two most significant components: a ‘keen appreciation of the emotional significance of space’ and a ‘way of seeing magic in the everyday’ (2013: 330), which are also demonstrated in the writings of Heidegger himself. In the process, migratory and diasporic people are creating what Boccagni defines as the ‘home experience’ which includes a sense of security, familiarity and control (2016: 7). Boccagni argues that based on ‘migrants’ typical biographies’ home should instead be appreciated as an ongoing process of emotional and relational attribution towards a variety of places, parallel to the life course of individuals

⁸ For example, studies from Avtar Brah and Paolo Boccagni.

and families' (2016: 106). His argument also covers many migrants who are under more peculiar circumstances such as refugees and asylum seekers, because 'not feeling at home in one's habitual place' and the desire to establish a home somewhere else 'may be one of the drivers of migration itself' (2016: 80). It is also possible for the differences between migrants' conditions to be reflected in their domesticity, because everything that can be 'felt, understood, and enacted as home is affected by variables such as social class, gender, age and ethnocultural background' (Boccagni, 2016: xxiii). For example, in terms of social class, wealthier migrants might have more means to navigate the migration system, secure housing and jobs, and integrate into new environments. In contrast, those of lower-class backgrounds often face greater barriers, such as financial instability, precarious employment and exclusion from the habitual order of their receiving society. And these observations can find their root in Mezzadra and Neilson's book *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. As they point out, instead of static spatial concepts, nation state borders are dynamic spatial-temporal processes which are shaped by, and in turn shape the 'tensions and struggles' in various areas such as migration policies, the cross-border flow of capital and labour, market, cultural expectations that 'play a decisive role in its constitution' (2013: 13). This nature of border is how different social categories interact to shape how different migrants and diaspora members experience borders differently; in other words, producing varied home-making experiences and strategies among different migrants and diaspora members. Therefore, it is important to consider these intersecting factors to understand the complexities of migratory and diasporic home-making fully.

Looking from this perspective, the meaning of home in my research is different from, or even contrary to the fixed and bounded notion introduced in Chapter 1: instead of attaching a sense of specialness to the material place itself, these scholars consider home as relationships humans build with the space that surrounds them (Boccagni, 2016: 4). For example, Bhabha argues that all migrants, including voluntary migrants, exiles and international nomads do not simply circulate, they need to 'settle, claim asylum or nationality, demand housing and education, assert their economic and cultural rights, and seek the status of citizenship' (2011: 3). And all these activities can be together considered home-making. Similar processes can be observed in diaspora members as well. Although they are usually legally recognised as full members of the receiving society, they still need to

'continually mediate between local and global perspectives, between near-at-hand strategies of action and the ideas or resources that circulate around the diaspora as a whole' (Brodwin, 2008: 55). In other words, although they have the political rights to call a society home, they still need to establish their own existence in an intersection of many different contexts. Another scholar who reflects this argument is Magdalena Nowicka. As Nowicka argues, home is an ongoing process instead of a static state, and a spatial-temporal experience instead of a certain geographic location, while the multiplication of the home over space and time has indeed become possible as a result of globalisation and technological development (2006: 140). Similarly, other researchers also suggest that the establishment of home experience is at the centre of all migratory and diasporic experiences, throughout migrants' journeys from their starting points to their destinations (Sigmon et. al, 2002, cited in Amit and Bar-Lev, 2015), or diaspora members' processes of mediation between the different contexts involved in their everyday life. Meanwhile, based on many previous researches, Boccagni also argues that various factors such as class, age and gender are also 'influential in shaping the home experience' (2016: 78) for them. This is the reason why my thesis makes the case that both migrants and members of diasporas can be included in my discussion, and that focusing on their home-making experience can reflect on the diversity of experience of people from different backgrounds.

3.1.2 Migratory and Diasporic Domestic Space

When talking about how migratory and diasporic people's negotiation of their existence within their receiving society can be manifested within their domestic spaces (and intimate cityscapes), I often give one example. I am an ethnical Chinese from an East Asian cultural background and have been living in the UK for a considerable period. Households in major East Asian nations like China, Japan and South Korea all tend to place different slippers in the living room and kitchen, while British and European households I have visited usually do not have this habit. Now, after living in the UK for a while, the placement of slippers in my household still tends to follow the East Asian manner: I put different slippers in every room. Meanwhile, I also tolerate my Polish partner wearing the same pair of slippers everywhere. This is a very small example of how I negotiate, express and make compromises about my identity in my process of home-making in the UK. Behind the use of slippers in my apartment is a string of efforts in communication and making compromises between me

and my partner in our experience of making a home in London. Although details like this tend to be ignored in everyday life by both migratory and diasporic people themselves and people who live in the same space as them, they can still be regarded as proof that migratory and diasporic home-making can be materialised and be made visible within the materiality of their domestic spaces.

As introduced previously, I consider the new perspective I intend to construct to be rooted in the idea that home and the notions which are frequently attached to it, such as culture and identity should be viewed as 'intersections over space and time' rather than as 'located and bounded' (Blunt, 2005: 10), which reflects Nowicka's idea of plurilocalism (2006: 140). The materiality of domestic space can play a vital role in migratory and diasporic people's negotiations in the geographies of 'belonging, residence, landscape and place' (Basu and Coleman et al., 2008, cited in Walsh, 2011: 516) in a way that can 'both enable and constrain' (Saunders and Williams, 1988: 83) inhabitants' patterns of actions, and is directly related to the migratory and/or experience of its inhabitants. This is echoed by Boccagni's statement that migrants' housing issues are a 'privileged observatory' for their '... transnational social engagement, as well as on the changing boundaries of their membership and belonging' (2013: 277). Although the spaces people journey through during their migratory journey are also crucial in creating an understanding of their experience, as the physical structure of the home (Hamlett 2010: 31), domestic spaces (and intimate cityscapes) directly reflect and embody the home-making activities and everyday life experiences of the migrants or diaspora members who inhabit them. This is also reflected in the discussions of Boccagni and Sara Bonfanti, that the dwelling arrangements in the home-making process, which is reflected in the materiality of physical spaces 'can mark migrants' housing pathways and biographies at different stages, not necessarily in a linear or sequential way', and are shaped by different elements such as 'class, length of stay, education, legal status, density and distribution of informal social networks' (2023: 10). Boccagni (2016: 4-5; 106) suggests that home-making is the process of re-making the home through negotiating with the places intimate to them against ever-changing circumstances over time. From this perspective, instead of a roof over one's head, domestic space can be any type of space that can provide people with the domestic experience including the senses of security and belonging, comfort, familiarity and control, which reiterates the

reason why I put intimate cityscape under the same scope of migratory and diasporic home-making for discussion. As I have defined intimate cityscapes as the part of urban space that is integral to people's everyday routines and home-making activities⁹, the discussions in this section can also be extended to that concept.

Apart from its theoretical importance in the analysis of migratory and diasporic home-making, domestic space has considerable storytelling potential that can be made use of in relevant visual representation practices. As Tally (2014: 2-5) suggests, material spaces are all embedded with stories, while telling these stories can re-organise and mobilise the materiality of spaces. Chinese-American geographer Yi-fu Tuan (1977: 5) further connects the concept of space and place and defines place as the result of people attaching meanings to locations in space and organizing the space according to their attached meanings. He also argues that places are the centres of 'felt value', or the locations at which human's biological needs, such as food, water, rest and procreation are satisfied (1977: 4-5). Since domestic space is a meaningful place closely linked to the satisfaction of migratory and diasporic people's biological needs in their home-making process, there are a lot of meanings attached to its materiality, and these meanings can be discovered through visual investigations. Similarly, in her studies on the intersection between architecture and visual arts and films, Giuliana Bruno also holds that a house can be considered as a 'private museum' which tells the stories of 'journeys and travels within' (2002: 110), which is also an argument that informed me to use the materiality of the domestic space (and intimate cityscape) to visualise migratory and diasporic home-making. Moreover, the narratives embodied by domestic spaces also have the potential to be visualised, especially through the visual documentation of the objects in it. As suggested by Margaret Morse, if we can follow any 'origin story' within an intimate space, we will eventually be able to find a 'perfumed object' (1999: 66), which, in this project's context, is an object or a section of the material environment that has sensory memories that is related to a part of the migratory and diasporic people's stories attached to it¹⁰. Morse's point is echoed by anthropologist

⁹ See Section 0.2.

¹⁰ Take myself for example again: before I moved to London from rural Surrey, I purchased numerous train tickets to travel to London for different reasons. And even now, I still keep these tickets because they are related to my memories.

Daniel Miller (2009), who argues that there exist many objects which are embodiments of experiences and histories, and it is possible to read through the physical forms of these objects to form an ethnographic understanding of culture and experience. In general, everyday objects can act as 'platforms for commentary on issues of identity, meaning, structure, social critique, materiality' (Fowles, 2006: n.p.). They and the individuals who make use of them co-construct the living experience through their everyday interactions (Miller, 2009). Informed by these discussions, I chose the creative experiences from two highly spatial art forms, installation art and artist's moving image to inform a new perspective that can be applied to the visual representations of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences.

One main task of my research is to investigate how places related to home-making can be the material embodiment of what Trinh calls 'hyphenated reality' (1991: 157). According to Trinh (ibid.), during the process of home-making, foreigners who come to a society different from their places of origin are essentially living in a hyphenated reality, which refers to a state in which rules from neither their origins nor the receiving society fully apply. Similarly, according to Bhabha, in migrants', and often diaspora members' negotiation between 'the conditional and the unconditional, between linguistic signification and discursive, governmental regulation', an 'interstitial space of thirdness' which signifies their status of belonging to 'neither the one or the Other' (2011: 6) will emerge. In terms of diasporic experiences, Brah also proposes the idea of 'diaspora space', which is 'the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes' (1996: 178). All these concepts are the backdrops for all migrants and diaspora members to undergo the process of 'becoming' (Trinh, 1991: 157), and to navigate 'in-between' the 'screens' of identity systems through a diasporic narrative of 'borders and crossings, and exchanges' (Bhabha, 2011: 17). During the whole process of settling in, navigation or becoming, transnational people keep initiating 'new signs of identity and sites of collaboration in the act of defining the idea of society itself' (Bhabha, 1994: 1-2). In general, migratory and diasporic domestic space (and intimate cityscape) is a space of thirdness, in which the hyphenated reality migrants and diaspora members live in daily is manifested and embodied. The navigation efforts defined by Bhabha can be regarded as home-making efforts, which will be visualised in the materiality of spaces. It was

based on these discussions that I chose my two case studies. For my first case study, I chose Do-Ho Suh, who dedicates a large amount of his works to understand how the concepts of hyphenated reality and space of thirdness can be manifested within the migratory domestic space. After that, I introduced the works of artist filmmaker Alia Syed to help us understand how the existence of the diasporic people can be situated in the materiality of their intimate cityscapes within the urban space to understand the dynamics between their physical existence and the materiality multi-ethnic cities including London. The life and creative experience of both artists I have chosen offer examples of the transnational social engagement and reflect how the physical existence and home-making activities of migrants and diaspora members can be made visible into material space. For example, Suh's *Bridging Home, London* (2018) uses a life-sized traditional Korean house (Hanok) in the hyper-modern London East End to signify his, and other migrants and diaspora members' long-term existence in the city. More detailed discussions and analyses of other artworks will be provided in later chapters.

3.2 Methodological Design

3.2.1 A Psychogeographic Investigation of Migratory and Diasporic Spaces

As introduced in the previous chapters, psychogeography plays an important role in guiding me in the analysis and discussions of my case studies. French philosopher Guy Debord first coined the term psychogeography and defined it as 'the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of the individuals' (1955, cited in Souzis, 2015: 194). I would argue that despite neither artist has stated that they have been engaged in psychogeographic research in their respective creative processes, my artist case studies, Do Ho Suh and Alia Syed, both use approaches with a psychogeographic nature in their respective creative practices through their visual explorations of the materiality of their domestic space or intimate cityscape. These explorations are reflected in how Do-Ho Suh lays out the spectral recreations of his former domestic spaces for gallery visitors to those life-sized installations and how Alia Syed leads her viewers onto journeys through meaningful cityscapes with the use of both visual and spoken languages, which would be deliberated in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

According to earlier psychogeographers such as Debord and Henri Lefebvre, the urban space is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the existence and activities of individual citizens as much as the processes of industrial production and capital accumulation (Debord, 1955, cited in Souzis, 2015; Lefebvre, 1996, cited in Pinder, 2005; Butler, 2012: 144). Drawing on these discussions, many recent scholars (Charlton et. al, 2011; Green, 2013; Shukatis and Figiel, 2013; Macfarlane, 2005: 3-4 cited in Coverley, 2018: n.p.) suggest that the main aim of psychogeography is to understand how the forces that shape the cities are manifested in the physical appearances and structures of urban space through the act of walking through a city's urban space. As introduced at the beginning of the thesis, psychogeography explorations are realised through the activity of walking. Home-making involves people making sense of and building relationships with their surrounding physical space, social network, and people. It is an interactive process that alters how they perceive the urban space of London or any other cities in which they dwell. This is why my research considers the home-making migrant or diaspora member as assuming the role of a psychogeographer, and home-making as a form of psychogeographic walking.

Despite the fact that no actual psychogeographic methodologies of walking or wandering within an urban space have been involved in my research process, it has indeed played an important role in informing my discussions about the case studies. By analysing my case studies from a psychogeographic perspective, I was able to gain an understanding of how, in the artworks being discussed, home-making practices offer a unique perspective for the 'imaginative reworking of the city' and transforming the 'familiar layout of the city' (Coverley, 2018: n.p.), especially in the context of contemporary global cities. In other words, through the analysis of my case studies, I came to understand how home-making is constantly changing London's physical cityscape, and how this ever-developing cityscape, which is undeniably also the result of transnational human flow, should be constructed in different types of visual representation practices. Based on these arguments, I chose to investigate artists from visual art fields that explore how stories and human experiences manifest in creative practices that interact with and remodel the materiality of space, including installation art and artists' moving image. In installation art, this exploration is mainly through the physical interaction and remodelling of space. Alongside Do-Ho Suh, many other installation and mixed-media artists I discuss, especially migrant and diasporic

artists like Ilya Kabakov and Nil Yalter who are mentioned later in this chapter, have also made informative explorations on the spatiality of migratory and diasporic experiences. In artists' moving image, the interaction with and remodelling of space is mainly through narrative voices and cinematic languages. For example, Alia Syed uses material cityscapes of the cities which are crucial to her, and other diasporic people's experience to capture the flow of her personal and familial experiences and memories as part of the British-Pakistani diaspora, as well as reflect on the collective history and experiences of her community and the collective struggle of contemporary migratory and diasporic people in an increasingly globalised world which is still built upon nation states.

After defining migratory and diasporic home-making as a form of psychogeographic walking, I focused on investigating how the artworks situate and materialise artists', or the narrative voice's migratory or diasporic experiences within the physical space or their intimate cityscapes in the analysis of all case studies, asking how the two artists visualise the traces of their home-making activities through reimagining and manipulating the materiality of spaces from their distinctive and intimate personal perspectives. This rationale helped me to use the analysis of my case studies to respond to my research questions in different aspects. It not only allowed me to better witness how the home-making of migrants or diaspora members unfolds in the space that surrounds them as a spectator, but also made me more aware of how the dynamics between their bodily existence and the physical space can be visualised through the materiality of these spaces as a researcher, and most importantly, a foreigner living a significant chunk of her life in London. By analysing the dynamics between the artists' subjectivity and their investigations of the space where their home-making activities take place, I was able to understand how, as migrants or diaspora members, these artists' home-making can influence the materiality of their personal perceptions of reality. I could understand better how a nuanced perspective towards migration and diaspora is achieved in the works of these two artists reflecting the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making. According to the more recent discussions from Demos, psychogeography helps to 'invent new modes of perceptual sensitivity' to the 'current iterations of postnational spaces of social flux and economic flow, building on those of the 1960s through the 1990s' (Demos, 2019: 48).

As introduced at the beginning of the thesis, examining how the psychogeographic methodologies of walking or wandering have an important role in informing my discussions about the case studies, enabling me to understand the artworks in relation to the argument of migratory and diasporic experience as home-making. Although I did not use it as a research method myself, I see psychogeography as providing a new perspective on migratory and diasporic experiences by providing a way of describing and visualising the dynamics between these people and the places where their everyday experiences take place in a manner different from the existing narrative conventions that I introduced in Chapter 2. Through the analysis of my case studies as psychogeographic practices, I came to understand how home-making is constantly changing London's physical cityscape, and how this ever-developing cityscape, which is undeniably also the result of transnational human flow, should be constructed in different types of visual representation practices. In Bruno's investigations on how psychogeographic cartography can transform the city into a 'transient space of intersubjectivity' (2002: 73), she argues that by mapping the integral moments 'the everyday practice of the city's user' 'as sites onto the topography of the land', the city would eventually be 'laid out clearly as a social body' (ibid.). In my research, psychogeography helps me understand how my case studies visualise the physical space of a city like London as the sum of migratory and diasporic Londoners' existences, their home-making efforts, and the social relationships they build during their home-making processes. Again, this also led to my choice of case study from two visual art genres with significant spatial traditions.¹¹

Through psychogeography, I was also able to use the analyses of my case studies to generate new readings on the activities and experiences of the 'global migrants', which refers to the large quantities of humans who 'move in all directions' as the economic polarisation in an increasingly globalising world of the contemporary era (Spickard, 2011: 456). Many global migrants come from an underprivileged background or do not have much control over their lives, which is the reason why they are often portrayed as naturally homeless and disoriented in existing cultural and visual practices, while their attempts at

¹¹ Apart from that, given the long psychogeographic tradition in the portrayal of London since as early as the 17th century (Coverley, 2018: n.p.), reimagining transnational London through a psychogeographic approach in the contemporary era in particular is also an extremely meaningful way to link the city's contemporary globalised days back to the history and cultural and artistic traditions of Britain.

home-making are frequently denied or overlooked. This mindset is also the reason why many very recent film and visual art practitioners continue to treat migration and diaspora as what Lynn Pearce calls an 'uncomfortable political and ethical dilemma' (2012: 332), making the already ambiguous relationship between migratory and diasporic people's physical existence and their surrounding space even more difficult to investigate and visualise, which is one of the most important reasons why recent films and visual art practices sometimes feature migrants and diaspora members as vigilantes, victims and criminals, thus labelling them as either placeless and lost or dangerous and a nuisance to society, such as in *The Foreigner* (2017, dir. Martin Campbell), a film I mentioned in the beginning of the thesis. From a psychogeographic perspective, as psychogeographers themselves, the artists bring a material agency back to the displacement experiences of these migrants who often live in adverse situations and are viewed by the nation state in an extremely negative light, thus offering the opportunity to reimagine their experiences from a more empathetic perspective.

Despite being adequate for my case studies analysis, psychogeography's masculinist and heterosexist nature has long been criticised by feminist scholars like Gillian Rose and Doreen Massey (Bridger, 2013). They do not consider the urban space to be a women's place (ibid.), while also regard the city as something feminine and passively 'for the taking' (Bridger, 2013: 289)¹². To develop psychogeography's potential of developing feminist, non-heterocentric, and non-sedentarist perspectives towards migratory and diasporic home-making in contemporary London, I intentionally choose to study non-white artists of different nationalities and genders and works in different art genres. By doing so, I am confident that I would better investigate how they provide different stances on the relationship between migrants and diaspora members, their domestic spaces and intimate cityscape.

¹² This was remedied since the emergence of female scholars and writers such as American writer Lucy Lippard and Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, whose works reflect strong sense of the psychogeographic framework and prove that psychogeography is a methodology that can be made use of by different types of research and creative practices.

3.2.2 Useful Frameworks

3.2.2.1 Artistic Nomadism

The mapping of migratory and diasporic Londoners' experience in relation to the materiality of their own domestic spaces and the urban space of contemporary London is about the 'unmooring from any sense of historical, geographic, or cultural specificity' from the fixed, bound and nationalist ideological framework, which is of an "'essentially nomadic" nature' (Krauss, 1978, cited in Lauzon, 2017: 31-32). As mentioned before, based on Bogue's comments that nomadism is a 'generative force that fosters a genuine globalism' (2007: 136), artistic nomadism is of great significance in the disruption of the nationalist order. This concept is of high relevance to the analyses of my case studies, especially to the analysis and discussions of artworks from Do-Ho Suh in Chapter 4. Different from the concept of conceptual nomadism mentioned in Chapter 1 and migratory aesthetics introduced in Chapter 2, which are about abandoning the idea of home and normalise the state of homelessness, this notion argues that home can be preserved in places other than someone's during displacement, a message that is strongly embodied in Suh's works.

Compared with its anthropological definition¹³, the meaning of nomadism has been greatly expanded in fields like philosophy, cultural studies and creative arts since the concept came into being. In the arts, Demos notices a tendency of 'artistic nomadism' (2013: 10), which refers to a tendency of embracing dislocation 'as a permanent home' (ibid.). Demos considers it a 'critical strategy for resisting the double tendencies of globalisation' (20013: 11) for two reasons. Firstly, it challenges the 'homogenizing aspect of capitalism that renders all places and things alike' (Demos, 2013: 11) by providing the representation of migrants, diaspora members and their experience with a new creative mobility, or to say expand how stories related to these subjects can be told; secondly, it would also confront the 'regressive returns to localism, tribalization, and essentialist identities' which are rooted from and encouraged by the 'backlash against cultural and economic globalisation' (ibid.). Rosi Braidotti further defines the 'nomadic state' of the current age of globalisation as a

¹³ As introduced in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, nomadism refers to a lifestyle of moving repeatedly or periodically all the time instead of living continually in the same location at the same time, but. Under this definition, nomadism is also different from migration in that migration does not involve constant moving once the habitat of the migrants is changed. See: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nomadism> [Accessed 28 Mar 2021].

state of 'the subversion of set conventions' (1994: 5, cited in Noyes, 2004: 164) instead of the literal activity of traveling. In this sense, nomadism can be regarded as a critical effort which 'seeks to expose and overcome the sedentary logic of state, science and civilization' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980; Braidotti, 1994; cited in D'Andrea, 2006: 107) that assesses dwellers more positively over the wander. In my project, artistic nomadism is not only helpful in providing a different perspective towards migration and diaspora, but also supports my observation that migratory and diasporic home-making can be used to make an alternative reading to this topic. It allows us to use visual material to 'ask questions about the politics of location, the identities of the self and the others and the relevance of both defined and undefined identities' (Zaheri, 2016: 70). It is firstly informative in the discussions of Suh's works, which address how migratory home-making takes place in his nomadic life as a long-term migrant and an artist who has established an international career. I also consider it informative in the investigations of the creative practices of my second case study of Alia Syed, which seeks to explore the existence of the migratory and diasporic selves in a state of in-betweenness in a spatial-temporal manner.

As Bogue suggests, nomadism in arts and culture is mainly a 'means of forming connections across the spheres of the arts, politics, the sciences, and culture in general' (2007: 5). In other words, the creative experiences of some visual art fields can be used to inspire practices from other genres, which again prove the value of my research. But despite its potential, artistic nomadism is not a totally unproblematic concept. As Demos (2013: 13) notes, nomadism in the cultural and art world often naively praises the pleasures of travelling internationally and living a borderless life, instead of actually speaking up for underprivileged people who are actually forced to migrate and then struggle to make their home in the receiving society. Besides, it also lacks sufficient attention to the contemporary nomad peoples themselves who are often considered as inferior to other social and ethnic groups of the society, and constantly suffering from demeaning and even inhumane (Kingston, 2019: 129), such as the Traveller communities of Europe¹⁴. As a result, although I consider artistic nomadism to be an informative notion, I especially apply it together with

¹⁴ For detailed information about the treatment of travellers, see *The Harms of Hate for Gypsies and Travellers: A Critical Hate Studies Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot) by Zoe James.

the unhomely in my discussions to ensure that it can play a more comprehensive role than simply emphasising the positive aspects of living as a migrant or a diaspora member in the contemporary society with 'lightness and joy' (Demos, 2013: 11).

3.2.2.2 The Unhomely

As introduced above, the unhomely is introduced in my analyses of case studies to avoid the romantic and noncritical tendency of artistic nomadism in its construction of migratory and diasporic experiences. Unhomely is the English translation of the German concept of *unheimlich*. Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud first defined *unheimlich* as the ability of a certain space to make its inhabitants experience a sense of 'uneasy... hidden and dangerous' (1955: 3-4, cited in Obert, 2016: 87) in a certain space. In Fredrich Schelling's words, unhomely is the process of what 'ought to have remained secret and hidden' eventually 'come to light' (Kristeva, 2002: 283), which can provoke a sense of 'uncanny strangeness', or a sense of anxiety that 'the frightening element can be shown to be something which recurs' (ibid.).

Although Freud himself has never intentionally linked the *unheimlich*/unhomely with either postcolonial studies or migratory and diasporic studies, starting from Bhabha, there have been many post-colonial scholars who have read this concept as a frame for their research (Coburn, 2015). For example, Bhabha borrows this concept to represent 'an experience of liminality that disrupts the national borders' order by 'highlighting the existence of 'the minority, the exilic the marginal and emergent' who 'gather on the "edge" of foreign cultures' (Lauzon, 2017: 80). In other words, unhomely in postcolonial studies, or postcolonial unhomely describes the process of how migrants and diaspora members make space for themselves in the contemporary world and establish their unique existence as what Kristeva terms as a 'paradoxical community' which, as introduced in the previous chapter, is made up of 'foreigners who reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners' (1991: 194-195), unavoidably changing the receiving society and making the natives uncomfortable during the process. Through the formation of paradoxical communities in their receiving societies, migratory and diasporic people then collectively construct the hyphenated reality to navigate between the cultural and identity systems of both their origins and receiving societies (Bhabha, 2011; Trinh, 1991).

Highlighting the existence of this hyphenated reality in the discussions about migration and diaspora, as well as the current period of globalisation and hypermobility will blur the borders of nation states. It is through this way that the new perspective I proposed can be considered a challenge to nationalism and xenophobia. This is especially reflected in Chapter 5, where I analyse Syed's works which shed light on the paradoxical status of diaspora members.

The unhomely suggests that the domestic and intimate spaces in migratory and diasporic experiences create what Julia Obert describes as an 'architectural uncanny' (2016: 86). Migratory and diasporic domestic space is not only 'congenial' and 'homelike' (Freud 1955: 3-4, cited in Obert 2016: 87), but also able to evoke a mixture of feelings Obert describes as 'homesickness, exile, or alienation, that preclude rootedness or deep dwelling' (2016: 86). I consider the evocation of these paradoxical feelings to be one of the most important similarities among everything across both my case studies, and it is through doing so that they avoid portraying migration and diaspora from an overly optimistic and simplistic perspective. As Anne Rønning argues, many of the people who are involved in a migratory or diasporic lifestyle feel an 'unhomely belonging' since they are not cut off from their roots in the same manner' (2016: 50-51) because people 'may live in another cultural and social environment, but still retain, and can update, some of their former beliefs and cultural connotations' (2016: 51). Similarly, Henriette Steiner also suggests that the uncanny, unhomely and the accompanied feelings of strangeness or 'not being at home' (2010: 143) it invoked can offer an opportunity of 'surpassing the dialectics of the home and its other' (2010: 140). By initiating a process of border-crossing, the unhomely would move the focus of relevant cultural and visual practices about migratory and diasporic experiences 'to the wider context of meaning in which the situation of the home is situated', and use the domestic space and cityscape integral to the migrants' and diaspora members' home-making routines as 'a meaningful material context and institution' (ibid.) for their experiences to unfold.

In general, the unhomely as a postcolonial lens allows me to really understand how the moment that a new community which exists beyond the border of nations emerges in the globalising contemporary nation state society is captured and manifested in various ways in

my case studies, and this can be regarded as a self-empowering movement by 'demonstrating to the powerless the unhomely territory which is singularly their own' (Rapport and Overing, 2000: 364, cited in Avery, 2014: 17). Under this framework, migratory and diasporic domestic space and intimate land/cityscape become sites 'for other positions to emerge' (Avery, 2014: 16), or to say allow for the existence of the hyphenated reality to be outlined and highlighted. It helped me to achieve the newness I intended to achieve with my research, which then responded to my last research question.

3.3 Scopes of Case Studies

As introduced previously, the cultural turn in the understanding of social life played an important role in the shape of my project. In her discussions about researching visual materials, Rose also suggests that there has been an 'increasing importance of the visual to contemporary Western societies' (2001: 7) since the cultural turn, which I term as a 'visual turn'. Apart from the already visual focus of my project, this visual turn is also reflected in the scopes of my case studies. As two relatively niche visual art fields that have already accumulated considerable experience in making use of the storytelling potential of physical spaces in their own unique ways, installation art and artists' moving image chosen as the scopes of my case studies to respond to the question of how the everyday life traces of humans and the materiality of migratory and diasporic domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes can be represented, thus providing a more multi-layered, complicated and nuanced reading of contemporary migratory and diasporic experiences that can be applied in different cultural and visual practices.

3.3.1 Installation Art

In 1967, American artist Bruce Nauman declared that 'The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths' (Steiner, 2014: 7). According to Rochelle Steiner, this is an 'apt description' for London-based Korean installation artist Do-Ho Suh, who 'seeks... to parse what it means to make one's way as an individual in the world' (ibid.), which is especially an important topic for a migrant like him. As a result of this theme in Suh's creative practices, I have decided to look into installation art as part of my research.

Art historians and critics first started to use the term 'installation art' in the mid-1970s as a replacement for the older term 'environment' art (Reiss, 1999: xi). The main characteristic of this art form is that there exists a 'reciprocal relationship' between the viewer, the work and the space, and that it is in favour of 'a consideration of the relationships between a number of elements or of the interaction between things and their contexts' (Archer, 1994: 8, cited in Shepley, 2000: 4). For example, in American-Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's large-scale site-specific public art project *Homeless Projection: Place des Arts* (2014), the images and voices of the local homeless population who frequents the area near the Théâtre Maisonneuve are projected onto the theatre's building. As the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MACM) introduces, the interplay between image, sound and architecture in this project means that 'the participants become both spectators of official culture and actors playing in their own theatre, following their own lived script' (2014: n.p.). As a result of this immersiveness brought by the interplay between different elements, I believe that this art genre is highly relevant to my project. It has the potential to show new ways of perceiving, and bringing agency to migratory and diasporic home-making, making it a valid starting point for my exploration of using the materiality of migratory and diasporic domestic spaces and other intimate spaces as a medium to construct the non-sedentary perspective based on the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making.



Figure 3.1 Installation view of House, Rachel Whiteread (Sue Omerod, 1993)



Figure 3.2 *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, Ilya Kabakov (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de Création industrielle, no date)

Although immersiveness is not a characteristic that is exclusive to installation art, I also consider this art form helpful to my project because as a highly spatial art form, it is able to sufficiently exploit the storytelling potential of physical spaces. As mentioned before,

discussions from scholars like Brah or Boccagni indicate that it is possible to reimagine the dynamics between migratory and diasporic people's bodily existence and the materiality of the space that surrounds them. Visualising people's living experiences through the materialities of their lived spaces is also common in installation. For example, British artist Rachel Whiteread's Turner Award-winning project *House* (1993) (Fig. 3.1) casts the negative volume of the void on the inside of rooms that people used to live in and embeds the now solidified negative volume within the domestic spaces with memories of people who used to live in it. In this way, the work makes us aware of our 'architectural existence', namely our bodily existence and its trace within material spaces, and 'casts us in the role of witnesses to our everyday life' by visualising the 'material weight of the space in which we live' (Bruno, 2014: 205). Besides, site-specific installation artworks can also be used to reflect the collective memory of a community or the history of a nation. For example, in many of his works such as *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1985) (Fig. 3.2), Russian-American artist Ilya Kabakov uses the materiality of domestic spaces to suggest different ways to cope with the harsh reality during the Cold War and represent different perspectives on the same period in the Soviet Union's history (Beckenstein, 2014). Similar explorations can also be found in many installations which deal directly with topics related to migratory or diasporic experience. For example, in Turkish artist Nil Yalter's *Topak Ev* (Nomad's Tent) (1973) (Fig. 3.3), she builds a tent which resembles the residence of shamans of historical nomad tribes of the Anatolia Plateau area in her home country as a manifestation of their borderless lifestyle. According to Nazlı Gürlek, the tent in this project can be regarded as a 'symbolic subversion that exceeds hierarchies of place and social construct' (2016: n.p.). This gesture of rising beyond the habitual orders of nation state society, as Jean-Pierre Criqui points out, is a symbol of a lifestyle shared by all nomads worldwide: they 'travel freely' while remaining a 'mobile and polymorphous entity ... Independent of the melancholy one associates with uprooting', and at the same time carrying along 'a part of native country' (1996: n.p.) with them on the way. As an iconic 20th-century artwork that explores nomadic life and leans into the idea of artistic nomadism, Yalter's work can be seen as an early attempt to tell the stories about the life of humans on the move without considering the home as a fixed, bounded and geographical concept, which provides an alternative to the existing frameworks like journey and journeying narrative and migratory aesthetics.



Figure 3.3 Nil Yalter standing in front of of *Topak Ev* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1973, Mayotte Magnus Levinska)

Do-Ho Suh has also made informative creative attempts to move away from the fixed and bound notion of the home. In his works such as *Passage/s* (2014-2016) and *Home within Home within Home* (2009-2011), he uses fabric installations of the domestic spaces or part of the domestic spaces he has lived in in different parts of his life as a long-term migrant as an autobiographic form of embodiment of his journey of making a home in different countries. As Francis Richard suggests, Suh's works are 'an antimonument that calls attention to... its construction as wish', a wish of 'the perfectly private yet perfectly shared locale' (2002: n.p.), and a wish to establish a home beyond the nation state borders. By studying how migratory and diasporic home-making can be materialised and visualised into spatial forms in Suh's works, we can effectively disorient and disturb the nationalist narrative about how society should be divided and how things should flow, thus providing a new perspective on the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved which does not see these subjects and topics from a nationalist light.

Another reason why I started my investigation with installation art is its potential to shed light on how non-human elements can become an integral part of different types of visual representations of migratory and diasporic experiences, such as narrative cinema. According to Julie Reiss, an installation artwork 'treats an entire indoor space (large enough for people to enter) as a single situation, rather than as a gallery for displaying separate works' (1999: xiii). Based on her statements, I consider the relationships between the surrounding space and artworks in installation and sculpture to be opposite to each other: sculptures tend to be self-contained, independent of any conditions of the external environment, while viewers view them from the outside. Besides, art historian Ronald Onorato considers that the 'aesthetic power' of installation lies in its ability to 'become, rather than merely represent, the continuum of real experience by responding to specific situations' (1997, cited in Shepley, 2000: 4), or to say providing an immersive viewing experience. Similarly, as pointed out by Michael Fried's influential essay, installation art immerses viewers in a sensory and story-imbued experience immediately but will maintain a considerable degree of self-identity as a viewer instead of being part of the work at the same time (Fried, 1998: 45). In the investigation of my third research question, the immersiveness and theatrical nature of installation art would also connect the viewers' personal home-making experiences with the migrant and diaspora member subjects' home-making experiences that the artist hopes to portray, which would provoke the viewers' own memories of home-making and reflective thoughts on the treatment of migratory and diasporic people by the receiving society, and further confront the wide existence of sedentarist bias in relevant visual representation practices.

3.3.2 Artists' Moving Image

Another field that is highly informative to my research is the artists' moving image¹⁵. Although earlier American artists like Man Ray and Maya Deren have been heavily involved

¹⁵ There have been various different versions of the definition of 'artists' moving image'. According to Maria Palacios Cruz, the modifier of artists' in this phrase 'might imply a certain sense of ownership or self-identification on behalf of the artists' (2017: 211) as creators of the moving image works in the first place. In the words of David Curtis, this term also 'identifies people who have worked with the moving image with a particular freedom and intensity, often in defiance of commercial logic, and knowingly risking the incomprehension of their public' (2007: 1).

in avant-garde and experimental filmmaking practices since the first half of the 20th century, the field of artists' moving image has actually only been defined and developing for a much shorter period of time. As Curtis explains, although there have been calls from critics and scholars for explorations into film's potential as a 'purely visual language' which can convey meanings highly effectively and as something more than 'visually opened-up but intellectually cut-down versions of stage melodramas' since as early as the 1920s, terms related to this field, such as 'artists' film' and 'artists' video' have only gained wide recognition during the last few decades of the 20th century, especially since the 1970s (2007: 1-3).

According to Curtis (2007: 3), the first British artist filmmakers were painters, sculptors and conceptual artists who occasionally made films as a supplementary element to their main creative pursuits in other fields. At this stage, relatively few artists were using film and video as their main medium of creative practices. Instead, film and video have mainly been used by artists in three ways, including allowing them to record the development process of works in other genres, allowing them to develop their 'painterly or sculptural ideas' into a 'time-based form' (ibid.), and prompting them to explore the time-based nature of the film genre and create time-based works. After that, as a result of technological progression (Cruz, 2017), there has been what scholars Erika Balsom, Lucy Reynolds and Sarah Perks define as an 'emergence of a new landscape of moving image practice in the UK' (2019: 1) since the 1980s, which was mainly characterised by the wider participation of visual artists who uses filmmaking as the centre of their practices (Balsom et al., 2019: 2). Since then, works from artists like Judith Goddard, Tina Keane, Chris Welsby and Stuart Marshall have showcased an increasing level of diversity and displayed considerable creative potential (Balsom et al., 2019: 1). Since film and video have stopped being the 'distinct categories, mediums or practices that they had previously been' (Cruz, 2017: 211) because of the technological progression, the Art Council of England first started to use the term 'artists' moving image' to refer to 'artists' film and video' in 2000 (ibid.). In general, there are two reasons why I consider artists' moving image to be part of my research: its potential to be political and ability to be spatial.

When looking at the practices of British artists' moving image from a contextual perspective, the three decades between the 1980s and the 2016 Brexit Referendum have played an important role in the establishment of British artists' moving image today have formed an era characterised by political changes, social unrest, and regional geopolitical transformation. During the 1980s, due to the conservative policies of Margaret Thatcher's government, socio-economic inequality in British society and British police brutality at that time, several influential racially inspired uprisings and violent conflicts took place, such as the 1981 and 1985 riots in Brixton and Handsworth, and the Tottenham Broadwater Farm riot in 1985. This increase in racial tension and retrospection in Britain's history as a multi-ethnic society and a historical colonial force has also been reflected in British artists' moving image. As Rizvana Bradley points out, the dynamics between the expansion and development in this field and 'the global transformation of British identity, initiated by black and minority artists interrogating the cultural hegemony of national identity and nationhood at the peak of Thatcherism' (2019: 71) is highly noticeable. To comprehend the social and political changes and engage with them politically and artistically, there have been considerable efforts to dismantle the nation narrative by focusing on the 'diasporic and intersectionalist' (Demos, 2019: 32) subjects, including race, class, gender, sexuality, crisis and contradiction; migratory and diasporic artists, including Isaac Julien, Mona Hatoum and my second case study Alia Syed, have also made up an important part of British artists' moving image landscape of the era (Demos, 2019: 31-32). According to Balsom, one of the most significant characteristics of British artists' moving image practices since that period is that artists started to 'foreground political and personal subjectivities, experiment with narrative and history and recruit cinema tropes and techniques' (Balsom et al., 2019: 2). For example, Syed's *On a Wing and a Prayer* (2016) and *Points of Departure* (2014) both explore different types of diasporic experience and their socio-political and historical contexts by visualising the personal realities of migrants and their descendants, which will be analysed in detail later in the Chapter 5 of the thesis. Meanwhile, her *Panopticon Letters: Missive I* (2012) follows the tradition of landscape painting and uses the images of the landscape along the River Thames in London to investigate the notion of memory and the colonial and imperial past of Britain (Fig. 3.4). This high level of political engagement in British artists' moving image practices including Syed's works enables viewers to envision the home-making efforts of the diaspora members and migrants who live there, then invites viewers

to project themselves onto the space and imagine their own home-making experiences happening in a similar or even the same setting, such as the urban space of the global London. In this way, the works prompt alternative ways of telling the stories of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved in visual forms and exploring the possibilities of looking at the topic from different angles.



Figure 3.4 Landscape on the Thames, Panopticon Letters: Missive I (2012), Alia Syed, video still



Figure 3.5 London at night, Twilight City (1989), Reece Auguiste, video still

While the political nature of British artists' moving image and its concerns with intersectionality make the form highly relevant to my project, most artists from the 1980s and 1990s still tend to treat the topics that fall into 'territories of race, class, gender and sexuality' as 'sites of crisis and contradiction' based on a 'national frame' rather than 'an insistently international and diasporic one' (Demos, 2019: 32), and consider the explorations of these topics from the perspective that they have the potential to rupture the fixed ideas of nationality. One example is Reece Auguiste's 1989 film *Twilight City* (Fig. 3.5), a revealing piece in which the filmmaker uses the candid discussions from film participants to criticise the vicious gentrification of the Docklands Enterprise Zone and Section 28's damage to the human rights of sexual minority groups. As Demos (2019: 31-39) says, national identity as a frame in the representation of migratory and diasporic people and their experiences is too out of scale: too big for the cinematic investigation of subnational conflicts such as race and class, too small for the mapping of global transnational human flow. He then suggests that moving image art practices dedicate themselves to the dismantling of the 'imagined community of nationality', then replace the nationality framework with 'works of aesthetic and political disunity' (2019: 31), and it is crucial to make adequate use of the expanded geography of human flow which 'transgress national boundaries' (Demos, 2019: 32) in the creation of this new type of works. Based on his argument, I argue that home-making is a universal human condition, so making use of the visualisation of migratory and diasporic home-making is reasonable in the construction of a transgressive perspective towards migration and diaspora. There have also been many successful works that follow this expansive and environmental framework from British experimental video artists. For example, using imageries of the ocean, John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015) discusses the sea's role in 'geographical conflict, liquid nationality and postnational uprooting', as well as unfolding 'histories of colonialism, migration, slavery and environmental transformation' (ibid.) (Fig. 3.6).

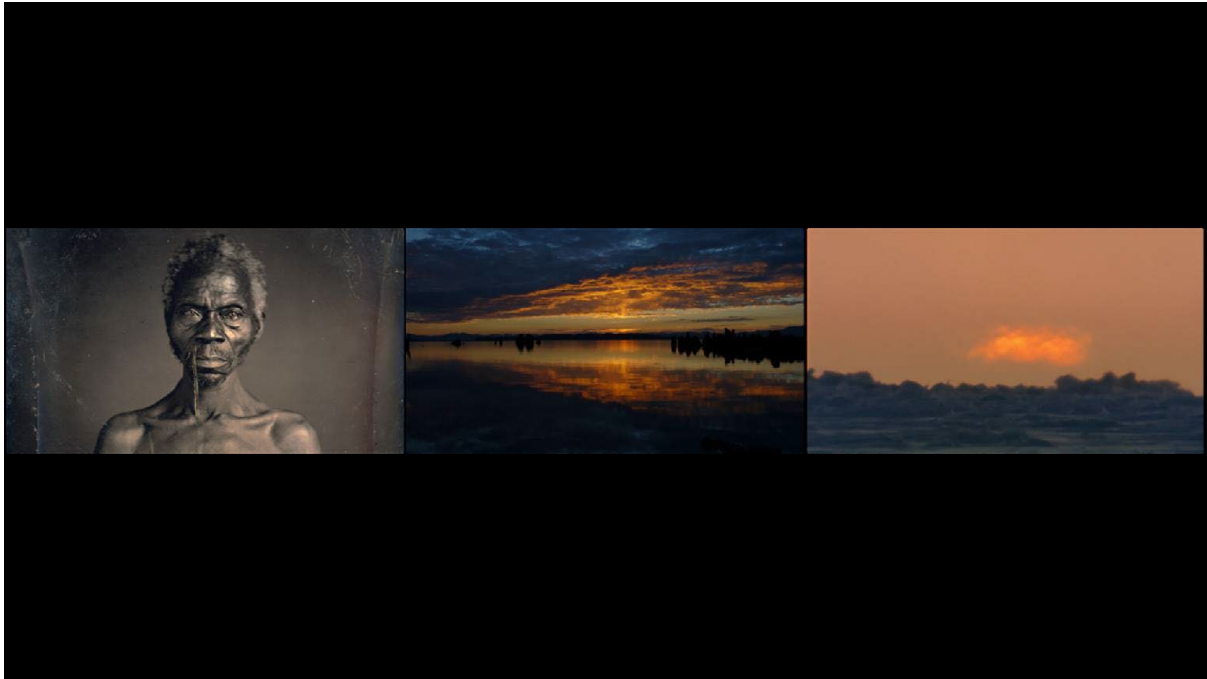


Figure 3.6 Installation view of John Akomfrah's Vertigo Sea (Lisson Gallery, 2019)

The same creative approach is also found in Syed's works. Instead of telling a plot-oriented story, the narratives in her, and many other artists' moving image works are constructed by conveying the inner logic of non-human elements to the viewers by fragmenting the spatial-temporal flow around them and setting up a reflective internal dialogue between the film and the audience (Richardson, 2018: 36-37). This is highly valuable in informing my research on how to translate the materiality of space and the embodied meanings into visuals. Firstly, artists' moving image's ability to produce meanings in such a spatial manner highlights the storytelling potential of the space in two-dimensional visual art genres such as narrative cinema. This spatiality also enables it to act as the point of exchange that transforms installation arts' creative experience into something that can be adopted by both three-dimensional and two-dimensional visual art genres, and further explore the question of how to achieve a nuanced perspective towards migration and diaspora by building on the visual explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making.

Chapter 4: Visualising Migratory and Diasporic Home-making within the Domestic Space:

Take Do-Ho Suh for Example

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Migratory Artists in London: A Historical Background

Even when I first started to decide on the artists and artworks for the case studies in the project, it was always my intention to choose from artists who were migrants born outside the UK or of a diasporic background, and live and work in London on a long-term basis. This is because, as Kristeva says, foreigners are the natural “‘enemy” in primitive societies’ who represent ‘the space that wrecks our abode’ and ‘the time in which understanding and affinity founder’ (Kristeva, 2002: 264). In other words, the existence of migratory and diasporic people who are unlike the native community of a society ethnically or culturally, or whom Kristeva describes as foreigners and strangers (1991), is one of the main forces that may disrupt the habitual order in the contemporary nation state society. Meanwhile, due to their potential to pose a threat to the order of nation states, foreigners are ‘inevitably second-class citizens because their stories do not fit the narrative requirements of modern nation-states’ (Appadurai and Ponzanesi, 2019: 558), and it is often difficult for them to claim their own voices in the public discourse, because the foundation of the very existence of nation states is against their existence. This is also one of the reasons why I chose London, a global city with a post-nationalist and pluralist social environment, to frame my research into the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved in them. Since it is often possible for ‘thought-provoking and powerful narratives about migration’ to emerge at the ‘intersection of art and activism’ (Leurs et al., 2020: 689), being informed by the voices and creative experiences of artists from this type of background not only enhances this project’s effort to prove that the existing dominant models of the visual representations of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences is not the only applicable perspective; it also empowers these people and gives them more voice in shaping the visual representations about their own existence and life experience through different forms. As the main location of my research, London has a long history of hosting many artists who have migrated from their home country temporarily or permanently, as well as providing a platform for many other artists to launch an

international career that spans multiple nations. It is also based on both London's history of hosting migrant and diasporic artists and Do-Ho Suh's personal experience and background as a long-term migrant that I made my choice of using him as the first case study.

Between 1760 and 1830, artists in London first started to 'forge visual and theoretical ties to the long-lauded traditions of cultures across the Channel' (Spies-Gans, 2018: 395), both socially and artistically. During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of migrant artists coming to settle in London were political exiles and war refugees, and many renowned impressionist painters, such as the Danish-French Camille Pissarro, all crossed the English Channel and settled in London (Jones, 2018). Early in the 20th century, between the 1930s and 1940s, London again welcomed a large wave of artists who were exiles and refugees from mainland Europe as a result of the political turbulence which first started in Central Europe, then soon expanded to other areas of Europe and escalated into a World War. Most notably, what is today the affluent neighbourhood of Hampstead in northwest London experienced an 'influx of top brains in science and the arts' (Hodin, 1974: 5, cited in Dickinson and MacDougall, 2020: 230) in this period, with the likes of Russian sculptor Naum Gabo, Dutch painter Piet Mondrian and Hungarian painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy residing in the area and continuing their creative and intellectual practices (Dickinson and Macdougall, 2020: 229-230). Then after World War II, the landscape of migrant and diasporic artists in London became even more comprehensive as more foreign artists who were not directly forced to migrate arrived in the UK. As Hall (2006) points out, it was during that time that the first generation of post-war Black British diaspora artists came to the UK: these artists were born between the 1920s and 1930s, migrated following the end of the War, and successfully entered the world of British modern art and literature as a historical Other in the UK. After that, during the 1950s and 1960s, London was the hub for a remarkable group of Caribbean intellectuals, including writer V. S. Naipaul and artist F. N. Souza (ibid.). Many Black British artists, filmmakers and writers who were active in the later decades of the 20th century were also the descendants of migrant parents who came to London at that time or came to London as young children themselves, such as filmmaker John Akomfrah (born 1957), artists Isaac Julien (born 1960) and Sonia Boyce (born 1962), and director Steve McQueen (born 1969). Around the same period, London also became a new destination for the migration of Portuguese artists who were attracted by the

international impact of British artists and wanted to escape the poverty and social injustice in their home country (de Oliveira, 2019: 3-4). Some of the most renowned examples of these artists include visual artists Paula Rego and Barto dos Santos, and sculptor João Cutileiro (de Oliveira, 2019: 2).

In the city's long history of hosting artists from other parts of the world, considerable efforts by galleries, art organisations and museums have been put into supporting the creative activities of migrant and diasporic artists in London, and the support for artists from outside Europe improved particularly quickly during the post-war period. In the 1950s and 1960s, under the governance of British poet, curator and art dealer Victor Musgrave, the commercial gallery 'Gallery One' became one of the first organisations to extensively show the works of South Asian modernist artists such as Indian painter Avinash Chandra, and hosted the first personal exhibition for up-and-coming young international artists such as Mexican indigenous painter Rufino Tamayo (Correia, 2021). In terms of experimental and artist filmmaking, the London Filmmakers' Co-op has gradually developed into an international movement which was considered 'one of the major centres of an international network of cooperatives and cinemateques' (LUX, 2016: n.p.), which again reflected that London's visual art scene has developed way beyond the national borders of the UK. Similarly, the Black Audio Film Collective has also not only played an important role in charting Britain's 'multicultural past and present', but also 'pushed the boundaries of the documentary form' (BAMcinématek, 2014: n.p.) in general. Currently, a wider-than-ever range of platforms are keeping working with international artists by providing residency opportunities for artists worldwide, representing them in London and the UK or seeking collaborations with them, and some of the most notable international galleries and organisations that stand out from others in my research about the topic include Victoria Miro, White Cube and Gasworks. Gasworks, a non-profit visual art organisation based in Kennington, southeast London, proudly announces on its official website that its aim is to 'commission emerging UK-based and international artists to present their first major exhibitions in the UK' (Gasworks, no date (a): n.p.). It has developed a 'highly-respected international residencies programme' which has 'worked with over 500 artists from 80 countries around the world' (ibid.), such as Kenyan artist Chemu Ng'ok or Filipino artist Lesley-Anne Cao (Gasworks, no date (b)).

Despite the vibrant international artist landscape in London, it still took me a considerable amount of time to decide that Suh could be an appropriate choice for the first study in my project. Indeed, there are a lot of international artists living and working in London, and many of them are indeed working on the topic of migration and diaspora in the city in the contemporary age, so I had a lot to choose from when making my decision. However, it is still difficult to ignore that even now, a great many non-Western artists, including those that are based in London, have been sticking to the tradition of exotifying and mystifying the cultural and ethnic Other which has existed in the art world both commercially and artistically for a very long time. For example, based on an extensive investigation of a wide range of painters of Chinese and South Asian origins, Joyce Brodsky notably points out that a considerable number of artists of both migratory and diasporic backgrounds would 'introduce stereotypical images from their country of origin, either to perpetuate an exoticism that caters to a global audience, or for nostalgic and/or nationalist longings, particularly as these countries are ascendant on the world stage' (2015: 264). For example, in her comments on Indian artist Raqib Shaw, Brodsky points out that although 'Shaw may utilise abjection in some of his works to forefront homosexual persecution', 'when wedded to the exotic, the ornamental and the sexually bizarre, the meaning may be overwhelmed, and an opportunity lost to expose one of the most vile of western stereotypes, the Orient as a place of sexual degeneration' (2015: 269). Since her observation is mainly based on Asian artists, she uses the term 'reorientalisation' (2015: 276), to describe the tendency of many artists, who are the cultural and ethnic Other in the society they live and work in, to make their works highly exotic and fit into cultural and ethnic stereotypes, particularly as a way to satisfy the needs of the audience and the market (Hansen, 2012). Based on her observations (2012), due to marketing and profiting considerations, many contemporary artists who are from a migratory or diasporic background are willingly putting themselves and the cultural and ethnic group they represent into the position of the Other and allowing their works to be a platform for the audience's novelty-seeking and voyeuristic interest in their Otherness, or to say the background, heritage and life experience they stand for. When it comes to the representation of migrants, diaspora members and their experiences, this reductive perception is reflected in the conscious or unconscious following of the traffic-based approach introduced in Chapter 2. For example, in the narrative cinematic practices

analysed in Chapter 2, the sedentarist perspective is mainly shown in how these films approach the relationship between migrants, diaspora members and the home. In my project, an artist that can be informative towards the visual representation of the migratory and diasporic experiences in contemporary London in a new light would most importantly be able to avoid this trait in their creative practices, and this again plays a crucial role in my choice of using Do-Ho Suh as my first case study, which will be discussed through the analyses of a selection of his installation works.

4.1.2 About Do-Ho Suh

Frequently working with colourful and semi-transparent fabrics and utilising traditional Korean sewing techniques that are often associated with women, South Korean sculptor and installation artist Do-Ho Suh (born 1962, Seoul, South Korea) attempts to explore contemporary migratory experiences by creating an immersive, sensory narrative with explorations of physical spaces and material environments. Compared to many other migrants and diaspora members or even artists from these backgrounds, Suh comes from a relatively privileged background with good connections to the art world. With renowned Korean artist Suh Se-Ok as his father, he started his creative journey in traditional Korean painting, obtaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts in Oriental Painting from Seoul National University. After that, he moved to the US and studied at both Rhode Island School of Design and Yale University, where he received another Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting in 1994 and a Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture in 1997 respectively. Apart from sculpture and installation art, he also works with other visual art genres including drawing and video art. Around a decade ago, he came to settle in London from New York to be with his British wife, art educator Rebecca Boyle Suh and their two children, and has mainly lived, worked and exhibited here ever since (Belcove, 2013). Since then, he has also incorporated his experience of living and raising a family in London into his more recent works, such as *Bridging Home, London* (2018), which will be analysed later in this chapter. For my project, Suh's creative investigations have provided valuable references on how migratory home-making can be spatialised and visualised in the materiality of the migrants' domestic spaces. So far, his works have been exhibited extensively in various famous museums and galleries in

different parts of the world¹⁶. Notably, he has represented South Korea at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001, and participated in other high-profile international exhibitions such as the 12th Venice Architecture Biennale, 2010. As an international artist, both Suh's works and his creative career reflect the artistic nomadism ideal of establishing one's existence (making a home) in dislocation, as introduced in Chapter 3. Meanwhile, the exhibition of these domesticity-themed installations in the gallery space is in itself a metaphor for displacement and the making of home in displacement.

As would be the case for many other migratory or diasporic artists, for Suh also, his art is 'highly informed by his personal experiences of home and migration, and the search for anchor points that his uprootedness has brought to his life' (Steiner, 2014: 7). Using large-scale architectural sculpture installations, he focuses on a series of themes which hold crucial places in the life of migrants and diaspora members of the contemporary era; many of his works use the domestic space he lives in to manifest his personal history and identity as someone who left his place of origin at a young age, as a world nomad and an international artist. His works can be considered as critical considerations of questions that have arisen from his own life, history and experiences, which Steiner sums up as 'how much space does a person need', 'what is the space that defines a group of persons', and 'where and when does home exist' (ibid.), which are also often of great significance in discussions about migratory and diasporic experiences. Therefore, apart from the fact that his works up to date have not shown the reorientalisation tendency as introduced in the previous section, it is reasonable to say that they form a powerful response to the important question asked by French philosopher Étienne Balibar in his article 'Toward Co-Citizenship': is the reimagination of the concept of citizenship possible (2014: 259-276)? As he (2014: 276) points out, in the contemporary era of globalisation and mass migration, it is indeed possible and necessary to reimagine it in a way that embraces plurality and inclusivity. He argues that

¹⁶ Famous museums and galleries Suh has exhibited in include but are not limited to Los Angeles County Museum of Arts (LACMA) (2019), Victoria & Albert Museum (V & A), London (2019), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington (2018), National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2013), and Tate Modern, London (2011) (Victoria Miro, no date). Relevant information can be found at: Tate, *Do Ho Suh, Born 1962*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/do-ho-suh-12799> [Accessed 31 Mar 2021]. Victoria Miro, *Do Ho Suh*, <https://www.victoria-miro.com/artists/188-do-ho-suh/> [Accessed 22 Feb 2021].

the notion of nomadic citizenship echoes with the idea of 'citizenship in the world', which focuses on people's migratory status and aims to transcend the framework of the nation state. Meanwhile, the vision of 'co-citizenship' builds up on the idea of 'citizenship of the world' that functions 'as a totality', which recognises the people's interconnectedness and work together for a more just and equitable world (ibid.). The emphasis on the transience nature of migratory experience and the fluidity of migrant identity across nation state borders in Balibar's discussions are both reflected in a lot of Suh's installations that explore contemporary migratory experiences through their extensive reimagination of the spatial and architectural elements which are traditionally considered to be fixed and bound with light-weight fabrics that can be folded and carried with ease. Besides, Suh's artworks contain extensive reimaginings of the domestic spaces in which he has lived in different stages of his life, which can be viewed as an indication that both migrants and diaspora members and people without these types of identities and backgrounds all have a domestic side to their everyday lives. This emphasis on an important aspect of the shared humanity that unites people across diverse socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and classes, namely the commonalities of home-making efforts, reinforces the idea of co-citizenship and promotes empathy and understanding among individuals regardless of their national or cultural origins. Through his evocative visualisations of the materiality of domestic spaces and the traces of himself and his family in the spaces, Suh prompts viewers to reconsider their existing assumptions about migrants, diaspora members and their experiences which are often fixed, bound, static and nationalist, and open up a conversation for viewers to embrace a more inclusive and expansive vision of belonging in an increasingly globalised world just as proposed by Balibar's idea of co-citizenship.

In this chapter, I use four of Suh's artworks in particular to demonstrate how his works can inform the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and migrants and diaspora members in contemporary London through the visualisation of the dynamics between these people and the physical spaces intimate to them. Firstly, I examine how his installation project *348 West 22nd Street* (2011-2015) visualises migratory and diasporic people's 'architectural existence' (Bruno, 2014: 205), or the traces of their everyday life, personal history and memory within the materiality of their domestic spaces. Secondly, through the investigation of the installation project *Passage/s* and the video *Passage/s: The*

Pram Project (2014-2016), I discuss how to manifest migratory and diasporic home-making as a process through the materiality of migrants' and diaspora members' domestic space. After that, I explore how the installation project *Home within Home within Home* (2009-2011) reflects how the unique and often paradoxical identities of migrants and diaspora members are constantly contested, reshaped and redefined during the migratory and diasporic home-making process in a material manner. Lastly, three questions related to the migratory and diasporic home-making experiences in London are also investigated on both an individual level and a collective level through the analysis of the installation *Bridging Home, London* (2018). These three questions include how home is reproduced by Londoners who are migrants and diaspora members in the urban space of global London in a spatial-temporal sense, how this has been constantly reshaping the relationship of their bodily existence with both the domestic space and the London urban space outside their homes, and how the multi-ethnic global city of London eventually comes into being in physical forms as a result of massive transnational human flow and migratory and diasporic home-making.

As introduced in Chapter 3, installation art is fundamentally the twinning of a spatial political or ideological system and its visual embodiment (Hawkins, 2010). Artist filmmaker Emily Richardson suggests that as 'an environment that if it were to be dismantled would signal the end of a life lived', the house is made up of the 'interior space and all it contains in terms of experience, the richness of familial relationships, the patterns of the everyday, the traces of changing lives' (2018: 107), and similar things can also be said for other types of intimate spaces and intimate cityscapes. In my project, by analysing Suh's installation about his own domestic spaces and migratory experience, my goal is to provide a spatial approach to the generation of visual information and meaning about migration, diaspora and the identity paradox of both migrants and diaspora members within the domestic space (and intimate cityscape) and through the dynamics between human and the materiality of these intimate spaces, which would eventually contribute to a non-sedentary perspective towards this topic from a less gendered perspective which is different from the creative tradition of many earlier female artists such as Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who are

interested in examining the traditional concept that the home is a feminine space¹⁷. I believe that in this way, it is possible for us to avoid the migratory aesthetics tendency in works such as *Extranjeras*, in which domestic spaces become a platform for the Otherness of migratory and diasporic females to play out, while migratory and diasporic males are still missing from domestic life and appear to be homeless and disruptive in the receiving society (Ballesteros, 2015). This is another reason for my choosing Do-Ho Suh for my first case study, on top of the fact that his works are not among the works of many contemporary artists that display a strong reorientalisation tendency, and that they reflect many important contemporary discussions in the topic of migration and diaspora.

Of course, choosing a high-profile international artist such as Suh as the key case study for this chapter has also raised some noticeable issues. As mentioned previously, Suh belongs to the type of contemporary professionals who have the ability and means to build homes at multiple locations, that is, a global citizen. This means that although his lifestyle and creative practices are a strong reflection of the characteristics of this group, it cannot provide sufficient information on the portrayal of the experiences of two other types of migratory and diasporic people, including the less privileged migrants and all the diaspora members who are born into the receiving society. This is one of the reasons why I chose Alia Syed, a diaspora member with mixed heritage and from a less privileged background, as the second case study to supplement and further develop the observations and analyses of how migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved can be visually represented in a way that highlights their home-making efforts and their links with the receiving society through making use of the materiality of the space that surrounds them in my project. However, Suh's migratory home-making experience as a well-educated artist with a good upbringing, an international career and stable financial status reflects Nowicka's (2006) terms plurilocalism, where it has become possible for people to make homes in multiple geographical locations at the same time. This in turn reflects Boccagni's (2016) statement that home and the experience of the home can be reproduced over space and time, which is at the core of a non-sedentarist perception of migratory and diasporic experiences. As I have

¹⁷ But it is not my intention to downplay migratory and diasporic women's role in home-making, both in participating in public life and in carrying out domestic duties. Neither is it my intention to declare these artists' feminist practices to be meaningless or out-of-date.

discussed in the previous two chapters, the remaking of home is a process that is essential to all kinds of migratory and diasporic experiences regardless of socio-economic status, and the aim of the research is to explore how a non-sedentarist perspective might be developed by exploring the materiality of migratory and diasporic domestic space (and their intimate cityscapes in cosmopolitan cities such as London). Besides, as explained previously, regardless of the financial background and social status of a migrant or a diaspora member, they will all go through the home-making process to establish their own space of thirdness and hyphenated reality. Similarly, for artists of a migratory or diasporic background, it can also be said that the emotional resonances of their home-making experience and the reflection of their paradoxical identities in their creative practices would be mutual to a considerable extent regardless of their migratory or diasporic experience and socio-economic status. These two factors connect Suh and his works with the experiences of other migrants and diaspora members of different socio-cultural backgrounds and financial status, making Suh and his chosen works a reasonable choice for my first case study.

Although Suh himself did not accept my interview invitation due to a combination of time schedule conflicts and bereavement after the loss of his father, his team has sent me a list of media reports and writings about the artist's creative career, on which a considerable part of this chapter is based.

4.2 Do-Ho Suh's Investigation of Migratory and Diasporic Home-making through Domestic Spaces

4.2.1 *348 West 22nd Street* (2011-2015): The Architectural Manifestation of a Migrant's Life



Figure 4.1 348 West 22nd Street, Do-Ho Suh (Museum Associates/LACMA, 2019)

When people try to describe the most memorable characteristics of Do-Ho Suh's works, one of the first things that comes to mind is undoubtedly the artist's life-sized, translucent fabric replicas of architecture that he terms a 'hub' (Morby, 2017). *348 West 22nd Street* (Fig. 4.1), a group of architectural sculptures modelled and named after a New York ground-floor apartment the artist used to live in around 1997, is undoubtedly one of the most well-known representatives among them. Built during four years between 2011 and 2015, the project recreated everything within the apartment in its original size. There are three sections in this group of works: 'Apart A', which has a three-dimensional measurement of $271 \frac{2}{3} \times 169 \frac{3}{10} \times 96 \frac{7}{16}$ inches; 'Unit 2', which is $422 \frac{7}{16} \times 228 \frac{1}{3} \times 96 \frac{1}{16}$ inches; and 'Corridor and Staircase', which is $488 \frac{3}{16} \times 66 \frac{1}{8} \times 96 \frac{7}{16}$ inches (Azzarello, 2014). With painstaking attention to both major and minor details, even extremely small and overlooked features of the apartment, such as the switches on the wall, letters on the oven in the kitchen and patterns on the bathroom tiles are also precisely crafted in these artworks (Reiner-Roth, 2019). And like a metaphor for his own migratory, or almost nomadic lifestyle

between three different continents, this body of work about Suh's one-time house has been going on exhibitions in different parts of the world since it first came out.¹⁸

All the components of this project are constructed by hand with traditional Korean tailoring and sewing techniques, which can be considered as a form of domestic and feminine labour. Considering how Suh approached this project as a male artist, I consider it reasonable to consider this project a demonstration of how migratory home-making is a process of labour which all migrants and diasporic members, not just the females, would all experience personally, while not ignoring the fact that the particular home-making process for each of the migrants and diaspora members can be specific to their gender, age, socio-cultural cultural heritage, economic class and their everyday experience in the receiving society. Meanwhile, by applying a traditional Korean approach in the production of the replica of a New York apartment, this project and its unique crafting process also reflects migratory and diasporic people's collective home-making experiences, including movement between the cultural and identity system of their places of origin and their receiving society, and the production of hyphenated identity or space of thirdness during this process. On top of that, all the structures are made of sheer polyester fabric, and are stitched together based on accurately constructed steel frames. This approach makes the whole project an intimate account of Suh's past migratory experience and home-making effort, which is deeply rooted in different sections of his personal history that have actually happened. However, what is also quite clear in this, and the second and third works selected for this chapter, is that although these replicas are life-sized and with highly accurate details, the etherealness of the fabrics used to construct them indicates that they cannot be understood as the type of functional domestic spaces that can serve any practical aim; they do not provide viewers who choose to walk into them with a domestic sphere of security, comfort and sense of belonging, nor is there the capacity for viewers inside them to carry out everyday tasks using the appliances within them. In a visual sense, instead of looking like actual domestic spaces, the translucency of the fabrics also makes this rigorously crafted assembly of structures look more like the ghosts or residues of home. This making strange of the

¹⁸ So far, the work has been shown in different renowned galleries and museums including Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2016), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2019-2020), and Lehmann Maupin Hong Kong (2013-2014).

domestic space can be considered as a reflection of the unhomely notion, through which the existence of migratory and diasporic people and their living status on the margin and border of nation state societies can be highlighted. I understand the choice of fabrics in this, and many other of Suh's works as a reflection of the reality in the contemporary nation state society in which the sedentarist framework is still popular. And despite being nomadic, his practice is not a simplification of migratory and diasporic experiences. As a result of the policies of the nationalist and nationalist-leaning governments and people with nationalist and xenophobic beliefs in many parts of the world including London and the UK, migrants and diaspora members are still frequently considered a homeless Other that brings instability, uncertainty, and disruption to the receiving society, thus facing many obstacles and difficulties in their home-making process that are not shared by the British population with no migratory or diasporic backgrounds and identities.

Like the particular projects that are selected for analysis such as this one, Suh's 'site-specific yet moveable' (An, 2013: 154) installations are often a manifestation of the idea that moving to a new location to settle outside of one's place of origin is not the loss of home, but a process in which home is constantly being remade by migrants and diaspora members. And this is further reflected in a short article in which he talks about his creative rationale. As Suh says himself,

'I am interested in the space that moves along with me ... the space I try to move with me because I want to, because it is important to me; or the space I have to move with me because I am forced to; or the space that just tags along with me without my being conscious of it. I explore the personal space as the combination of tension between these two force fields, and how the boundaries of the personal space are drawn.' (1997: S28).

To sum up, these spaces that he is interested in exploring exist not only in the form of physical structure, but also in the invisible realms that people create for themselves or are being forced to carry with them through the establishment of their bodily existence no matter where they go. In other words, Suh uses his works to visualise the scope of the relationship between human body and the physical space that surrounds them under a

migratory or diasporic context; and the domestic spaces of migrants or diaspora members, as the structure of its core, is at the centre of his creative practice. As a type of space which is so intimate with people that they move along with the human body, they invoke the positive feelings of happiness, comfort and liberation and also the negative feelings of oppression, confinement and alienation that are both experienced by migratory and diasporic people in their home-making process. As discussed in Chapter 3, migratory and diasporic domestic spaces like the one visually presented in this project are central to any migratory or diasporic people's effort to establish their existence and make a home in the receiving society. They are able to provide varied degrees of privacy and control depending on the various individual circumstances of the people involved (Hamlett, 2010: 31; Long, 2013; Graham and Graham, 1989: 5), and invoke all the feelings that can be caused by the portable homely realm Suh is interested in. Considering Suh's creative interest, it is no wonder that the houses and apartments Suh lives in or used to live in in different times and different countries have been frequently explored rigorously by the artist. The different layouts, settings, and domestic appliances featured in this project also prove my point. For example, different units (rooms) in the whole structure all have different sizes, and viewers can easily distinguish different rooms, like the bathroom and the kitchen, by what is in them (Fig. 4.2-4.3), such as the toilet, fridge or oven. The great level of detail in the project reflects the intimate knowledge Suh has about the space of the apartment and the close-knit dynamics between Suh's bodily existence and its materiality. In addition, in comparison with many migrants and diaspora members who struggle in grave poverty and constant insecurity, I also consider these modern home appliances in Suh's home as accounts of his power and privilege as a professional with a stable career spanning across multiple countries worldwide, which reflects how the disparities of social and financial status can have an impact on people's migratory or diasporic experience in reality. Meanwhile, Suh's long-lasting interest in finding an intimate space that can move with people reflected in different projects such as this one also reflects to a certain extent the theoretical explorations of migratory and diasporic spaces as introduced in Chapter 3. For example, apart from a reflection of the traumas of displacement and the difficulties of migratory home-making, the lightweight nature of the material used in the project can also be regarded as Suh's imagery of an intimate space which is also 'infinitely transportable' (Suh, 1997: S28). In other words, this creative choice is an embodiment of the mobility of Long's concept of the 'domestic sphere',

which is mainly made up of ‘feelings of comfort, security and belonging’ (2013: 329), that is to say, the reproducibility of the home is both a physical structure and a set of feelings or relationship system, as well as all of the experiences included in it.



Figure 4.2 Bathroom in 348 West 22nd Street, Do-Ho Suh (Museum Associates/LACMA, 2019)



Figure 4.3 Kitchen in 348 West 22nd Street, Do-Ho Suh (Museum Associates/LACMA, 2019)

As indicated above, for Suh, the domestic spaces he has lived in at different points of his migratory experience are essentially the embodiments of his home-making activities. In many different projects including this particular body of work, Suh has made a series of informative practices in using the materiality of domestic space to trace the different types of existences and activities of migrants and diaspora members within it, that is to say, the proof that the migratory and diasporic home-making process has been happening in it on a daily basis. If viewers connect all of his home or domestic space-related projects together, it can be seen that this lasting line of development is a reflection of his perception of the movement in his own life. When talking to art content platform Art21, he suggests that his life so far, which has been manifested in these different domestic spaces is a process of ‘movement through different places’ (Artnet News, 2018: n.p.), while the reason why domestic spaces are used for this manifestation is that people have the tendency to ‘remember the space, and also somehow memorialize the space’ (ibid.) over time. Based on the theoretical discussions about home and home-making in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 of this thesis, it can be said that Suh’s vision reflects the non-sedentary perception that home is a set of meaningful relationships between the human and the space that surrounds them

which can be duplicated, reproduced or recreated, while migratory experience is fundamentally the remaking and reproduction of the home over a considerable period of time in one or a series of different locations. This perspective is different from that of many other migrant and diasporic artists and artists who deal with similar topics, such as the exilic Palestinian-British Mona Hatoum. According to Kuang Vivian Sheng, in Hatoum's works such as *Grater Divide* (2002) or *Quarters* (1996), home as both an idea and a spatial term is

'...never simply a familiar, hospitable and comfortable place where one feels settled and at ease. Instead, the most quotidian household objects ... have been unexpectedly distorted by the use of incongruous materials, absurdly exaggerated in scale or even ingeniously animated by an audible, forbidding electrical current, engendering a tangible sense of threat and disturbance at the heart of the "home"' (2016: 118).

This is to say, Hatoum's perspective generally views her migratory experience as having a damaging effect on the establishment and maintenance of the home. It is undeniable that despite her differences from artists like Suh, Hatoum's construction of a dislocated experience and reflection on the dysfunctional and hostile relationship between migratory and diasporic people and the space that surrounds them is a reflection of her turbulent her life experience which is turbulent and exilic: born and raised in Lebanon, she was unable to obtain identity cards from the country, and was forced into exile when studying in London as a result of the Lebanon Civil War (Dimitrakaki, 1998; Chaudry, 2009). Her attempts to search for a home and establish a sense of domesticity as an exile, which is often met with harsh socio-political realities, is also an unavoidable theme for both her private life and her creative practices (Chaudry, 2009; Kuang, 2016). While the use of a relatively exilic perspective is perfectly justifiable in Hatoum's works due to her particular personal background, the exile framework cannot be applied to the representation of the experiences of all types of migrants and diaspora members, particularly those who are not persecuted or forced to migrate and relocate, especially those who have the means to establish a good life abroad like Suh, who represents the contemporary professionals with an international career and global citizens who represent the spirit of pluri-localism and co-citizenship in the contemporary age of globalisation and mobility. Balibar argues that we 'should not consider the choice between access to and denial of the rights of citizenship', but instead think about

'between the possibility and impossibility of an inclusive political order' (2004: 68). Compared with Hatoum, who comes from the equally valuable and truthful perspective of a political exile who was first forced out of her home country, Suh's creative occupation of domestic space and artistic claim of the right to home-making have undoubtedly provided a more optimistic answer to the question, enabling it to offer a new possibility of reading migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved. Based on Staub's writings (2016), the order of the nation state society is significantly reflected by who can and cannot build a home within it. Similarly, Mezzadra and Neilson's (2012: 182) discussions also suggest that this order relies heavily on the creation and maintenance of a legitimised unjust system of unevenly distributed resources for home-making. By visualising Suh's home-making effort within the space intimate to him, this work can be considered what Mezzadra and Neilson describe as an 'attempt to go beyond merely formal models of procedural justice' which link 'questions of distribution to problems in political theory including debates on democracy, legitimacy, membership, and identity' (2012: 182).

By delving into the visual explorations of his domestic space as a migrant, this particular project by Suh has also provided a valuable example of how to visualise humans' 'architectural existence' (Bruno, 2014: 205) in the domestic space or the traces that humans' bodily existences, personal experiences and everyday activities may leave behind, a concept I introduced earlier in this chapter. Similar to another installation artist, Rachel Whiteread, who is mentioned by Bruno in her discussion of architectural existence, Suh in his works also often turns his domestic space into a witness of how his own life unfolds from day to day in this project (ibid.), and this is mainly achieved by sculpturing on the 'surface' (Bruno, 2014: 2) of these domestic spaces. According to Bruno's definition, surface refers to the configurations of an architecture, which can be understood as 'the material configuration of the relation between subjects and objects' (ibid.). Although all the structures are indeed accurate in details, instead of producing absolutely accurate models in a mechanical manner, what Suh does in this project, and all other similar projects, is to present enough information to provide a sense of habitation for the space, that it is being occupied by a real person with their specific habits, preferences, identities and personal history. In Bruno's words, it is a process of making 'imaginary space', or the portable intimate homely realm Suh proposes 'become projected in material space, on the surface of things' (2014: 187),

manifesting how the apartment has been used as a living space and a location for his migratory home-making efforts through the materiality of its space. As Bruno eloquently puts it,

‘A window cuts out a new frame for looking. Walls put up barriers, but their borders easily crack. The perimeters of a room change into boundaries to be crossed. Doors open up new access, morphing into portals. An entranceway becomes a gateway to an inner world. A mirror shows specular prospects for speculation and reflection. Objects of furniture turn into lively object of an interior design ... A staircase takes us up to a whole new level of intimate encounter...’ (2014: 187).

Bruno’s words indicate that the project is a powerful manifestation of the unhomey notion, which makes strange the apartment space by bringing the traces of Suh’s everyday life experience to light, thus allowing for critical reflections on his home-making experiences as a migrant from an intimate and individualised perspective. Meanwhile, his existence in the wider New York society is also embodied in various details of the flat in the project, such as the notices and official documents stuck on the wall of the apartment’s public area, as shown below in figure 4.4.

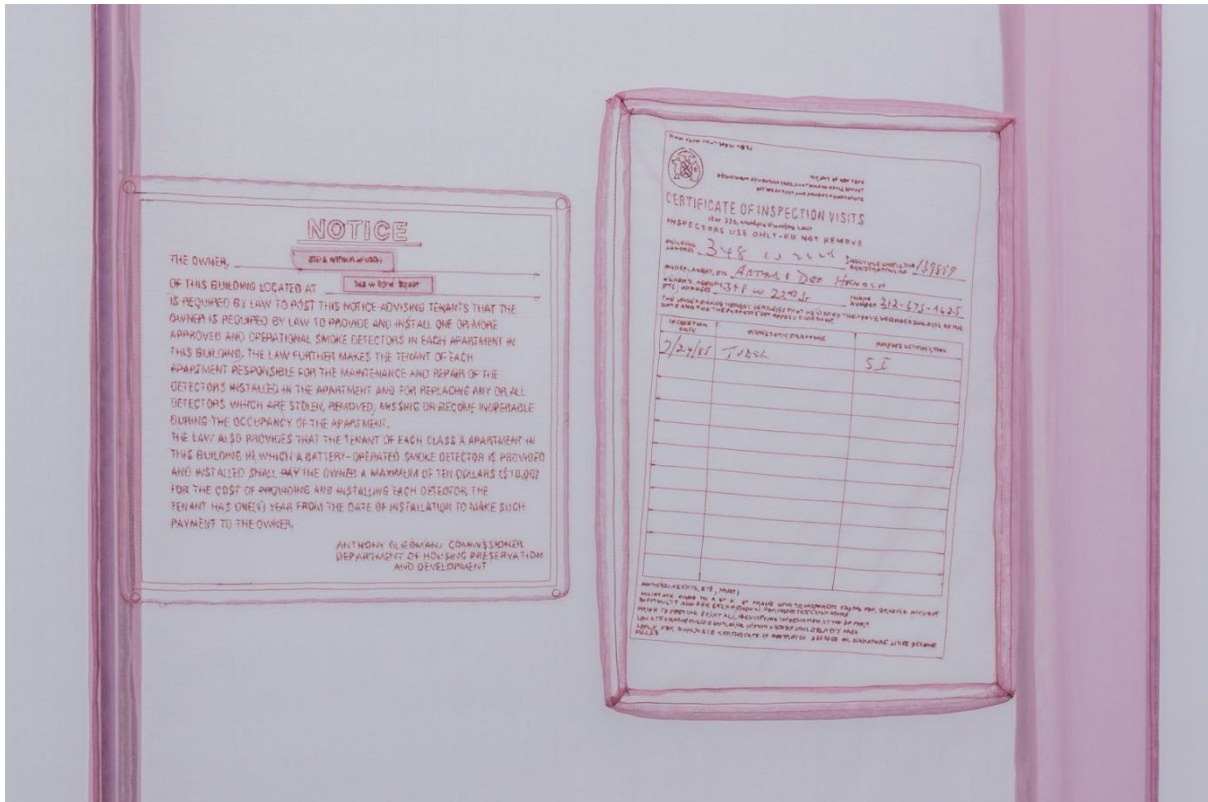


Figure 4.4 Wall details in 348 West 22nd Street, Do-Ho Suh (Museum Associates/LACMA, 2019)

The handcrafting and assembling process of this project is another factor that makes the project a visual representation of migratory and diasporic home-making, which can be understood as a form of ‘rubbing’ (Compton, 2017: n.p.). A few years ago, before moving out of a flat he used to live in, Suh dipped his fingers in pastel, caressed the walls and attempted to give ‘a part’ of his body to that space before moving out of one of his residences; he himself termed the process ‘rubbing’ (ibid.). This practice eventually evolved into a project *Rubbing/loving*, which is also related to Suh’s migratory domestic space: before moving out of the same apartment featured in *348 West 22nd Street*, he covered every surface in the apartment with white paper, and then rubbed with coloured pencil to reveal and preserve all of the space’s memory-provoking details, such as the shape and texture of objects, and their relationship with the movement of human hands and body (Extended Play, 2016). As Suh says, rubbing is a process in which ‘memories were triggered by the recovery of small textures or details that I had completely forgotten. Through the rubbing they resurfaced so I lived that time very intensively’ (ibid.). Although the making of these large fabric architectural sculptures in this project is different from rubbing in a strict sense, through this handcrafting process Suh manages to interpret and construct ‘the physical parameters of

these spaces, in turn securing his memory of them' (Steiner, 2014: 9), which can be regarded as the visualisation of his personal migratory home-making experience as a form of psychogeographic journey. After the rubbing process, Suh leaves the place, and 'came out of it' (Compton, 2017: n.p.) with the memories related to the space internalised as part of his identity, making him feel safe and in control in a ritualistic manner; meanwhile, part of his existence and experience is preserved in architectural form (Rose, 2017), just as in Whiteread's works mentioned previously. Using the same standard, the process of building *348 West 22nd Street* by hand can also be regarded as a type of 'rubbing', in which the artist 'infuses' part of his emotions, his life experiences and his very existence into the structure. Borrowing from the artist's comments on *Rubbing/Loving* from different sources, it can also be said that in *348 West 22nd Street*, through the process of measuring, creating patterns and sewing, the apartment has also become an immortalised version of the orientation of things, movement, and internal routine inside the artist (ibid.). This means that the traces of his existence in the space are gradually visualised in the process, making it a form of rubbing which helps to trace and embody his and his families' presence, or architectural presence, as they move around the home space.

4.2.2 *Passage/s* and *Passage/s*: *The Pram Project* (2014-2016): Home-making as an Ongoing Process in the Realm of Thirdness



Figure 4.5 *Passage/s*, Do-Ho Suh (Thierry Bal, 2017)



Figure 4.6 *Passage/s: The Pram Project*, 2014-2016, Do-Ho Suh (Thierry Bal, 2017)

Passage/s (Fig. 4.5) and *Passage/s: The Pram Project* (Fig. 4.6) are two independent but

interconnected artworks which focus on the same subject of passageways. The former is an installation project, while the latter is a three-channel video project. Both works were completed between 2014 and 2016, within a period of around two years' time. As one of the first of Suh's works to be exhibited in London after he came to live and work in London long-term, they were shown together in the Victoria Miro Gallery in early 2017. *Passage/s*, the installation, is a group of life-sized 3D colourful fabric replicas of the corridors and stairways in all the different studios, houses and apartments Suh has lived in over the years in different parts of the world, as well as the doors that connect different rooms or the outside world and the domestic space. For the final outcome of this project, the artist combines all these different spaces together into one whole long passage the audience can walk through and interact with. This seemingly infinite passage tempts the viewers to go in for a stroll with its vibrant colours and intriguing structure, but at the same time looks so lightweight and delicate that it might be torn open or blown away by careless external forces as light as a gust of wind. Meanwhile, *Passage/s: The Pram Project*, the three-channel moving image piece that accompanied the installation in many exhibitions, is a multi-screen video documentation of how the artist passed by other people's passageways and corridors on the streets of Seoul and in the Islington region of London over a few different walks while pushing his infant daughter in a pram, and the whole film lasts for 14 minutes and 25 seconds (Victoria Miro, 2017 (a)). The most important reason why these works are investigated as part of my project is that, just as the artist himself states, human life and his migratory experience in the contemporary age can both be regarded as a process of walking through a colourful long passageway with neither fixed beginning nor predetermined destination into different spatial-temporal contexts, different environments and different life experiences (Victoria Miro, 2017 (b)). In general, it can be considered as an example of the psychogeographic mapping of Suh's migratory home-making activities during the last few decades within the materiality of the domestic spaces involved. However, due to the utilitarianist and sedentarist ideologies that have long existed widely, people still tend to overly focus on the destinations of their lives and 'forget about the in-between spaces' (ibid.). Meanwhile, based on the theoretical discussions introduced in earlier chapters, the corridors and passageways can be considered as the embodiment of the hyphenated reality or the space of thirdness, both of which surround and contain the migrants and/or diaspora members but are often neglected by researchers who are under the influence of the existing

representational frameworks such as the ones introduced in Chapter 2. In other words, these spaces featured in this project form a metaphor for the in-between state of being for both migrants and diaspora members: as can be shown in Kristeva's (1994) description introduced previously, they are not fully assimilated in the socio-cultural systems of their origins and their receiving societies, but at the same time are creating their own unique and often paradoxical identities, stances and living spaces based on the characteristics of both systems. Different from many other of Suh's works which use domestic spaces to embody the process of how he establishes his existence as a contemporary migrant, although they are still technically part of the domestic space, corridors and passageways as the main subjects of both the installation and the video are liminal, and represent a sense of transience instead of rootedness and fixity. However, despite its paradoxical nature in a practical sense, I would still argue that these projects are a visual representation of the contemporary migratory, and also diasporic home-making process instead of the lack of home for migrants and diaspora members, which will be deliberated later.

As introduced in the previous chapters, from a theoretical perspective, one of the deepest ideological roots of the sedentarist framework is the tendency to 'romanticize and essentialize' (Cancellieri, 2017: 50) the ideas of home and homeland by considering it as a fixed and geographically bound notion. As a result of the romanticisation and essentialisation of the home, nationalism would 'consider the "home" as a fixed and bounded place to protect' (ibid.). From this perspective, people can only have one true home, which is their place of origin where they were born and brought up, and this is the reason why many who hold this perspective would frequently tell migrants and diaspora members to 'go home'. According to Balibar, the 'prototype of identity' is 'national' (2002: 76). Based on my previous argument that there exist various levels of home-making rights between the natives and non-natives of a society, it is reasonable to say that having access to a home in a certain nation state society has almost always been an important indicator of being able to identify as a full member of the society. In other words, the right to a home is fundamentally what Balibar terms as 'fictive ethnicity' (2002: 90), which separates its natives from non-natives by 'perceptible (visible, audible, etc.) marks' and 'by "typical" or "emblematic" behavioural traits' (ibid.). However, since the late 20th century, the fixed and bound imagery of migratory and diasporic home-making has been gradually reversed both in

the academic world and in the public narrative because of the development of globalisation and the sharp increase in the scale of people living in places other than their origins, either temporarily or on a long-term basis. Many academics like Boccagni have argued that the home, as both 'a material environment and a set of meaningful relationships' (2016: xxiv), can actually be reproduced at different locations over time. On top of this, the home can even exist at the same time for the same person in different locations, which is the basis of Nowicka's plurilocalism notion (2006), a concept which was introduced in the first chapter and reflected in *348 West 22nd Street*. This new perspective towards migration and diaspora in the contemporary age of globalisation which highlights how home-making takes place beyond the borders of nation states, is also strongly displayed in both of Suh's projects that have been discussed in this section, making the ability to make a home or the access to a home lose its status as a mask over the inherent diversity within the nation state and criterion for exclusion (Balibar, 2012: 90), thus using the logic of artistic nomadism to create a space which emphasises the hybridity and multiplicity of identities and disrupt the habitual order of nation states. Similarly, the focus on the experience and bodily existence of both migrants and diaspora members in a space of thirdness is also a feature in Syed's films, which will be analysed in detail in the next chapter.

According to Steiner (2014: 7), Suh has often asked himself the question about how the continuity and discontinuity of space, of his spatial existence and of his intimate portable realm are both manifested in the spatiality and temporality of his migratory life from Seoul to New York and then to London. Among his extensive works, this group of two projects, both of which are related to the transitory spaces in people's domestic spaces such as doorways, corridors and stairways, can be considered as an answer to the question. As the most significant subject in them, the passages, staircases or corridors of houses and apartments can be considered as a special part of the domestic space which is slightly different from others. First, they are indeed an important part of the spaces people live in, and people unavoidably use them for their practical functions when they go about their everyday life. Second, compared to the more private sections of domestic space such as bedroom, kitchen or bathroom and the cityscapes outside the door of people's domestic space, what is unique about these kinds of spaces is that transiency is their most important feature. This is most importantly reflected in the fact that people mainly use them for

transitions, or to say going through them to go to other places they want to get to, such as different locations of the outside or one of the rooms in the domestic space. And this is the foundation of another significant characteristic of this type of space: according to Max Feldman's article for *Frieze*, the passages in this project are like 'a piece of playground' because although people use the structure, it is not necessary for them to be 'fully immersed in play' (2017: n.p.); in other words, although these transient liminal spaces are an unavoidable part of everyday life and frequently used for various purposes, it is rare that they become the destination of people's journeys, and they generally function as the spaces of continuity and connectivity between the domestic space and the outside, as well as different parts of the domestic space. Similar things can also be said about the relationship the audience builds with the artwork during their viewing experience, because although viewers can walk through the hubs, they are more of a facsimile rather than a functioning home where it is not even possible to act out the most simple tasks, such as opening or closing the doors or using sockets to get power for their electronic devices (ibid.). But this does not indicate that passages and corridors are not an important type of space: Feldman also points out that the passage can be regarded as a bridge between the public and private life and draws the distinction between the identities of the 'insider' and 'outsider' (ibid.). In general, passages and corridors here can be regarded as a physical embodiment of what Bhabha terms the 'interstitial space of thirdness' (2011: 6). On one hand, the space of thirdness is the place where a postcolonial history starts to unfold and migrants or diaspora members start to negotiate between the dual language systems of hostility and hospitality in their receiving societies to establish their own unique and paradoxical existence between the socio-cultural and identity systems of both their places of origin and their receiving society (Bhabha, 2011: 7). On the other hand, while researching this topic, I also came to realise that the third space is of significant transitory nature and bears the important role of a witness in the process of 'becoming' (Trinh, 1991: 157), in which migrants and diaspora members navigate themselves between the cultural identity systems of their origins and the receiving society to achieve a certain form of recognition instead of a state of complete assimilation as a member of the minority community in their receiving society. However, based on Trinh's discussions, this navigation process is most likely never-ending for a lot of people, including both first-generation migrants and second or third-generation diaspora members. As she (ibid.) expressively points out in her reflective writings about the

experience of living as a migrant and an ethnic minority in the US, in the country, a migrant or a diaspora member might successfully become Asian-American or Black-American after obtaining American nationality or even living in the country as a family for generations, but it is still almost impossible for them to fully becoming simply American. Compared with white Americans, they would still be constantly doubted, scrutinised, and regarded as the Other and alien in American society due to their cultural background, personal history, accent and skin colour, and they cannot control this situation by any efforts of their own. Based on the discussions of scholars such as Paul Gilroy, this is also the case for the migrants and minority groups in the UK.

Considering that passages and corridors are still very common components of domestic spaces in different parts of the world, it is reasonable to say that they are also indeed connected to the home experience of Suh, who has walked in and out of all of them during multiple different processes of home-making as a long-term migrant. Therefore, it is also reasonable to say that the long line of corridors in this project is a psychogeographic mapping of his migratory home-making experience over space and time, which is framed by his, and all migrants' and diaspora members' struggle for their own place and recognition in a still very nationalistic world. In general, by focusing on the passageways and corridors, this project not only portrays the continuing fluxes between geographical locations and cultural and identity systems that keep happening in the lives of migrants and diaspora members, but also forms a reflection of how the migratory and diasporic people's home-making efforts are really happening all the time, but often made light of or even neglected under the existing sedentarist perspective. Passages and corridors are both dividers and bridges between the private and intimate (domestic) worlds of different migrants and diaspora members alike and the outside world they need to face. In a space like this, the loneliness and discomfort all these people unavoidably experience in the process of establishing their existences in the receiving society are evoked and enhanced to a great extent (Feldman, 2017), which again makes it a realistic metaphorical manifestation of how all migratory and diasporic people mediate between their own unique culture and identity and that of the receiving society instead of an oversimplified and rose-tinted representation of contemporary migratory and diasporic experiences as in conceptual nomadism. The visual argument that the migratory and diasporic home is not only one, or a few physical locations,

but a lived emotional experience is also supported by the fabric choice of the project. Sheer polyester fabrics are used to construct all the different hubs in this passage, while each one of them replicated from each of Suh's former residences is marked with a different colour. As Hetti Judah writes for *The Space*, 'In the jade segment, for example, we find the wooden latticework of the doors and windows of his home in Seoul; a gold section reveals the fine mesh grille of a ventilation unit at his London studio; while sombre forest green embroidery represents the decorative antique door handle from an apartment in Berlin' (2017) (Fig. 4.7-4.11). The diversity of colour in this project is most significantly a marker of the different characteristics of different parts of his life. Green is what British artist Derek Jarman considers to be a colour that 'nourishes the soul' (2000: 65). As a kind of green, jade is used as the colour for the corridor of the traditional Korean house Suh grew up in as a child from an upper-middle class with a renowned painter father, which can be considered as an indicator of his happy and peaceful childhood in his country of origin with his parents and family. Similarly, other colours which are used for the fabrics of different hubs of the work can also be regarded as the signifiers and embodiments of other different experiences and memories in Suh's life to date, both when he was living in South Korea and in Western countries as a migrant, thus reflecting on how migratory, and also diasporic home-making can be a complex emotional experience.



Figure 4.7 Entrance to Suh's childhood home in Seoul in *Passage/s*, Do-Ho Suh (Victoria Miro, 2016)



Figure 4.8 Entrance to Suh's New York apartment (right) in *Passage/s, Do-Ho Suh* (Victoria Miro, 2016)



Figure 4.9 Corridor in Suh's Berlin apartment in *Passage/s, Do-Ho Suh* (Victoria Miro, 2016)



Figure 4.10 Entrance to Suh's London apartment (right) in Passage/s, Do-Ho Suh (Victoria Miro, 2016)



Figure 4.11 Gold, jade, green and other colours presented in *Passage/s, Do-Ho Suh* (Thierry Bal, 2017)

In the end, it can be said that this work argues that the home-making effort and domestic experience of a migrant or diaspora member can never be fully fixed and finished, which reflects the artistic nomadism in its treatment of the relationship between the people and the physical space of the nation state society. Like many other of his works which reimagine his presence in the physical space, this project aggregates Suh's presences from different periods and in different domestic spaces together into a passageway of memories to represent his previous internationalised life experience as a migrant or an international nomad and invites viewers to observe and imagine the artist's own migratory experience from an external perspective by walking through this corridor. At the same time, as with other large-scale installations that allow viewers to walk through them, the viewing experience of the work also encourages viewers to review their personal experience of any forms of dislocation or displacement, or the migratory and/or diasporic experiences that happen to others around them with the corridor that visualises the essence of migratory and diasporic life. While viewers walk through the passages, looking at them and touching them as they view the artwork at exhibitions, the whole setting at least reminds them of their own home-making experiences and domestic life at least to a certain extent, regardless of

whether they are from a migratory or diasporic background or not. And these effects are mainly achieved by the translucency of the fabric used in the project. According to Burhanettin Keskin, there exists a type of liminal memory that can be described as translucent, which can be described as 'neither pure reality nor pure fantasy' but still has a real impact on the memory holder's self-identity and their perceptions of the environment and understanding of 'other' and 'otherness' (2019: 147). Like in many other of Suh's artworks, here translucent fabrics are used to create a series of spaces which resemble each of the apartment corridors and passageways but are not full replicas of the original, because he has created them out of a type of material which is flimsy and non-functional. The materials used for the construction of the project are see-through and ephemeral, thus suggesting that the notion of home investigated in this project is more of a concept held by the artist and other migrants and diaspora members alike within their memories about the construction and establishment of their lifestyle and sense of self, instead of an actual geographical location or an actual built environment, which can be considered a form of artistic nomadism. It echoes Boccagni's (2016) arguments about migratory home-making introduced previously, and also makes the project able to provoke ephemeral and elusive memories in its viewers and start discussions about identity, home and otherness in the increasingly diverse and mobile contemporary world. Meanwhile, the use of manufactured fabrics in the project also reflects on the situation of home-making in the post-modern era. In his analysis of Frederic Jameson's comments on postmodernism, Demos points out that Jameson considers that 'the geographical homogeneity of built space and the ahistorical imagery in the states of multinational capitalism ... compromises one's ability to suit oneself in time and space' (2013: 7). Indeed, Jameson's words are more of a criticism on 'the schizophrenic disorientation and debilitating amnesia of the subject in the state of advanced capitalism' (ibid.). However, instead of viewing it as a form of collective homelessness, I consider the compromise of people's ability to situate themselves can be considered as the disruption of the sedentarist notion that home is a fixed, bounded, and spatial concept, which again informs us to look beyond the sedentarist framework for different perspectives in the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved, which is again a reflection of artistic nomadism.

In general, in the first place, the imageries of passages and corridors from Suh's different

domestic spaces in this project provide a way of visualising how migrants and diaspora members exist in a paradoxical state which does not fully conform to either the social and identity systems of their places of origin or their receiving societies, and in the space and state of thirdness. Therefore, this project can be understood as a visual representation of Suh's, and many other migratory and diasporic people's home-making efforts over space and time, or to say their efforts of negotiation and mediation between different socio-cultural systems which would happen in different kinds of migratory and diasporic experiences. It lays claim to a type of universality of different types of experiences based on the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making. Bhabha sums up these home-making processes as a restructuring process of 'going back and forth' (2011: 13) and 'passing through places' (Jacir, 2004: 3-4, cited in Bhabha, 2011: 15), and the 'exchanges' of resources and information across 'borders and crossings' (ibid.). Apart from these, it also proves that migratory and diasporic people's thirdness is not always characterised by the disorientation and out-of-place-ness which have been described in the exile theory of Edward Said, which was introduced in Chapter 1, and this is proved most significantly in *Passage/s: The Pram Project*. In this short film, Suh chose one of the perspectives which is most often linked with the characteristics of being carefree and curious – the eyes of a baby – as the only camera perspective, which is done by filming the whole piece completely with three GoPro cameras attached to his infant daughter's pushchair. This small-scale and low-down perspective also gives the footage a childlike and playful characteristic by showing what his children are most possibly able to witness when they are walking on the streets of London and Seoul. The child's perspective also plays an important role in the soundtrack of this film. Apart from the environmental sounds that naturally happen as they walk past the streets, Suh and his daughter can also often be heard communicating with each other in a gentle, loving and simple manner. However, while these elements have made the film extremely delightful and intimate, considering that Suh's own young daughters appeared in this project, there have also long been different interpretations of this work. For example, some commentators believe that this project is a song of praise dedicated to 'the innocence of humanity' (Gilchrist, 2017: n.p.) and the importance of "'home" as an emotional connection, something which provides stability and safety' (ibid.). Based on this logic, this passageway of Suh's life as a migrant is the visual representation of a temporary state that people who have the capability go through for self-growth and development, the preparation for a final,

glorious life destination (ibid.). And by arguing thus, her comment indirectly suggests that Suh's migratory lifestyle is a complex, exilic state, which is unhealthy, unsafe and abnormal compared to the lifestyle that is rooted, immobile and static. On top of these arguments, she then indicates that considering that his family, including his British wife and two young daughters are now all living together in London, it would be highly possible, or even natural and reasonable for him to eventually stop his lifestyle at some point in the future, settle in London and make it his permanent home on a long-term basis. However, as Ho Rui An describes in an interview, while Suh's actual migratory experiences 'have begun with his arrival in New York in the early 1990s', the process of psychological displacement 'was already underway during his childhood in Korea' when he grew up in a family of 'traditionalists who believed in the importance of looking back at one's roots in times of rapid change' in an age of rapid westernisation (2013: 154). For someone who identifies as a nomad 'who resides in the space between each city, who is always hovering, always in transit' (ibid.), it is unlikely that Gilchrist's assumption would be true. Moreover, this type of opinion contradicts the artist's long-term creative rationale that intimate and personal spaces and the experiences they provide are both reproducible and mobile (Suh, 1997), and can be considered as a hostile nationalist attitude towards migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved. I am more in agreement with another perspective, which argues that these two projects together form a celebratory gesture towards the thrill of self-discovery, discovering what was previously unknown in life, finding the entrances to other people's worlds, and crossing the geographical and cultural boundaries in the lives of migrants and diaspora members (Victoria Miro, 2017 (a); Feldman, 2017). Just as Feldman points out, the film celebrates 'change, travel and the free-play of cultures and languages, questioning not merely what it means to have roots, but what it means to be able to grow new ones' (2017: n.p.). In other words, Suh and his young daughters' explorations of their neighbourhood can be considered as an embodiment of the process of migratory and diasporic home-making: migrating to another part of the world, getting to know the surrounding spaces and the cultural and identity systems and establishing their presence, and also rediscover and reinvent themselves during the process. This, as introduced previously, is a process experienced by all migrants in their own unique and personal ways.

Meanwhile, as an accompany to *Passage/s, Passage/s: The Pram Project* is based on his

walks and chats with his young daughters and shows a nurturing and caring gesture highly linked to his domestic life and shows the familial bonds between him and his family members extensively. Through this video, Suh also provides a perspective on how, instead of being homeless, rootless and placeless as perceived by the sedentarist framework, the home and the domestic experience can indeed take place for himself and other migrants or diaspora members who are living a relatively globalised and mobile lifestyle. In general, when I consider this project under the contemporary context when nationalism and xenophobia are on a rapid rise, it can be seen that this work can be considered as ‘a bracing riposte to the idea that the “rootless cosmopolitan” is the enemy of the people’ (Feldman, 2017: n.p.) with its exhibition of how the domestic sphere and homely feelings such as a sense of security, comfort, rootedness, as well as the familial connections between Suh and the people around him all exist in Suh’s seemingly rootless and turbulent lifestyle of moving and working between different countries. I would argue that when being examined based on the discussions from Hage and Malkki discussed in great depth in Chapter 1, it is obvious that the two works by Suh in this section can be considered together as an argument that the majority of migrants and diaspora members are ordinary people whose daily routine and home-making activities take place in ways similar to people without this type of identity, experience and background, rather than living a rootless and somewhat dangerous lifestyle that may pose threats to ‘the people’ (ibid.) – or rather, other people who are not migrants or diaspora members, and natives to a nation state from a nationalist perspective. From these messages that the projects attempt to convey, migrants and diaspora members should not be considered irresponsible, cannot take good care of their own homes and are even homeless and a nuisance, and nor should they be subject to excessive value judgements and scrutiny solely because of their identity and status. This again proves that highlighting the domestic life of migrants and diaspora members and focusing on home-making activities is useful in achieving a new perspective towards migration and diaspora. In general, these two projects here form a strong demonstration of how this is achieved by placing more emphasis on how migratory and diasporic people’s home-making activities and family life take place during their everyday life. At the same time, they also further undermine the dominant status of the sedentarist perspective by expanding the definition of ordinariness and rootedness.

4.2.3 *Home within Home within Home* (2009-2011): Home-making as a Process of Negotiation and Mediation



Figure 4.12 *Home Within Home Within Home*, Do-Ho Suh (Phaidon, no date)

Similar to the previous two projects, *Home within Home within Home* (Fig. 4.12) is another example of Suh's explorations about his life experience as one of the many migrants who choose to migrate and live somewhere else in an age when transnational human flow and cross-cultural communication have both been made easy by globalisation and the development of technology, as well as what the notion of the home means to them and how their personal identities are altered and reshaped as a result of their migratory experience. Constructed between 2009 and 2011, this project is another representative of Suh's long-lasting interest in the format of translucent fabric sculpture of architecture and domestic space, which is made up of two large-scale replicas of two houses in which Suh has lived in different stages of his life. Although Suh defines this project as site-specific (Choi, 2013) and

it has not been shown as extensively as the first two projects investigated in this chapter, the work has also been shown in a number of cities worldwide, especially those where the artist has lived, and in major museums and galleries in these cities including Lehmann Maupin in New York (2011), and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in Seoul (2014). For me, this project demonstrates an understanding of what Balibar sums up as 'how the fluctuation of identities is articulated with the universality of nationalism' (2004: 21), or to say the fluidity of Suh's identity as a long-term migrant in a world comprised of nation states, which is the reason why it is informative to my research.

At first impression, there are two layers in this whole artwork. On the inside of it is a replica of his childhood home in South Korea, a Hanok. A Hanok is a type of traditional Korean house which originated in the 14th century (Park et al., 2015: 6), but the architectural form has been in fast decline since the second half of the 20th century (Park et al., 2015: 14), since the time when Suh was born. This first makes it a metaphor for the traditional Korean style of living, which has been constantly on the decline during the wave of globalisation and modernisation in the country for the last more than half a century. Apart from that, the fact that the Hanok is the most inner and invisible layer of this project is also a manifestation of the development of the artist in his globalised lifestyle and identity as a professional with an international career and a global citizen. Although it would be only natural that he still identifies with certain parts of Korean culture and values and considers himself a Korean person, his physical, emotional, and ideological connection with his home country have unavoidably lost their significance as time passed while he lived in other parts of the world among people from other cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups, and he also most possibly does not always display typical Korean behaviours in his everyday life in other countries, such as to continue living in a Hanok, following Korean social etiquettes or eating an exclusively Korean-style diet. On the outside is a replica of the three-storey townhouse where Suh used to live while studying at Rhode Island School of Design. Similar to the design of the inner layer of Hanok, using the townhouse as the more visible outer layer and the more significant thing the viewers notice can be regarded as a manifestation of the artist's migratory experience living in different Western countries, and also a symbol of his current lifestyle, which has most possibly been Westernised to a great extent. This can be considered as a spatial manifestation of how Suh establish his self within the spaces that

were the most intimate to him in at least a stage of his life throughout his unique life experience so far, which is a type of psychogeographic practice.

Like the previous two projects, both structures here are made with a steel frame and polyester fabric. Meanwhile, both layers in this project are life-sized; but while the viewers can walk into and wander around the outer layer of the townhouse, the Hanok is hanging in mid-air inside the townhouse and is inaccessible to viewers. This arrangement again shows that although it still exists and will continue to exist, the artist's tie with his home country has become a less significant and visible part of the artist's everyday life because it is being overwhelmed by his long-term and ongoing migratory home-making efforts in the West represented by the townhouse: the Hanok does not maintain its original functions as the physical structure of a home and the material manifestations of domestic sphere and homeliness anymore; similarly, the Korean cultural and identity system also unavoidably stops being the only major factor that can define who Suh is and how he behaves in his everyday life. Blue is chosen as the sole colour for both constructed layers of the artwork. In Korean culture, blue is regarded as a symbol of 'creativity, immortality and hope' (Shin et al., 2012: 50). Jarman also says that blue is 'the universal love in which man bathes' (2000: 108) which 'transcend[s] the solemn geography of human limits' (2000: 109). In this project, the ability to symbolise everlasting hope in human life and create a sense of universalness and inclusiveness within the colour make it a bridge for connecting the different parts of experiences in Suh's life regardless of the spatial-temporal differences. Based on these discussions, this project can be considered as a physical manifestation of how migratory, as well as diasporic home-making is an ongoing and developmental process that provides a perspective towards migratory and diasporic experiences different from the existing ones such as journey and journeying or migratory aesthetics, which, as indicated in many of the points introduced in Chapter 1 and 2, considers migratory and diasporic experiences as the severance or dysfunctionality of one's connection with one's geographical, ethnic and cultural origins, as well as the disturbance to the rooted lifestyle that is deemed to be more desirable by nation states. However, as introduced in the last chapter, there are many factors that can shape a migrant's home-making experience, or the establishment of their unique self during their migratory experience, such as gender, age group, socio-cultural background and class, and Suh's journey of transcending national borders that blesses him with love,

hope and creativity is no exception. I would argue that this is because as a successful artist, he fits in the scheme of interests which Balibar describes as 'bourgeois class nationalism' (2002: 80), which many other migrants are excluded from.

Often referred to as simply 'Home within Home' because there are only two apparent constructed layers in the artwork, the longer names of 'Home within Home within Home' or even 'Home within Home within Home within Home within Home' are also titles often used for this project when it has been exhibited in the cities Suh has lived in. Suh himself also confirmed that there can be as many as five layers to this project, and this is especially the case in a South Korean context. For example, in an interview about this project's exhibition in Seoul with writer Catherine Shaw (2013) from *Wallpaper** magazine, Suh uses the longest version of the title to refer to the project, and explains that the five 'homes' in the title include the Hanok which is his Korean home, the townhouse which is his New York home, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) which is one of the most important exhibition spaces for both Korean and international artworks, the Deoksugung Palace which contains the museum and represents an important part of Korean history, and the city space of Seoul, where he grew up and started his creative career. Outside this particular context, the longer versions of this project's title with four or five homes in them are also often used. In general, based on this information, outside the first layer of the Korean Hanok and the second layer of the New York townhouse, the exhibition space in a museum or gallery where this work is installed can be regarded as a metaphorical home for the project, and numerous other artworks by both himself and other artists. On top of these, the fourth home of the project title usually refers to the gallery or museum, where the exhibition space is included, as an entirety. And the fifth and last home in the longest version of the project's title is usually the city space where the project is exhibited in a place where Suh used to live or still resides. As an established international artist, Suh is undoubtedly living a migratory lifestyle due to the needs of both his private and work life, and the world can also be regarded as a home to him in the widest sense. This again adds the fifth, and last 'within home' into the title on top of the two fabric sculptures of the buildings, the exhibition space and the museum or gallery as a whole. After reading into Suh's personal life, I found that the pursuit of an art career away from the impact of his father, who was a renowned painter in Korea, was what made Suh leave South Korea in the first place (Choi,

2013). Based on this information, it should also be reasonable to understand the fifth layer of home in the title of this project as art itself, because this is where both his creative life and migratory experience take place, and it is also through the creative journey which has spanned decades that Suh found his self and his place in the world. In other words, this project shows that for Suh, home is not only where he resides and lives his everyday life physically, but also where his works are exhibited, and his creative life is manifested. In other words, this project can be considered a reflection of artistic nomadism because it not only visualises a form of the portable intimate space that can make Suh feel at home and can be carried by him regardless of where he lives his everyday life physically, but also reflects on his highly globalised lifestyle and his identity as a global citizen, which is the result of his international creative career.

Of all the five layers of the project, the first two are its centre and are covered by the others, and manifest the most important information about migratory and diasporic home-making and the identities of migrants and diaspora members that the artist wants to convey by the nesting of translucent houses one over another. From the above analysis, it can be observed that the multilayered meaning behind this project is tightly knit with the artist's complexity of identities and personal experiences, while it also reflects Suh's creative interest in visualising how, as a type of intimate space, the home is portable and can travel with migratory and diasporic people during their home-making experiences. From the suspended but still visible Hanok in the innermost layer of the project, it can be seen that despite having lived outside his home country for decades, Suh is still an ethnic South Korean who grew up in the South Korean social-cultural system. Therefore, it is natural that at least some of the culture, traditions and values of that society should be reflected in him, and this Koreanness has also travelled with him throughout his migratory life so far. Meanwhile, the townhouse is in particular a symbol of the Western culture that he gradually incorporates into his identity system as a migratory over time. After migrating to the US and living among people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds for a while, it would be natural for him to start to show signs of assimilation into American and Western cultures in different aspects of his life, all while maintaining a certain degree of Koreanness into his identity system. On top of these, for Suh who has married his British wife and has two daughters of mixed heritage (Belcove, 2013), as well as many other migrants, diaspora members and

people with family members from other parts of the world who are experiencing similar situations to his, the sign of integrating into the social-cultural system of their receiving societies would also include starting a family with someone who is outside one's own ethnic group. This project reflects how home is built across different cultural and ethnic systems for those people. All these are symbolised by how, in the project, the townhouse envelops the Hanok and works as a functioning structure that allows viewers to go in and explore.

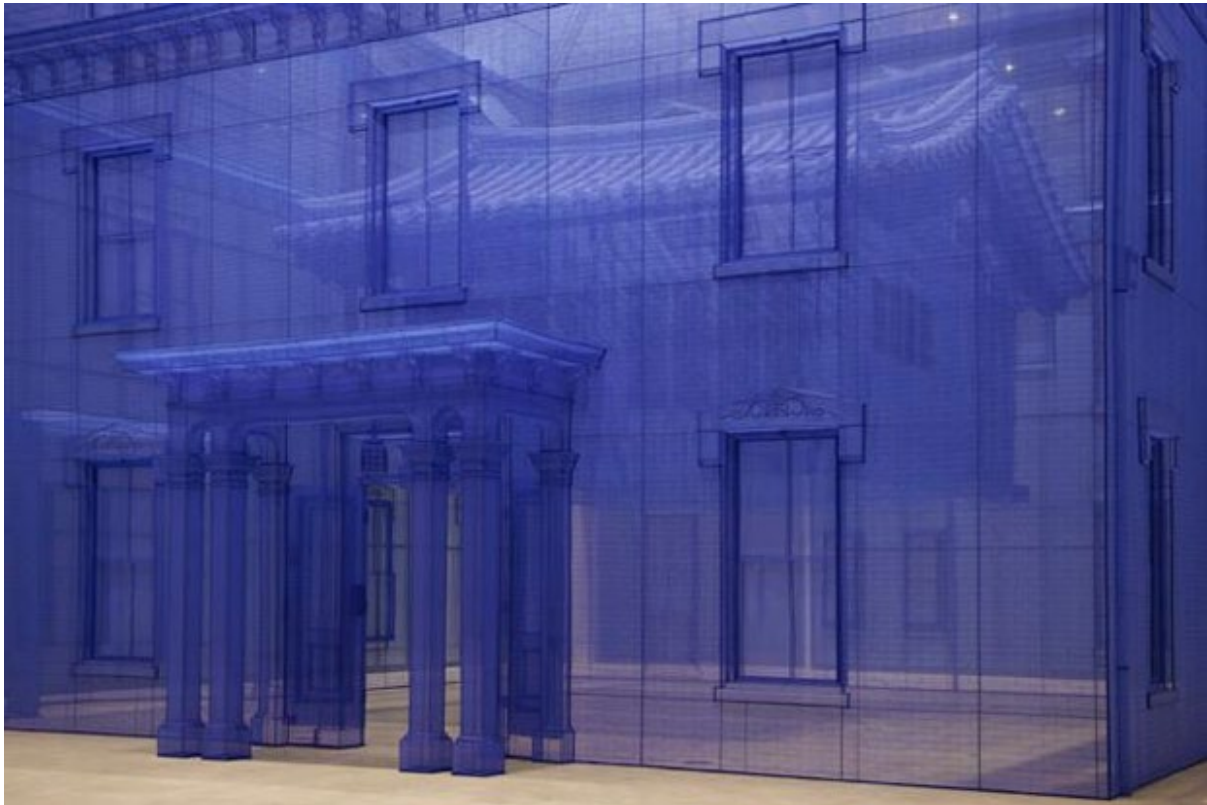


Figure 4.13 Close-up of the Hanok being suspended midair inside the townhouse in Home within Home within Home, Do-Ho Suh (Phaidon, no date)

During the investigation of this project, I also identified two potential ways of analysing the reason why the Hanok is chosen to be placed inside the townhouse and suspended mid-air out of the two most visible layers of the project (Fig. 4.13); these are related to the navigation of both migrants and diasporic people between the complexities of the cultural and identity systems of their origins and their receiving society. When looking at the setting of these two layers, we can say that the Hanok being hung in the middle of the townhouse indicates that his Korean identity is still at the core of his heart. At the same time, his Westernised aspect is more externalised in his everyday life. However, while the Korean part

and Westernised part of his identity will indeed continue to coexist based on the theoretical discussions previously, it could also be argued that their statuses in Suh's everyday life will eventually diverge. From this perspective, although Suh is still an ethnic South Korean who carries South Korean cultural and linguistic traits, he has become less and less of a traditional Korean who can connect and identify with all kinds of Korean cultures and values throughout the years of living in North America and Europe; despite that the Koreanness will always be there, it is possible that his acquired Westernised identity will eventually become the dominant part of his identity system, which is signified by how the Hanok gets completely enveloped by the townhouse and suspended in mid-air, being inaccessible to the viewers from outside and below and without any practical function. As something situated in the heart of the project, the Hanok is firstly not an actual home that can provide a domestic experience to the viewers. On top of that, its inaccessibility to viewers makes it unable to provide the immersive experience which characterises installation as an art genre.

However, what is equally noticeable is that while the large New York townhouse forms the external layer, the Hanok is still at the most central place of this project, suggesting that despite its unavoidable decline in importance, Koreanness will still continue to exist in the centre (core) of Suh's identity system as a contemporary migrant. This ambiguous presentation of the Hanok suspended within the larger multi-layered townhouse may have different meanings according to different audience experiences, especially the migratory and diasporic people among the viewers who are also consciously or unconsciously undergoing changes both in their lives and in their minds. Just as Georgina Maddox says in her comments, this project 'seems to represent the dual cultural identity of a migrant individual, who on the outside may show signs of cultural assimilation, but whose heart and soul remains encoded with the traditions and values that were learned in their place of origin' (2019: n.p.). And this would again greatly inform the research aims and questions of my project.

4.2.4 *Bridging Home, London (2018): The History and Present of Migratory and Diasporic Home-making in London*

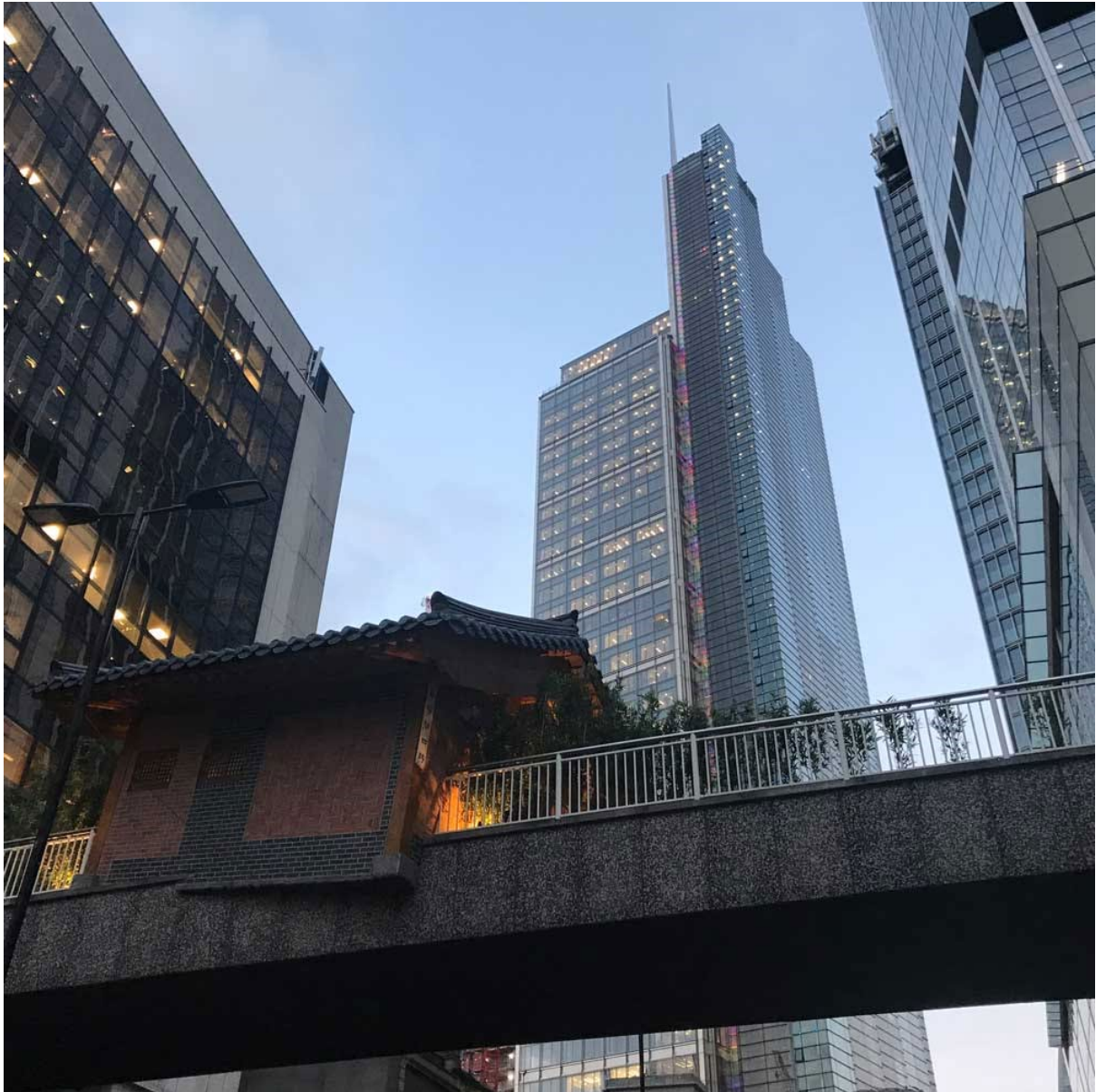


Figure 4.14 *Bridging Home, London*, Do-Ho Suh (HOK, 2020)

Created in 2018, *Bridging Home, London* (Fig. 4.14) is the latest part of Suh's artwork series entitled *Bridging Home*, a collection of drawings and installation art projects showing the artist's traditional Korean home inserted among the modern Western buildings and bustling cityscapes of London's ever-developing East End in an improbable manner which also include other large-scale public art projects such as the installation *Bridging Home* which he created for the Liverpool Biennial in 2010.¹⁹ Suh himself considers *Bridging Home, London* a

¹⁹ The work shows a Korean traditional house (Hanok), perched between two taller buildings in Liverpool. Online art magazine Designboom comments that it is an exploration of what impact 'living in an interconnected world' has 'upon the psychology of the individual and the community' (2012). Detailed

special component of the whole series. When talking to the Victoria Miro Gallery about the project, he comments that London is his 'adopted home', and that he considers it to be 'hugely rewarding' to create something like that in the city of London (Victoria Miro, 2018: n.p.). Although this may be considered typical publicity talk for his project, he had indeed started a home in London with his wife at that time after decades of migration across other parts of the world and years of endeavours to be reunited with her. The process of coming to London, negotiating with the materiality of London's urban space and the British socio-cultural system and making a home in the city, which is also experienced by countless other migrants and their descendants for generation after generation in London, is represented in this project.

Commissioned by two major British public art organisations Art Night and Sculpture in the City, as a large-scale outdoor public installation project, *Bridging Home, London* is among Suh's most ambitious works, as well as the first project he has ever made specially for the British capital and his current adopted home. From his interview quotes, it is also reasonable to say that creating a project about this topic in London is also important to the artist on a personal level. Just as Suh himself says, the project 'comes from personal experience'; with the project, he wants to construct an architectural space that is 'not only physical but also metaphorical and psychological' by drawing out the 'intangible qualities of the energy' embodied by the space, such as 'history, life and memory' (Art Night, 2019: n.p.). The centrepiece of the project is a hyperrealistic to-scale replica of a Hanok with a small bamboo garden, which resembled his childhood home and a nearby garden he used to play in back in South Korea. Similar to another of his earlier works *Fallen Star 1/5* (2008-2011),²⁰ here it also seems that the Hanok is lifted up into the sky, and then placed in a spot where buildings should not be located – this time in the middle of a closed footbridge above Wormwood

information is available at: <https://www.designboom.com/art/do-ho-suh-bridging-home/> [Accessed 1 Mar 2023].

²⁰ The work shows the collision of a small Korean Hanok and a multi-storey American townhouse at 1: 5 scale. As a result of the collision, the Hanok splits the townhouse open, leaving lots of debris in the latter's ground floor. As Los Angeles Times introduces, Suh considers the work as 'a sort of self-portrait', an embodiment of his 'personal journey from Korea to the U.S.', the 'story of the house' has always been with him on his migratory journey, and eventually brought him to create the work (Muchnic, 2009: n.p.). Full introduction is available at: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-do-ho-suh24-2009jun24-story.html> [Accessed 1 Mar 2023].

Street, EC2, and also looks visibly tilted. The humble and oriental style of this installation also provides a highly noticeable contrast with the Western-style buildings, modern businesses, busy traffic and bustling waves of people in the Liverpool Street area that pass under it (Fig. 4.15). In some ways, the precarious state of this Hanok almost makes it look like an alien spaceship that has just crash-landed in the middle of London and has not had the time to adjust itself, making it an architectural uncanny and reflecting the idea of unhomely. This can again be understood as a self-expression of the artist's identity as a foreigner in the UK, and his personal experience of being dropped into the centre of London from another part of the world without a great deal of first-hand knowledge, either about London or the general British socio-cultural system, as well as a reference to the generations after generations of people bringing their different regional histories, languages and cultures to the city. In short, this project is a retracing of Suh's personal life memories, as well as the collective histories of generations of other migrants from different parts of the world in London and their descendants, and therefore a gesture of nostalgia. By bridging the geographical distance between London and Suh's hometown, Seoul, and other parts of the world where migrant and diaspora members originated from, this installation serves as a visual representation of the interconnectedness and mutual influence between different cultures and societies.



Figure 4.15 Striking contrast between the project and the environment in the installation view of Bridging Home, London, Do-Ho Suh (HOK, 2018)

As Meghan Tinsley argues, the standpoint of nostalgia in contemporary Britain in a globalised post-modern and post-colonial world is ‘the perception of a gap between past and present, the desire to reclaim the past, and the awareness that doing so is impossible’ and ‘the anxieties and fractures of the societies that produce them’ (2020: 2327). Although this statement is mostly directed at the collective nostalgia of the British people as a whole community, we can also say that the contrast between the installation and the materiality of London’s urban space in this project is a visualisation of the gap between Suh’s past and present, and an indication that it is not possible to go back to the past spent in this Hanok. Although the Hanok here is a highly nostalgic imagery of home, the project should not be perceived as simply a remembrance of the artist’s childhood. When considered together with Suh’s long-term creative interest in the visualisation of portable intimate spaces and his personal experience as a global nomad, I regard this project as the imagination of an idealised spatial-temporal entity for himself which is simple, woe-free and free from the restrictions and hardships imposed on migrants and diaspora members by the nation state society, making it a manifestation of the artistic nomadism framework. Indeed, due to its link with Suh’s childhood, this imagery can also be considered as an innocent corner in his heart that is still untarnished and unhurt, despite the changes that have happened to him over his

life, including his choice of a migratory lifestyle, which has shaped his life in directions that are often unimaginable for people who have not had this kind of experiences. However, I do not consider the project to be an expression of Suh's desire to return to an earlier time when his migratory life had not started. As introduced in the beginning, as a public installation that can be viewed by any people who pass by the area, it also tells the stories of other immigrant Londoners like Suh. It is a portal that connects their past, which is often portrayed in an idealised manner, and their migratory or diasporic present, which is characterised by the process of home-making in their receiving societies. The collisions between Korea and London, and East and West manifest him and other migratory and diasporic Londoners' attempt to build a new society in which the traditional colonial world order and the nationalist ideology are heavily disrupted while maintaining their cultural and ethnic roots and identity. Meanwhile, the messiness of how the Hanok is positioned also reflects the late Liberal Democrat politician Roy Jenkins's 1966 speech, which defined the integration of immigrants and often their descendants in a multi-ethnic society 'not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (Mercer, 1994: 20); or in the words of historian Panikos Panayi,

'Many newcomers have remained distinct from wider London society (although this distinctiveness forms a fundamental aspect of London life) while others have helped its cosmopolitan evolution. Even when first generations have remained separate, their descendants have become absorbed into, and determined, the nature of London's history' (2020: 27).

In this way, it can be said that this project is a spatial manifestation of many migratory and diasporic Londoners' experiences, which echoes the aims of psychogeography introduced in Chapter 3.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, migrants and diaspora members are perceived in a paradoxical way in a world which is becoming increasingly globalised, but is still made up of nation state societies and shaped by the sedentarist framework. In this project, the artwork's site also imposes on it the paradoxical identity of both an alien entity to London and a

humble domestic space for Suh as an immigrant Londoner, which reflects the reality of migrants and diaspora members in the nation state society. In addition, the way a whole realistic Hanok hangs above the audience's heads at a certain angle is also meaningful: instead of being vertical, it is tilted and does not look very stable. This makes the project a subtle metaphor for the uniqueness of migratory and diasporic people's home-making activities, which is fundamentally a process of pursuing a sense of relative stability against a background which frequently changes and is not considered homely from this perspective. As established previously, Suh has repetitively engaged in migratory home-making since leaving South Korea in the 1990s. By looking back into his own childhood and past through the symbol of the Hanok, the project reflects how the international and migratory part of Suh's life experience is developed from his childhood life and his memories about it. Using the artist's own life as an example, the project then touches on the complexities of how all kinds of migratory and diasporic experiences in contemporary London and the world are shaped by not only the socio-cultural and economic context of the receiving society and the everyday life experience of migrants and diaspora members in the receiving society, but also these people's own personal background and past. Meanwhile, what is also noticeable about this project is that its message has the potential to connect audience members of different personal histories and are functioning as parts of London (Victoria Miro, 2018; Art Night, 2019), because arriving in the city as a newcomer and continuously putting more effort in home-making than people without a migratory or diasporic background only to achieve less is something that is undoubtedly experienced by all of them, regardless of their era and socio-economic status. This observation is also recognised by Suh himself, who says passionately in an interview that '[w]hile *Bridging Home, London* comes from personal experience', he still hopes that 'it is something a lot of people can relate to' (Art Night, 2019: n.p.). Although Suh did not clarify who he would like to relate to in this project, it is reasonable to assume that he wants to connect with both the migratory and diasporic and native population of London instead of just migrant and diaspora member Londoners for two reasons: firstly, home-making is an experience shared by both migratory and diasporic people and people who are not under these categories; secondly, cross-cultural displacement and integration are among Suh's long-term creative interests and the topic he hopes to investigate with this project (Sculpture in the City, no date), and these processes also play an important role in shaping the landscape of the society of contemporary London

as a whole. Similarly, Alice Bucknell also agrees that the artist's intention to significantly expand his own unique experience as an individual is 'both tangible and collective, extending empathy to the surreal feeling of floating between worlds' (2018: n.p.).



Figure 4.16 Close-up of the hyperrealistic details in Bridging Home, London constructed with materials that are used for construction in real life: different woods for the body of the Hanok, tiles for the roof, paint for the door frame, real bamboo for the garden, Do-Ho Suh (Designroom, 2018)

As shown in Figure 4.16, unlike the other three works considered in the previous sections which extensively use sheer lightweight fabrics such as polyester and gelatin tissue, in this project, as the main subject, the Hanok was created with different types of materials used in real life for Hanok construction such as plywood, softwood, steel and PVC, and finished with paint (Sculpture in the City, no date). Meanwhile, the surrounding plants are also real bamboo specially planted onto the footbridge. Despite being suspended in mid-air and looking precarious and awkward in the middle of the hyper-modern East End of London, the project's choice of heavier and more solid materials over translucent light fabrics, its realistic style and delicate details can be considered as a highlight that migrating to the British capital

and making a home in the city has been the lived experience of many migrants and diaspora members for centuries. Throughout history, they have always been leaving real marks on London instead of an abstract notion that is difficult to perceive or an unstable memory that might not be really accurate. However, the project should not be understood as purely mechanical or without its sense of humanity simply based on the fact that both the Hanok and the garden are constructed in an architecturally correct manner which reflects very limited subjective emotions, artistic creativity and personal opinions. As has been pointed out, the artist aims to 'reflect his own experience of moving from one country to another' (Frearson, 2018: n.p.) through this project. Considering that Suh has been engaging in migratory home-making in London with his British wife and two children for a considerable amount of time, I would further argue that it is a projection of Suh's perception of his home in London, which forms the core of his personal reality as a migrant living in the city, while similar subjects have been explored in his other works like *Home within Home within Home*. Besides, as the curator of the project, Fatoş Ustek says that 'the piece activates feelings of home, belonging and remembrance that will resonate with viewers on their individual journeys' (Sinopoli, 2018: n.p.). In other words, although Suh's story is only a very small part of London's East End migration history, this project is indeed a small window into the stories of how generations of migrants and their diaspora member descendants come to London and make efforts to make the city their home. Therefore, I consider it reasonable to state that it represents migratory and diasporic home-making experience at a collective level. Through the humorous and even absurd contrast between the painstaking manner in which the Hanok was constructed and the way it was installed onto a footbridge, in mid-air at a random angle, the viewers can gain a personal and intimate perspective of the efforts of home-making from Suh and generations of migratory and diasporic Londoners, of their love for the imperfect homes that they can make in the city, of their often maladroit attempts to mediate between culture and identity in British society and their places of origin in their home-making efforts, and of their eagerness to call London home after a certain healthy amount of hesitation and doubt at the beginning.

Apart from an embodiment of Suh's, as well as many other Korean Londoners' and migratory and diasporic Londoners' personal experience and memory, the project can also be considered as a reflection on his understanding of and relationship with the migrant group

or diasporic community of which he is a member, as well as a response to the multiplicity of the 'migrant history of the East End and the City of London' (Art Night, 2019: n.p.). This was again mainly achieved by the choice of where the Hanok 'landed', which is the midpoint of a footbridge connecting two modern business buildings on Wormwood Street, surrounded by an ever-developing urban forest made of steel, glass and stone. Wormwood Street is one of the main streets near Liverpool Street Station, which is one of the busiest railway and underground stations in London with a history of accepting thousands of refugee children into London during World War II. Wormwood Street is also located in the heart of the City of London, which has long been London's primary central business district (CBD) in history. Meanwhile, it is also the centre of London's East End, an area with a long history of attracting migrants and refugees and hosting large diasporic communities. Apart from the more historical groups of migrants which became sizeable communities in London between the 16th and 18th centuries, such as the French Huguenots, the Jewish and the Irish communities (Parker, 2013; Selwood, 2008; Bailey, 2013), more recent official statistics from the Office for National Statistics (2019) also show that the London boroughs that contain the East End area of London, such as Tower Hamlets and Hackney, all have significant non-white populations, most notably the Asian and Black communities of different origin. Just as the view of Wormwood Street is changed by the project's existence, the existence and home-making activities of these communities, and many more migrants and diaspora members from other ethnic groups, have all contributed to the transformation of the cultural, economic and physical cityscape of the area. Fundamentally speaking, installation artworks make sense by heightening 'the viewers' awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in space', and addressing the viewers 'directly as a literal presence in the space' (Bishop, 2005: 6), and this project is no exception. Like all site-specific installation artworks, here the cityscape around Suh's work is what Miwon Kwon would refer to as 'a social and political construct and a physical one' (2002: 74). This is because as my analyses above reflect, the convey of meanings in this project is also achieved through 'the particular environmental components of a given context' and also take the 'social political characteristics of the site' (Serra, 1989, cited in Kwon, 2002: 74) into consideration. The historical significance of the location of the site and the symbolic meaning of this project itself together form a sense of connectivity between the social, cultural and historical aspects, thus giving it the potential to respond to the migratory and diasporic history in the East End area at a macro level. Through

looking at the choice of the project's location, it is also reasonable to say that creating a reaction to the internationalised past and global present of London in the audience is an important aspect of the project's creative intention which has been successfully achieved.

Different from the other three artworks this chapter has investigated, the footbridge on which the project is installed has remained totally closed to viewers, and viewers are therefore not allowed to closely interact with it. Although people can see the project from different distances and angles, they merely pass by it without entering the Hanok to explore or stop and say hello to the possible inhabitants in it, while the other works chosen here all allow viewers to go inside them, touch them and connect their own experiences with the materiality of the structures, experiencing the work on an individual basis. This puts the audience in the position of an 'outsider', displacing them from this particular home. However, Suh did not intend to stop the audience from responding to it. When talking to contemporary art magazine *ArtAsiaPacific*, he specifically says that 'being displaced allows for critical distance and perspective' (Choi, 2013: 89). In fact, like many other of Suh's works, when the audience views this project, they are encouraged to apply their own unique perspectives towards migratory and diasporic experiences and their recognition of the physical existence of migrants and diaspora members in London and the UK into the viewing experience. Despite the particularity of the project's appearance, Suh's bridge-built project serves as a connection between different unique personal histories and memories of an immigrant living in the ever-diverse London East End and the whole city at a micro level, thus reflecting on the relationship between London's migratory and diasporic population and the 'natives', or the white British population of the city. The success in conveying these messages of the project is achieved by visualising the dynamics between an alien object like the Hanok and the contemporary, Western cityscape which supposedly belongs in London under the sedentarist framework. In doing so, the Hanok embedded in the skyline of London becomes a symbol of the fact that the migratory and diasporic domestic space is not only a frame and physical structure for people's life experiences, but also becomes a bridge between the ontological dimension of these different migratory and diasporic experiences and the collective history, memory and experience shared by all migrants and diaspora members in London, and all who live in London and the global city of London itself.

As introduced above, Suh's installations and site-specific works help to raise an open-ended discussion about migratory and diasporic people's identity. Apart from the history of the East End and London, this project can also be regarded as an embodiment of Suh's home-making efforts and the complexity behind his paradoxical identity as a long-term migrant which has been investigated in *Home within Home within Home*, as well as that of many other people who are currently living a migratory or diasporic lifestyle for various reasons. In the interview with *ArtAsiaPacific*, Suh states that,

'My upbringing was very unique. In the 1960s and 70s when the norm was to tear down traditional Korean buildings to make way for modernization, my father went backward, preserving the Korean hanok... Living in a hanok was like living in a time capsule; each time I left home, I entered an entirely different world. The experience was dramatic not only because of the contrasting architectural styles, but also because of the political and economic climate at that time.' (Choi, 2013: 89)

Then, as Suh was growing up, the process of social, cultural and economic globalisation was accelerating from the late 20th century, making most people including himself able to survive in roughly the same conditions due to globalisation: as Suh himself vividly describes, 'with globalization being so ubiquitous, we can survive no matter where we go. McDonald's, for example, is everywhere' (ibid.). It has become very simple for people to maintain similar lifestyles in any parts of the world, and for people of different parts of the world to live similarly. Meanwhile, it has really become unnecessary to associate one's identity and sense of belonging with geographical locations, making displacement 'hard to measure' (ibid.). Building upon Suh's personal experience and memory, the project strongly reflects the idea of artistic nomadism introduced in the previous section, because it transcends the limitations of the sedentarist framework as a manifestation of the notion of plural-localism and points out how home-making efforts can still take place and come to fruition with results that can be visualised even against a relatively mobile background. In this sense, it can be said that the creative experience from this project further contributes to the shape of an alternative to the existing representations of migratory and diasporic Londoners and their experiences, a lot of which have been deliberated in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 5: Visualising the Dynamics between Migrants, Diaspora Members and the City:

Take Alia Syed for Example

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 British Diasporic Artists' Filmmaking since the 1980s: A Historical Background

After investigating migrants living in London and international artist Do-Ho Suh in my first case study as an example of artistic nomadism, I quickly decided that the second case study should be an artist who is from a diasporic background. This is undoubtedly because as introduced at the beginning of the thesis, I consider it possible to include in my research both different types of migration experiences (including both voluntary and involuntary migration) and diaspora and the people involved in all of them. Meanwhile, the diasporic perspective, especially the Black diaspora perspective has also proven important both in socio-political discussions and in the fields of ideology, culture and art in Britain since the latter half of the 20th century. For the UK, this era was a turbulent time with a series of what Black-British writer Kobena Mercer terms 'morbid symptoms' (1994: 2), from the deepening of social inequality throughout the whole country under the policies and racism of conservative government to the worldwide socio-political turmoil which has been ongoing since the final years of the Cold War. Under this context, a focus on the issues of race, ethnicity and nation started to emerge, which eventually led to a situation of what Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci refers to as the 'crisis of authority' (Gramsci, 2005: 210). Gramsci is a scholar whom Mercer frequently refers to in his discussions of the 'cultural politics of diaspora' in Britain (Mercer, 1994: 1). As Gramsci argues, if the ruling class 'has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer "leading" but only "dominant", exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc' (2005: 275-276). Although Gramsci is from outside the UK and from an earlier era, his writings were still relevant in Mercer's analysis of the UK during the 1980s and the 1990s as a result of the socio-political environment of British society at that time. Based on the framework Mercer built upon Gramsci's discussions, the crisis in British culture at the end of the 20th century can mostly be characterised by the phenomenon that the increasingly diversified population of the British public has lost touch with the traditional cultural and

ideological systems which are most often associated with the white British community, which is formerly overwhelmingly dominant in British society. This formerly dominant system has a clear idea on issues such as who can rightfully live in the UK and even run the country, what position each of the social and ethnic groups should occupy in British society, what British culture should be like and who should have the rights to shape it. Although it is still considerably influential, as can be indicated from Gramsci's analysis, the ideas from this system may not be shared by the increasingly diversifying public, and it is also not possible to coerce the public into this belief system by the forces of the nation state.

In the collection of essays in his book *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Mercer argues that the 'mixed and fusion of disparate elements' that has been gradually taking place among the various contemporary African, Caribbean and Asian diasporas formed after World War II in the UK which is a Black Britishness would play a crucial role in the creation of 'new, hybridized identities' (1994: 4-5) and 'the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture' would gradually lead to a cultural 'common home' that is able to accommodate all foreigners who came to live in Britain regardless of their roots (1994: 4). According to Mercer, these 'emerging cultures of hybridity' (1994: 3) would have the potential to point to ways of 'surviving, and thriving' (Mercer, 1994: 5) in the age of crisis and transition. Similarly, Rizvana Bradley argues that the emergence of this new hybrid culture is also achieved by how diasporic artists such as Theo Eshetu were interrogating the 'cultural hegemony of national identity and nationhood' (2019: 71), which means that it is a product of the age of crisis of authority. The more frequently seen resistances under the nation state context to this crisis are manifested through nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and different types of religious fundamentalism, and all of them are rooted in the nation state society and the sedentarist bias that is fundamental to it. In order to provide an alternative to these responses, it is necessary to create profound changes in British national identity and collective memory as a result of diasporic perspectives and stances including the Black British perspective that nurtured this hybrid culture which had not existed in British society before (Mercer, 1994: 5). Regarding how the Black British perspective comes into being, Trinidadian historian and writer C. L. R. James points out that despite the generation of Black people who moved to Britain, or were born, raised and educated in Britain would certainly be 'intimately related' to white British people, they 'cannot be fully

part of the English environment because they are black', and everyone '... is aware that they are different' (1984: 55, cited in Mercer, 1994: 1). On the other hand, James also argues that since these Black British people are 'in Western civilization... have grown up in it, but yet are not completely a part' of it, Black British people 'have a unique insight' into the British society and potentially have 'something special to contribute to western civilisation' by giving 'a new vision, a deeper and stronger insight into both western civilization and the black people in it' (ibid.), which leads to an unhomely reimagination of ideas such as Britishness. This paradoxical position is the case of many other British diasporic communities including the British-Pakistani community Syed is associated with. Besides, it also sums up how Syed takes structural filmmaking, something she considers to be a 'very white male idea' (Danino et al., 2015: 176) and uses it to tell the stories of herself and other migrants and diaspora members who exist outside the official narrative and habitual order of the UK and British society in her creative practices. According to Peter Gidal, structuralist/materialist film 'produces certain relations between segments, between what the camera is aimed at and the way that "image" is presented' (1978: 1). This was reflected in all three of her works I chose to investigate. Meanwhile, Gidal also points out that the root concern of structural/materialist film is 'the attempt to decipher the structure and anticipate/recorrect it, to clarify and analyse the production-process of the specific image at any specific moment' (ibid.). This is also significantly reflected in my analysis of Syed's works throughout this whole chapter.

Even though Black diasporic artists had been active in Britain for decades before that, it was during the 1980s and the 1990s that British moving image art started experiencing a series of significant changes related to the globalisation and diversification of the British identity (Bradley, 2019: 71). And since the very beginning, Black British artists have been 'burdened with the impossible task of speaking as "representatives," in that they are widely expected to "speak for" the marginalized communities from which they come' (Mercer, 1994: 235), which Mercer terms as the 'burden of representation' (1994: 236). This burden leads to certain 'expectations of the diasporic cinematic voice' (Garfield, 2019: 102) which determines what film languages are used in these cinematic practices and how they speak as the 'representatives' (Mercer, 1994: 235) of all the Black diasporic people in Britain. This is why Rachel Garfield describes earlier generations of diasporic filmmakers such as Horace

Ové and Menelik Shabazz as aiming to ‘represent the lives of their communities in the UK’ with a realism approach (2019: 102). Different from them, the new generation of artists who rose to fame during this time chooses ‘a multivalent film language that was constituted through the complexities of a lived experience of diaspora’ (2019: 98) over these expectations. Their works tend to oppose the implicit sense of neutrality in the earlier realist films by boldly accepting the influence of what Mercer terms ‘both Third World and First World film cultures’ (1994: 55). Garfield also points out that these filmmakers’ practices ‘benefited from the avant-garde debates within the film world, as well as the debates about black identity’ (2019: 103). Some of the most famous representatives, as Bradley (2019: 72) introduces, include Keith Piper, John Akomfrah, Maureen Blackwood, and Isaac Julien. These artists do not limit their creative practices to one specific version of blackness, while the hybridity of their practice includes two aspects: how they have taken up specifically Western ideas surrounding experimental filmmaking, and how they rearticulate blackness as part of Britishness. Their practices can be considered as a part of the avant-garde tradition instead of simply diasporic films, and they are informative to the representation of different types of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people that are involved in them. They tend to refuse to be restricted by the realist traditions in what Mercer terms as ‘black and Third world film practices’ (1994: 56)²¹ while highlighting the ‘complexity rather than homogeneity’ (Mercer, 1994: 53) in the experiences of the Black diasporic communities in Britain and offering a ‘transformative and self-reflexive film aesthetic’ (Garfield, 2019: 103). This new aesthetic is informative not only ‘in terms of the confidence it gave to Black artists of this period, but also in terms of forging a language that subsequent generations of artists could take for granted’ (ibid.). Based on these discussions, these practices can be considered what Catherine Russell defines as a form of ethnography, because they are heavily involved in the ‘experimentation with cultural difference and cross-cultural experience’ (1999: xii), and Syed’s creative interest has significantly reflected this nature.

²¹ Rachel Garfield summarises this tradition as ‘transparency, immediacy, authority and authenticity that pretended to be neutrality’ (2019: 102).



Figure 5.1 Two main characters dancing against the footage of a rainy street in Tea Leaf (2018 edit), Ruth Novaczek, video still

Providing an alternative language of visual representation for the sedentarist, nationalist and hegemonic narrative against migrants, diaspora members and their lifestyles is not the only achievement in British diasporic filmmaking. As Lucy Reynolds mentions in her introductions of studies from renowned British film theorist Laura Mulvey, 'the avant-garde's experimental approach to film-making might thus offer new strategies for the development of a feminist film practice, while the film-makers of the Co-op might in turn gain an increased awareness of feminism's burgeoning film activity' (2019: 1). Meanwhile, for a new film voice 'to develop away from white hegemony' (Garfield, 2019: 103), a non-patriarchal language is required as much as a Black diasporic voice, and this is why it is necessary to involve the discussions of gender and sexuality in my analysis of how diasporic artists' filmmaking practices challenges the sedentarist notion of Britishness. For example, London-born Jewish filmmaker Ruth Novaczek's short video *Tea Leaf* (1988) reflects on her paradoxical identity as both a Jewish woman from an ultra-religious community and a

lesbian, and offers a look into the confusion after being abandoned by her own culture, the sense of being denied her very existence by her own community, and the danger of being harmed and abused by even people who are seemingly harmless (an older woman) from being a sexual minority and a woman who has not, and does not intend to marry a man. Using the double exposure technique to show footage of a road trip and the close-ups of multiple people's movements, the film forms what Garfield terms a montaging 'double consciousness', while the two main characters of the film appear to be 'continually fleeting across the screen in different configurations (2019: 106) (Fig. 5.1). The film denounces the 'transparency or authenticity of the documentary image' (Garfield, 2019: 106), and liberates the 'image from the containments of stereotype' (Garfield, 2019: 107). It is a prime example of how moving image 'explores how abuse, self-esteem and relationships are bound up with power relations in the world' (ibid.). Instead of constructing a comprehensible story about the topic, the artist chooses to use a combination of footage from a road trip and close-ups of different people and scenes to accompany a voiceover that seems to be a confession to a new lover (ibid.). It presents the audience with an intimate look into the experience of a generation of Jewish women living in the UK: growing up in the 1960s when neo-Nazi groups like the British Nationalist Party (founded in 1960) and the National Socialist Movement (founded in 1962) were active, these women were denied their cultural and ethnic identity by the rampaging antisemitism in British society at that time, and then got brutally indoctrinated by the often-cruel conservative orthodox Judaism. But as time went on and socio-cultural and political changes took place, they eventually reconciled with their personal and collective reality in the 1980s. Eventually, this challenges the expectations of 'what anyone might look like, and what that might say about the communities to which they belong' (ibid.). Similar non-patriarchal creative approaches and messages can also be found in the works of many other artists in the same era, such as *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986)²² (Fig. 5.2), a film written and directed by filmmakers Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, both of whom are founding members of the London-based Sankofa Film and Video Collective. Therefore, it can firstly be said that these artists' practices can not only transform how certain migratory experiences and people are perceived by artists and audience

²² More on this film could be read at: Garfield, R. (2019) 'Prescient Intersectionality: Woman, Moving Image and Identity Politics in 1980s Britain' in L. Reynolds (ed.) *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

members from both the different migrant and diasporic communities and the community of the society members perceived to be natives of a society from a nationalist perspective. Moreover, they break away from the singularities and stereotypes that widely exist in the visual representations of the identities and experiences of the diverse migrants and diaspora members, especially females and sexual minorities. On top of being ethnographic, these practices can be further defined as a 'subversive ethnography' which 'challenges the various structures... that are inscribed implicitly and explicitly in so many forms of cultural representation' (Russell, 1999: xii), which is also reflected in Syed's works I chose to study in this chapter such as *On a Wing and a Prayer*.



Figure 5.2 *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986), Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, video still

Apart from using an avant-garde and subjective approach to make major political and even existential statements, a considerable number of artists from this era also reflect on different kinds of migratory and diasporic experiences in a personal, intimate and quiet manner and from a domestic perspective, and at the same time fuse the everyday with the existential (Garfield, 2019: 102-107). And as filmmakers Nina Danino and Sarah Pucill both suggest, these cinematic practices embody the entanglement between the defiant logic of British diasporic filmmaking and those of 'exile, migration, diaspora and globalization' and 'dispossession and dislocation' (Danino et al., 2015: 168), thus bringing previously

underrepresented perspectives and experiences to challenge ‘hitherto privileged voices’ (Danino et al., 2015: 176). In this way, British diasporic artists’ filmmaking practices are able to transform the landscape of moving image and cinematic practices of migrants and diaspora members in London and other parts of the UK, as well as their experiences. By altering how the existences of migrants and diaspora members are perceived from a nationalist framework, their creative experience can also contribute to the shape of an alternative to sedentarist bias by exploring the visual representation of migratory and diasporic home-making. Based on these analyses, I would argue that Syed’s practices not only embody Mercer’s hybridity, but also reflect feminist discourse and the avant-garde tradition in British moving image arts, and these thoughts, in turn, had a significant impact on my decision to use Alia Syed and three of her selected works from different periods for the second case study.

5.1.2 About Alia Syed

My research explores the home-making of different migrants and diaspora members through the investigation of the materiality of the places that are the most familiar and intimate to them, including their domestic space and intimate cityscape, in the representation of their migratory or diasporic experiences. And like I said, this home-making process is not only experienced by migrants, but also members of diasporic communities. For example, according to political science scholar Gabriel Sheffer, in a diasporic community, members have their own ‘hybrid identities, orientations and loyalties’ (2003: 11), but the concept of an ‘exclusive homeland’ does not actually exist for them, and their identities, orientations and loyalties are also not connected to any particular nation state’s territories. This is also the reason why Sheffer poetically describes diaspora as ‘at home abroad’ (2003), which echoes the observations of many scholars introduced in the previous chapters, that diaspora members are only the nationals of their receiving society in a technical sense, but not fully recognised as members of the receiving society culturally and socially. Similar to the home-making activities of migrants, diasporic home-making also requires the negotiation between two different social, cultural and identity systems. But one of the major differences between migrant home-making and diasporic home-making is that while migrants navigate between their origins and the receiving society, diaspora members conduct the process between the different parts of their paradoxical identity as someone

who is legally recognised as a member of the receiving society but is considered a cultural and ethnical Other. Alia Syed's works can offer crucial insights into my exploration of how a non-sedentarist perspective towards the visual representation of different migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved built upon the visual exploration of migratory and diasporic home-making.

As defined by herself (Syed, 2002), Alia Syed (born 1964, Swansea, UK) is an experimental filmmaker. She is of Pakistani and Welsh heritage, with a Welsh mother and a first-generation Pakistani immigrant father. She grew up in Glasgow with a financial background much more ordinary than Suh's, then started her creative career that spans more than three decades in London. Before I started to write this chapter, I had the privilege to interview her in 2021 on many relevant topics including her creative approach and style, her creative career to date, her experience of living and creating art in London, and how she grew up identifying as a member of the South Asian diaspora in the UK. Despite the developments of the practices of British Black and diasporic artists during that time, from what she describes to me, the age in which she grew up was a time when non-white and mixed-race children like herself were largely absent from visual representations of British society on mainstream British media, TV and films. These observations and experiences from her childhood have shaped her creative interest in the future in a very profound manner: as described in her own article for *Vertigo*, the magazine of the comprehensive independent film organisation Close-Up, her practice is 'interested in time and memory: both cultural and individual. How external events collide with internal realities creating spaces of clarity', and also a reflection of the 'very personal and political issues around representation, identity and the language of film' (Syed, 2002: n.p.). In another discussion with a few other female experimental filmmakers, she also states that an important theme of her practice is finding out 'how to represent something that has not been represented, and finding a way to do that through film' by 'constructing an internal dialogue through the material and language of film' (Danino et al., 2015: 169), that is to say, a structural approach in filmmaking. Through structural filmmaking, she has found her own space 'between the overtly political and lyrical ways that experimental film-makers had already delineated' (ibid.), and formed her own unique visual language, which is quiet, personal and intimate. Syed first came to London for her bachelor's degree in fine arts at the University of East London and a Postgraduate

Higher Diploma in Mixed Media at the Slade School of Fine Art, and started her creative career around that time, during the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s. At the earlier stage of her career, she was an active member of the London Filmmakers' Co-op. Although she thinks that the structuralist film practised by the London Filmmakers' Co-op is a creative tradition dominated by white male artists for a long time, it has remained an important concept in her practices ever since, while she also considers it to be 'an approach to representation that was against representation' (ibid.) by opening up meaningful, personal cinematic spaces in a materialistic manner and allowing meanings and knowledge to emerge through an internal conversation within the materiality of these spaces. Like many other diasporic British artists of her generation, her works are also a departure from the constraints of the burden of representation. In terms of visual aesthetics and cinematic language, her works fuse the visual documentation of her personal reality as a diaspora member in Britain and narratives on culture, history, memory, identity and rituals to destabilise the singularity of perspective in structural filmmaking and question the stereotype of what Black British films should look like, which effectively upset and disrupt 'fixed expectations and normative assumptions about what black films should look like' (Mercer, 1994: 54) and contributes to the liberation of Black diasporic cinematic practices from the burden of representation. These films play an important role in bringing a feminist and diasporic perspective as an alternative to the traditional white-male voice within structural filmmaking, and at the same time reflect Mercer's (1994: 63) discussions on how Black diasporic British artist filmmakers' practices can be effectively used to creolise the European and American avant-garde film culture under a black British context. In terms of the articulation of the Black British experience and the dynamics between blackness and Britishness, instead of shouldering the burden of proving the legitimacy of the existence of her and other members of the Black diasporic communities in Britain, her works 'turn dominant versions of Englishness inside out' (Mercer, 1994: 66) by 'talking about our experience in the diaspora', or her personal experiences as part of the Black diasporic communities in Britain, and the 'specificity of the Black experience' (Fusco, 1988: 31).

Almost four decades after starting to make films, Syed has established a creative career as an internationally recognised artist.²³ There have now been a handful of academic articles about her films, while she herself has also published several articles on her own practices and experimental cinema in general. Apart from the in-depth analysis of Syed's practices in Garfield's impactful book chapter that I have looked into before, the monograph book *Alia Syed: Imprints, Documents, Fictions* devoted to her works, which will also be incorporated in this chapter. In this chapter, I have used three of her short films and videos to demonstrate how the materiality of the cityscapes intimate to migrants and diaspora members in London can be used in the visual representation of the home-making process and efforts experienced by diaspora members and migrants alike. Since sedentarist bias tends to believe that migration is a disruption to regular living, it is especially crucial to consider migrants and diaspora members' past and present together as a journey of establishing their own existence and shaping their unique identity, as a process of home-making that takes place across the borders of multiple nation states. Therefore, this chapter will first use two films, *Fatima's Letter* (1992) and *Points of Departure* (2014) to explore the question of how to further visualise the dynamics between all their past and present. The second one is how to manifest humans' identities, experiences, collective histories and memories through their traces within the materiality of a cityscape. Although this question is not directly related to migratory and experience or the people involved, based on what has been thoroughly discussed previously, we can still see that it is still tightly knitted with my attempt to shed light on how to look at migration and diaspora from a perspective different from the ones introduces and as a home-making process. Besides, it is also necessary to consider how the self of migrants and diaspora members is experienced within an intimate cityscape separately from how their experience and identity are negotiated within their domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes. This is because based on Naficy's (2001: 152-154) discussions, this type of relatively open space is not frequently associated with migratory or

²³ Syed has participated in prestigious international art exhibitions such as the Artefact Festival, Leuven (2019-2020), Courtisane Festival, Ghent (2019), the 5th Moscow Biennale (2013) and XV Sydney Biennale (2006). A lot of her works have also been shown and exhibited in various media platforms and art institutions all over the world, including Talwar Gallery, New York (2019), LUX London (2018), Iniva, London (2002), Tate Britain, London (2013) Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York (2010) and Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (2002). Meanwhile, the public screenings of some of her earliest works can also be dated back to as early as the late 1980s.

diasporic experiences because migrants and diaspora members are often perceived as homeless from a nationalist perspective. This question will be investigated through an analysis of Syed's 2014 film *Points of Departure*, which uses the cityscapes of Glasgow to investigate how the negotiation of her unique self as a diaspora member is achieved within the city, and her 2016 film *On a Wing and a Prayer*, which responds to the case of asylum seeker Abdul Rahman Haroun by reenacting his astonishing walk through the Channel Tunnel and questions the systematic injustice suffered by migrants and their descendants coming to and living in the UK. A third question this chapter will explore is how to use the materiality of physical space related to migratory or diasporic persons' efforts in establishing their existence to reflect on their collective struggles in a world which is still predominantly made up of nation states. This question is also responded to through the analysis of *On a Wing and a Prayer*. Through this film, I will also look at how the visual investigation of spaces can be used to create a response to the socio-political environment of British society, which significantly shapes the experience of migrants and diaspora members in London and the UK. While none of the films is related to their domestic spaces and specifically, the materiality of the spaces in these films are all closely related to their efforts of establishing a home in the receiving society from a psychogeographic perspective.²⁴

5.2 Alia Syed's Manifestation of Migratory and Diasporic Experiences within Intimate Cityscapes

5.2.1 *Fatima's Letter* (1992): On Migratory In-betweenness within Global London

One of the most significant features in Syed's creative practices is that she works within 'the wider issues of representation and race' guided by the investigation of the structural filmmaking question of 'how different relations of sound and image could open up the filmic space' (Danino et al., 2015: 169), which is also why her works can be informative for my own investigation about how migratory and diasporic home-making can be visualised through the materiality of physical space. This characteristic has been reflected in her work since the early stage of her career, and the development of her creative style throughout her career is also one of the topics we discussed in our interview. As she explained to me, she first moved from Glasgow to London to attend the University of East London (North East London

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

Polytechnic at the time) around the mid-1980s. Although she started university study as a painter, she quickly got involved in filmmaking activities with the vibrant film department of her university due to her enthusiasm for cinematic technologies and her fascination with the influential and rapidly developing landscape of London's artists' moving image circle studying under the teachings of the likes of writer Alan Leonard Rees and filmmaker John Smith. Soon, she also started to get heavily involved in the London Film-makers' Co-op, and started her creative journey of structural filmmaking. As she herself describes in our interview, for her younger self, London is a city in which 'one area juxtaposed against another area both in terms of culture and race', and this also provided her an environment that is strikingly different from the place she grew up, a 'very suburban', 'very white' neighbourhood outside Glasgow (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). Syed comments that London is a diverse city in which different cityscapes, classes, cultures and even historical periods can all coexist and juxtapose with each other without too many conflicts (ibid.). Therefore, it can be said that the city was, and still is, almost contrary of the environment she was very familiar with in the previous part of her life, and this quickly grabbed her curiosity (ibid.). Her experience in London as a young art student who was based in the working-class region of Plaistow in the late 1980s eventually allowed her to develop an especially strong impression of the diversity of London, and for this very reason, she deliberately chose to spend most of her university life there, instead of living in more expensive and popular areas like many other trendier and wealthier art students who lived a Bohemian lifestyle in more affluent areas of London at that time (ibid.). Due to this reason, I would argue that although Syed's unique heritage and background make her less of an Other to London and Britain than many other migrants and their descendants, it is still reasonable to say that Syed's existence and everyday activities in London are more connected to what Guha defines as the 'unofficial' (2016: 137) side of the city which Londoners who are migrants or diaspora members all supposedly belong to.

When we finally reach the topic of how these experiences of living in East London and curiosities about the urban spaces have influenced her creative practices, she admits that although she did not really think about it in that way at that time, it is reasonable to say from the hindsight that it was her urge to 'make sense of your immediate environment' around her and 'negotiate the city' through filmmaking (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr

2021). As my first case study, *Fatima's Letter* is one of her most important works completed during this period. And this interest in understanding both the physical and the cultural frames of the spaces that surrounds her, together with her enthusiasm in filmmaking technologies, have shaped her creative practice in the next few decades in a significant way. As Syed introduces in our interview, since camera is essentially a tool for documentation and recording, filmmaking naturally became a useful way for her to know the urban space of London and herself better at the earliest stages of her creative career (ibid.). One example of her perception that moving image is an approach of sense-making towards both the outside world and the inside of herself is this film, which was produced during her time of studying at the Slade School of Fine Arts whilst using the facilities of London Filmmakers' Co-op. This film is a black-and-white short video shot on 16mm film and lasts for approximately 19 minutes and 53 seconds. The film has long been one of Syed's most frequently exhibited and discussed works²⁵. It can be roughly understood as a manifestation of the process of how the narrator (voiced by Ghazala Shaikh), a young Pakistani woman who reads a letter in Urdu to her friend Fatima throughout the whole film, tries to recollect her memories of a past event that happened in Pakistan that involved the arrival of guests, a feast of Bhiryani and the playing of Karom (Karim) games with a slightly sorrowful and nostalgic feeling while passing a lot of people on the London Underground. These memories prompt her to write a letter to her friend Fatima, which eventually forms the main storyline of the film. The film is considered 'a quiet, intimate and poetic film that reflects the diasporic experience through the juxtaposition between a narrative of ritual, playing the game of Karim and visual footage from Whitechapel Underground station in London' (Garfield, 2019: 107). Garfield also praises the fact that in the contemporary 'renewed climate concerning the question of subjectivity in art', films like it 'will begin to be given the place they deserve' (2019: 108).

Based on Paul Gilroy's argument that 'Britain's "race" politics are quite inconceivable away from the context of the inner-city' (2002: 311), it is only natural that Syed chooses to express the subjectivity of the woman who writes the letter to Fatima through the

²⁵ So far, the film has been screened extensively both within and outside the UK, in renowned museums and galleries such as Tate Gallery, London (1991), Euclid, Toronto (1992), National Film Theatre, London (1994) and the Institution of Contemporary Art, London (1991, 1997). Besides, it has also participated in film festivals such as Mango Film Festival, Manchester (1995) and London Short Film Festival (2020).

materiality of a space of inner London. As regards my project, the film is also highly informative in terms of how the existence of the self of a migrant or a diaspora member can be visualised within the materiality of the spaces that are meaningful or intimate to them. For this research, one of the issues I am the most interested in is how, as the film's main location, the Whitechapel Underground station functions in holding together 'the fusion of the everyday with the existential' (Garfield, 2019: 107). I have asked three questions regarding this issue: firstly, how is Whitechapel station used to bridge the narrator's past memory and current everyday experience; secondly, how does it situate the rituals and habits of another part of the world in the urban space of London; and thirdly, how, as a kind of place which is usually not linked with the domestic sphere, homely feelings and intimacy, does this underground station function as an embodiment of the narrator and the South Asian diaspora's home-making effort throughout the whole film. Whitechapel station is a major transportation hub which holds both London Underground's District and Hammersmith & City lines and the East London line of London Overground, which can be regarded as what Marc Augé terms a 'non-place' (1995), a concept first introduced in Chapter 2. Augé explains the concept of non-place as the sites which are the result of a world that is 'surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporal and the ephemeral' (1995: 78), while Ponzanesi further suggests that they are locations where different individuals get the chance of 'immersing themselves in the chance anonymity of a space without history, as if trapped and frozen in a time unmarked by events happening in the present' (2012: 677). Based on their discussions, it can indeed be considered a non-place because it is of a transitory nature and does not concern the unique identity or social relationships of each of the passengers in it, including the narrator herself, and allows anyone to operate anonymously as a passenger. If we link this back to Gilroy's insightful observation that the 'context of the inner city' has provided foundations for certain imageries of migrants and people with a diasporic background living in Britain (2002: 311), it is fair to say that the imageries of Whitechapel Underground have portrayed the film's narrator as placeless, lost and nostalgic, just like a lot of other films which made similar uses of similar places: for example, in a scene entitled 'Misery' in Argentinean filmmaker Fernando Solanas's *Tangos, el exilio de Gardel* (Tangos: Exile of Gardel) (1985), a telephone booth outside a subway station is used as the setting for the often painful and unsuccessful

effort to establish contact with the country of origin of the Argentinean exiles in Paris (Naficy, 2001: 133).

However, the use of this location in this film is strikingly different from many other visual representation practices of displacement and displaced people that use the non-place to present scenes related to departure, separation, border-crossing, or the misery of the homeless status experienced by a lot of migrants and diaspora members of various ages, genders, social classes and backgrounds. Compared with other visual representations like Solanas's film, the uniqueness of the use of non-place in *Fatima's Letter* can actually be explained from two different perspectives. Firstly, although it is a transportation hub, Whitechapel station is a meaningful location to both Syed and the narrator of the film for two reasons, and it is possible to not consider it as a non-space. As Syed tells me in our interview, she was living in the New Cross area of Southeast London when this film was made (Haque, 2022: 19), which means that she had to pass by this station on her way to the university (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). Since passing by this station on public transport is a standard part of her daily routine, we can say that it might be counted as an important element in her efforts to establish her own existence in London, that is to say, her home-making activities. Based on the information here, it is not baseless to say that Whitechapel station is a location that can provide Syed with a certain degree of familiarity and intimacy, and opens up a window to her everyday activities as a person who is the descendant of an immigrant and from outside London living in the city (Garfield, 2019: 107). In other words, Whitechapel station can be regarded as a part of Syed's intimate London cityscape, and this sense of intimacy is also reflected in the words of the narrator, who is also a woman of Pakistani heritage. Apart from that, what is also special about the Whitechapel station is that it is one of the biggest transportation hubs that serves both the heart of London's East End and the London borough of Tower Hamlets at the same time. In the previous chapter, when I analysed Do-Ho Suh's installation *Bridging Home, London* (2018), a public installation project installed in the same area, I provided a detailed introduction to London's East End and its long history of attracting migrants from outside the UK and explained that there are also a great variety of diasporic communities, including some of the most prominent South Asian communities not only within the borough, but also across the whole of London. When discussing the migratory heritage in the East End around

the Whitechapel area, Syed herself also writes in a highly poetic and touching manner that, 'when travelling on the East London line or visiting Whitechapel, I would encounter smells that reminded me of India or Pakistan' (Tate, no date (b)). Therefore, although Whitechapel station is not related to the domestic sphere or domesticity in any sense, it can actually be considered as a symbol of the South Asian diaspora's effort to establish their long-term existence in the area,²⁶ i.e. their home-making activities generation after generation. It is also reasonable to presume that for Syed herself, it is also a part of the city that held some form of familiarity in her early days of living in London.

The film's visual footage of Whitechapel station presents viewers with a Western, modernised view, including the concrete buildings of the station, underground trains coming and going, and passengers of different ages, social groups and ethnic backgrounds going about their own journeys. Therefore, the station can also be considered as the embodiment of the post-colonial global London and British society, culture, civilisation and lifestyle, as well as a symbol of the current state of the everyday life of the woman who is writing to Fatima and the hundreds of thousands of migrants and diaspora members who also come to live in London from other parts of the world. Throughout the whole film, the narrator's monologue letter details how she remembers a fairytale-like traditional event including the arrival of distinguished guests, a feast and the playing of Karim games, delectable food, enjoyable activities and an overflowing of love, joy and happiness. The whole fantastical story of South Asian roots (Fig. 5.3) is closely related to her and her community's unique cultural, historical and ethnic roots, and is fabricated into the visual footage of Whitechapel station in London in the forms of Urdu voiceover and English text overlay on the screen. As argued by Anjana Janardhan, by using Urdu in the voiceover, Syed 'gently challenges the hegemony of the English language' by not prioritising the viewing experience of English speakers (2022: 15). Instead of following the habitual socio-cultural and linguistic orders of the British society, this decision centres the Urdu language that 'might ordinarily be classified as "other"' and brings forth its innate 'beauty and lyricism'

²⁶ For more in-depth and extensive information on Pakistani and South Asian diaspora in London and the UK, see the relevant discussions in books including but not limited to *Political Blackness in Multiracial Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) by Mohan Ambikaipaker and *Making Diaspora in a Global City: South Asian Youth Cultures in London* (London: Taylor & Francis) by Helen Kim.

(ibid.), which can be considered as viewing London from an unhomely perspective. Different from the audio and visual of many other non-fiction films which tend to be parallel with each other, there exists a constant interplay between images of Whitechapel station and the narrated letter, which works as an exploration of what Garfield describes as ‘a subjectivity that is caught between the present and the past, in stasis between where you are from and where you are going to, and how the past must play out before the future’ (2019: 108). As a result, when put against the voiceover of the narrator trying to describe the feast she has experienced in Pakistan, the images of underground trains passing, windows in the trains, people walking by and randomly looking into the camera in London can also be considered as the symbol of how everyday ritual and habits from another part of the world are manifested in the urban space of London, and how the materiality of London’s cityscape abruptly shapes these migratory Londoners’ everyday life by showing how the narrator’s reverie on another place and time is constantly interrupted by the everyday. In general, the images of the film are not only the visualisations of a slightly sombre mood that the woman who writes the letter to Fatima is probably experiencing when wandering in a city far away from Pakistan, but also an embodiment of her dual identity which comes into being because of her status as an in-betweener. Even when the movement of trains disrupts her narration and cuts it into pieces in a seemingly brutal way, it is still more of a transformation between memory and reality instead of an embodiment of her homeless status as a person originates from outside Britain, which is usually presumed by sedentarist bias. All these points are presented in the film in an understated manner through the seemingly calm visual exploration of the location and the momentary encounter of strangers on the camera. While watching the film, we are also displaced from our habitual positions and perspectives as viewers, but instead positioning ourselves as what Syed defines as ‘in relation to the languages within the film’, where ‘various discontinuities in narrative, sound and image produce ruptures, different languages vie for authority’ (Syed, 2022: 23). As she points out, the film allows us to ‘become part of a dialogue’ and ‘an audience to ourselves’ and ‘see ourselves within ideology’, while ‘the static film frame becomes a stage’ (ibid.).

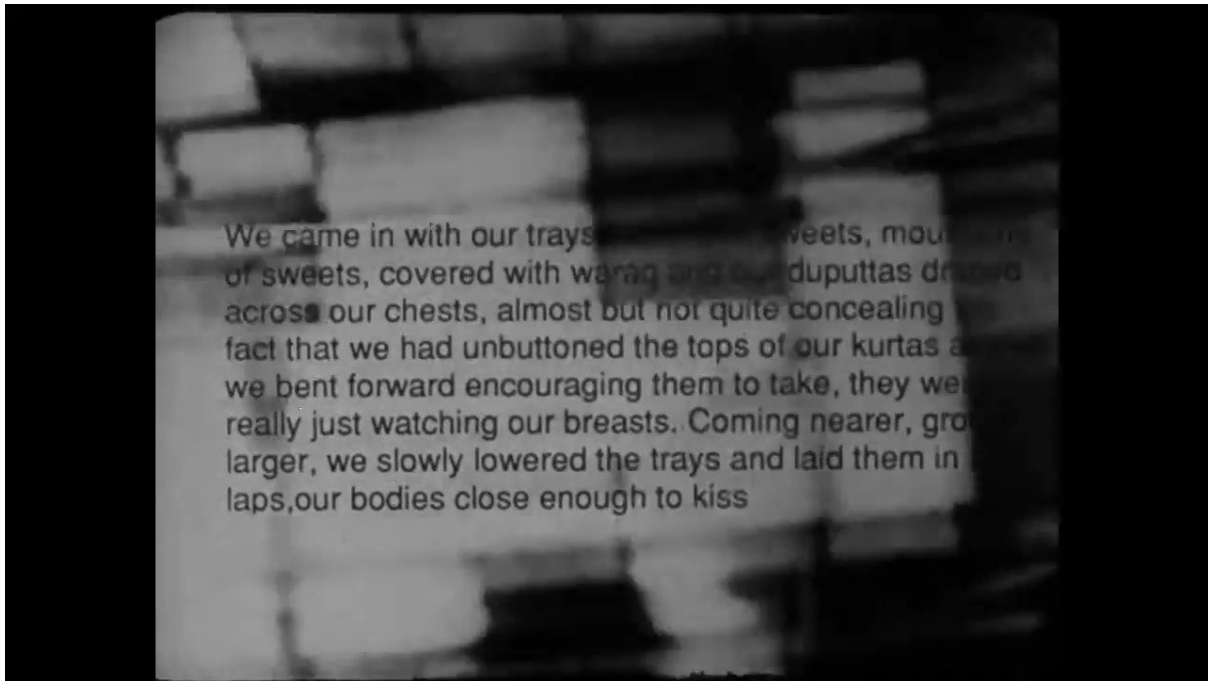


Figure 5.3 Texts related to the narrative overlaid with visual image of Whitechapel station, Fatima's Letter (1992), Alia Syed, video still



Figure 5.4 The encounter between the camera and the physical space inside Whitechapel station, Fatima's Letter (1992), Alia Syed, video still



Figure 5.5 The encounter between the camera and the faces of other passengers, Fatima's Letter (1992), Alia Syed, video still

However, compared with other films, what makes this documentation of the narrator's memory from another part of the world different and even intriguing is how the narrator manifests a story which is highly personal to herself and strange to others in the faces of passengers she sees on her underground journey, as if starting to believe that the passers-by walking in London's urban space have all become part of the feast and part of her past. As part of the narrator's, and Syed's intimate cityscape, Whitechapel Station is also made strange into a stage for the memory from the other side of the world to play out under the unhomely framework. Although Syed herself has never defined this film as autoethnographic, it indeed reflects the nature of autoethnographic work by achieving what Arthur Bochner describes as 'invite others to become involved with a life' and 'engage with it' (2013: 54), and helping us to 'become more attuned to the subjectively felt experience of others' (Bochner, 2013: 53). Similar to the manifestation of the narrator's memory back in Pakistan, this expansiveness is also achieved through the visual encounters between the camera and the materiality of the space within Whitechapel station and the passengers walking by (Fig. 5.4-5.5), which display a strong sense of everydayness. Garfield specially mentioned that this 'lack of specificity' within the film makes up 'part of the poetry of the film' (2019: 108). The impact of this reflective and transformative aesthetic is brilliantly

elaborated by American writer and activist Audre Lorde in a discussion about hatred, anger and the construction of understanding and love between different communities. As she says, we human beings 'will begin to see each other as we dare to begin to see ourselves', while 'we will begin to see ourselves as we begin to see each other, without aggrandizement or dismissal or recriminations, but with patience and understanding... and recognition and appreciation' (2007: 173). In the film, individuals are either passing by without paying too much attention, or only giving a short, silent and impassive glimpse to the camera during their journey. However, according to Rahila Haque, it is the 'collapsing, blurring and meshing into a diasporic phantasmagoria' of 'the boundaries between all of these' passing bodies on the move that suppress 'memories and imagined stories' and 'finds in the tube station a threshold between London and Karachi' (2022: 18). Similarly, Janardhan also comments that it is through this that the 'private correspondences' between the woman and Fatima, as well as her intimate memories and present migratory experiences are both 'woven into the public fabric' (2022: 15). It is also impossible for viewers to learn anything about who these passers-by are, what is on their minds and what they are thinking about the film camera that points at them from the brief time they appear. The way in which viewers see these people and how they react to the camera can be understood as looking at others without either intentionally making them appear to be grander or more insignificant than they actually are or framing them with hidden prejudices. I consider the treatment of people appearing in this film as the manifestation of a way to humanise the passers-by regardless of their identities. Lorde's passionate words signify the building of love and understanding between the white British natives who are least likely to feel alienated or othered and the rest of the people who live in London. Besides, regarding the dynamics between knowing the self and seeing others, Lorde also points out in an interview that when people attempt to shape a clear understanding of their personal histories and identities in relation to how they are like others and how they are different from others, they are not stopping others from joining them; instead, they are creating meaningful connections with others (Bereano, 2007: 10-11).

Based on Lorde's writings and Kristeva's discussions on being a foreigner in the nation state society as introduced earlier, it can be argued that migrants and diaspora members should not be considered as 'neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder

responsible for all the ills of the polis' (Kristeva, 2002: 264) just by being a foreigner and a member of the paradoxical community. This statement not only further explains the value of what Lorde describes as to 'arm ourselves with ourselves and each other' (2007: 175), or the cultivation of understanding and solidarity in the fight against racism and bias towards foreigners, but also suggests that on a personal level, the film is a reflection of the narrator's, and all migratory Londoners' effort of home-making, which demonstrates how the film's expansiveness can be used in achieving a non-sedentary perspective towards contemporary migratory and diasporic experiences. As discussed in previous chapters, home-making can roughly be understood as the establishment of meaningful relationships between a person's body and the space that surrounds them. By building a link between the narrator's old memories, personal thoughts, and the human faces and physical spaces she sees on her journey which are one of the most ubiquitous elements of every city in the world, Syed successfully creates an intimate link between the bodily existence of the narrator herself and the city, which is essentially a form of home-making. Garfield also says that the 'momentary glimpses of bystanders', such as a young woman turning her head towards the camera and a group of children getting off the train, provides a counterpoint to the 'intimate evocation of rituals and habits from another place' (2019: 108). Through the interplay of the bustling scenes in Whitechapel station that represent her in real life and the narrated story from her past in Pakistan with significant psychogeographic characteristics, Syed also connects the narrator's past and present, and roots her within an environment that is filled with traces of her memory from Pakistan which can provide some comfort and familiarity, while highlighting a sense of in-placeness and a dynamic between the narrator and the cityscape which is maintained throughout the whole film. The station space is turned into Bhabha's 'third space', in which the 'dual-history of language and hospitality work together to reveal a profound truth about the concept of Recognition' (2011: 7). This again reflects how the negotiation of a diasporic self takes place in the narrator's, and other migrants', and diaspora members' experiences, which is different from many other cultural and visual practices which highlight their supposed homelessness. This way of establishing a subject's spatial-temporal existence is also frequently seen in artworks that use everyday personal items as the embodiment of memories. For example, in Chinese installation artist Yin Xiuzhen's *Dress Box* (1995), a few pieces of old clothes that were worn by the artist during the last three decades are placed in an old dress box, then used as a manifestation of

her personal memory and experience, as well as the rapid and intense changes that were going on in Chinese society at that time.

It is also due to this particular way of seeing migratory and diasporic Londoners and their experiences that the film becomes different from many existing narrative cinematic practices about topics of race, gender, memory and thirdness. Return to Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002). The director chose two people who could best represent the risk, danger, instability and anxiety induced by border-crossing as imagined by people who are without these types of experiences and identities, including one asylum seeker and one undocumented immigrant, as the main characters. In addition, the whole story of the film can also be said to be built on these main characters' identities, because it is most likely that they will fall into the crime-ridden underworld of unofficial London due to their vulnerability (Guha, 2015: 127). To maximise the dramatic effect and make the audience more sympathetic to the characters, particular types of harm are also inflicted on these two characters based on their ethnic and religious background: for example, as a Muslim woman from a highly conservative culture that values women's virginity, Senay is raped multiple times. However, in *Fatima's Letter*, the differences between the identities of the narrator and the passers-by, as well as the differences among the passers-by themselves are both consciously dealt in a different way. Instead, all who are in the film are equally placed under the collective identity of passengers or travellers, and this collective identity is most significantly characterised by a shared goal among them, which is to go somewhere else in London. Meanwhile, it should also be noticed that the passenger as a collective identity in this film is also different from the ones that often appear in many different visual representations of migratory Londoners and their experiences, which exhibit stronger tendencies of self-alienation. As Syed says, 'London is never London, but contains traces of other cities' (Carroll/Fletcher Onscreen, 2014: n.p.). As Haque comments, 'passing through London's underground network' like the passengers in the film is fundamentally 'an experience of learning what the city is, who others might be and who we might become' (2022: 18). Meanwhile, just as London gradually becomes an integral part of their personal identity, experience, and history, it is highly possible that there are many migrants and diaspora members among those who are travelling through Whitechapel station during the film, and their existence, together with the native elements of British society, are also

gradually changing London little by little. Syed also says that there exists a sense of wistfulness about the cityscapes of London which 'lies in its ability to conjure' (Carroll/Fletcher Onscreen, 2014: n.p.). This conjuring ability can be understood as the materiality of London's cityscape which allows people with a migratory past and hybrid identity to naturally connect their past, which they can never go back to, with their present, which is characterised by their efforts and struggles in the establishment of a set of meaningful relationships between their self and the space around them, in a home-making process in a social-cultural system that may be riddled with the interplay between hospitality and hostility. For the migrants and diaspora members who inhabit a space of thirdness, this context would create a sense of nostalgia, as well as familiarity and being in place at the same time. To sum up, the visual exploration of a part of London's cityscape which is not often linked with intimacy or homeliness is used as a platform for reflecting on how the narrator's (and other migrants' and diaspora members') past shapes their present and their unique and personal relationships with London's urban space, and how their unique existences and relationship with London.

5.2.2 *Points of Departure* (2014): The Visibly Invisible Collective History of the British Asian Community

Although I have highlighted the importance of looking into British diasporic filmmakers for valuable perspectives towards migratory and diasporic experiences in London and Britain at the beginning of this chapter, one thing that I have noticed through earlier research is that there are even significant differences between the perspectives of members of the same diaspora community who live in their receiving society at the same time. For example, as diasporic members, their relationship and identification with the receiving society is even more complex.

In general, on one hand, diasporic children tend to be more integrated than parents because, as Helen Fehervary quotes from Marcus Bullock, there is no 'diaspora of children' because diasporic children come into being 'by means of a substitution they did not choose' and have the ability to 'live on in the identity accepted from a new family and new culture' (Fehervary, 2008: 15). On the other hand, I would argue that it is still not possible to say that diasporic children would be fully accepted by the receiving society without being subjected

to the racist and xenophobic attitudes and alienation that the first-generation immigrants from the same ethnic group may have suffered from. Although the contemporary wave of transnational human flow and ethnic hybridisation has been taking place on a scale larger than ever, our world system is still fundamentally based on nation states. Based on the theoretical discussions from the first few chapters, since the sedentarist framework is at the root of nationalism and nationalist practices, it is highly predictable that diaspora members who are born and raised in the receiving society and immersed in the host culture are often still be considered impure in terms of their heritage and unstable or untrustworthy in terms of their relationship with the receiving society, and the receiving society would eventually consider them undeserving of citizenship of the society. This is reflected in the discussions about relevant narrative cinematic practices in Chapter 2. Like any other diaspora members, diasporic children's status also reflects Sheffer's term 'at home abroad' (2003) which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, a term which was coined by him to describe the paradoxical existence of diaspora communities in nation state societies in his book about the politics of historical, modern and contemporary ethno-national diasporic experiences. In our interview, Syed also suggests that as a diasporic child who lives in between two socio-cultural systems, she grew up with 'the feeling of not belonging, and of being somehow outside continually' (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). This complexity in the diasporic experience of non-white children in the UK of Syed's generation is the theme of her *Points of Departure*, a 16-minute 32-second-long HD video made in 2014, which is part of BBC Arts Online's permanent artists' moving image collections and has been exhibited on multiple occasions²⁷.

In her discussion of autoethnographic filmmaking as a mode of avant-garde filmmaking, Russell also points out that for films that deal with themes of 'displacement, immigration, exile, and transnationality' (1997: 28), it is also very often for filmmakers to 'cast their own history as an allegory for a community or culture that cannot be essentialized' (ibid.). For example, in British-Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) and Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977), both filmmakers use the

²⁷ It participated in the Artefact Festival in Belgium in 2019 and screened at multiple renowned locations including the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow and Tate Modern, London in 2014.

reading of intimate letters with their respective mothers as the medium to reflect on their personal displacement experience, their respective family histories and the situation of the ethnic group, the community and the culture they stand for. While the medium of reflectivity is different, a similar approach is also used in *Points of Departure*, which, as commented by Cruz, is also a film that is 'concerned with the intersection between private lives and public narrative' (2022: 61). As the title of the whole film, the phrase 'points of departure' refers to the precise location established by seafaring vessels to set a course, and also the starting point for discussions or arguments. Both meanings are reflected in the film: first and foremost, Glasgow is not only a cityscape that is the most intimate to Syed, but also the prologue to her subsequent adult life, which has been mostly spent in London and her subsequent journey into the art world. Whilst she spent most of her creative career in London, the Scottish city is undeniably a crucial location that would always be part of her investigations about migratory and diasporic experiences, culture and identity. Syed considers the film an attempt to 'going back to Glasgow and again, actually trying to make sense of the place that I grew up in' (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). On that trip, when helping her elderly father tidy up the house before his move, she discovered many items she grew up with, including an old tablecloth which she felt emotionally attached to. This experience urged her to describe the objects to find out why she had such feelings towards them (Aesthetica Short Film Festival, 2015). It was also at that point that she first got the idea to revisit the Glasgow of her memory from a Scottish-Asian perspective through a filmmaking process that is designed and controlled by herself. However, as she also tells me during our interview, the Glasgow in her memory is 'forgotten in a way. It's only accessed through where you are, but not through the actual specifics of that place' (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). In other words, when she was actually back in the place where she grew up after spending a long time away, she eventually found that the Glasgow she visited at that time did not feel homely. Therefore, in order to reconstruct the Glasgow which is of such intimate historical and personal meanings to her, Syed decided that it would be better for her to 'find an image within the BBC archive that relates to her memories of growing up in Glasgow' (Artefact, 2019: n.p.), instead of travelling around the city and doing some filming. Considering her statement in our interview that filmmaking is a way of making sense of the space that surrounds her, making this film from archive footage can firstly be considered as an effort for her to attempt to re-live her childhood experience

of the city and re-establish her existence in the city's urban space, which is an artful response to my first research question. The film is also essentially an act of re-presenting and reimagining the dynamics between her bodily existence and the city, which has always been ambiguous and even difficult since her childhood, and eventually getting to know the space she grew up in once again, making it fall under the category of 'journey of the self' (Russell, 1999: 278), which is another of Russell's poetic observations about ethnographic filmmaking.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Syed's background is the product of two strikingly different cultures and ethnicities from two parts of the world that are far away from each other but historically intertwined as a result of the colonial history of the British Empire. Just like Bullock's analysis of diasporic children, growing up, Syed also did not feel that this unique heritage is an issue that needs to be addressed or meditated on at first. Instead, she says that the two parts of her heritage have finished the reconciliation process within her, and she accepted without too much difficulty that they are what makes her a unique person early on – or as she says, 'make me "me"' (Artefact, 2019: n.p.). But as mentioned previously, the introduction of her own childhood in our interview also confirmed my doubt that growing up as a diasporic child is really not a journey as smooth as Bullock describes (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). Growing up as a British citizen, Syed spoke English with a Scottish accent, went to British schools, and was immersed in British culture. However, she also tells me that as she grew older and started to develop her own thoughts about the world, she has been bothered by 'having a very different point of view' from her friends from a different cultural and ethnic background 'in relation to history or religion' (ibid.). From there, it is almost natural that she started to feel that she is an outsider to everything and everyone around her, and then this alienated feeling developed into a sense of self-consciousness that she is not the same as the majority of people around her, both externally and internally. Like Suh, Syed also often felt that she did not really belong to either the space or the community around her. However, while Suh's feeling came from the fact that his family's lifestyle was different from the mainstream way of living at the time, it can be seen from her interview content above that Syed's sense of displacement is a result of the way she exists among the rest of society: her ethnic heritage, her identity, her background, and the often-contradicting ways she was taught to think by the different

cultures associated with the two parts of her heritage contributed to this feeling of displacement. And this self-alienation did not come out of nowhere. It is not a coincidence that Syed decided to use the film to 'go back and look at how Scottish society and the media in Scotland had sort of represented its minorities' (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). And since 'we believe the archive is supposed to be a receptacle for society so that we find our histories ourselves somehow in that' (ibid.), she started by looking into the BBC archive for footage related to the presence of the Asian community in Glasgow (ibid.). However, even before starting this process, she already knew that there would not be much material due to a systematic lack of recognition of migrant groups and diasporic communities (ibid.). Even so, the fact that she found almost nothing still made her bitterly surprised and disappointed: indeed, similar to many other multi-ethnic British cities, Glasgow's culture 'is a product of a continuous influx of diverse aspects of human experiences and histories' (Artefact, 2019: n.p.), which also involves the presence and contribution of immigrant groups, including the Pakistani and Asian communities. However, the Asian communities in Glasgow have almost been totally left out of the narrative created by Britain's national broadcaster, as if the existence of Asians in the city is something that no one intends to remember, talk about or show to the world.

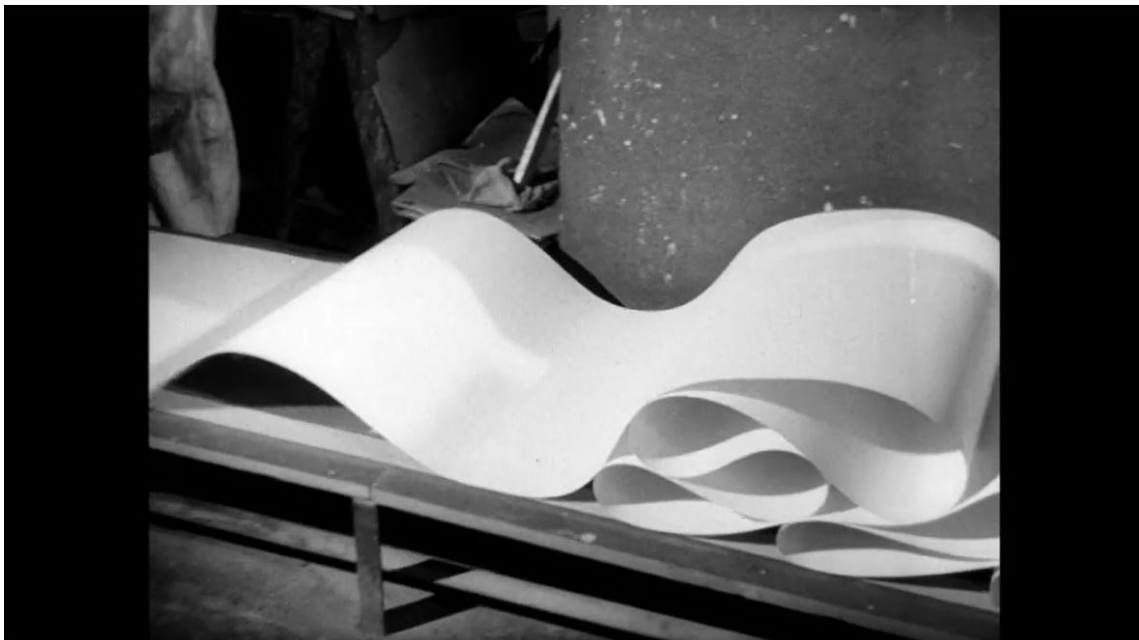


Figure 5.6 Sheets of Paper being dispensed, Points of Departure (2014), Alia Syed, video still

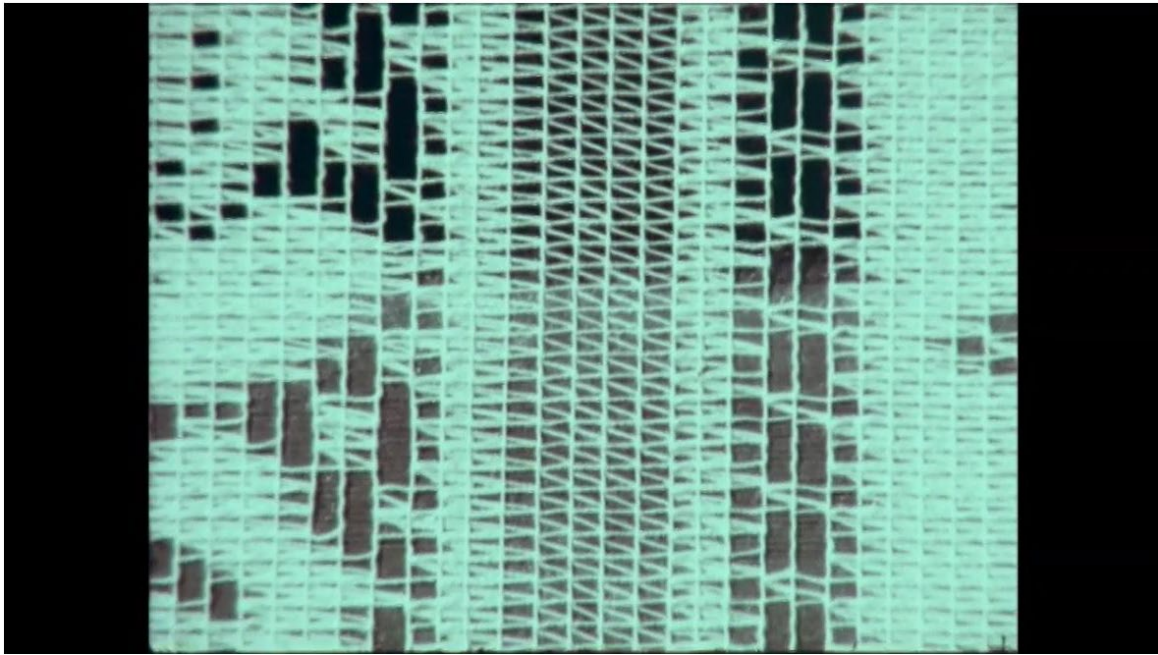


Figure 5.7 Fabric being woven, Points of Departure (1974), Alia Syed, video still



Figure 5.8 Traffic on a Glasgow road, Points of Departure (1974), Alia Syed, video still

Since it was impossible for her to find sufficient footage, Syed eventually chose to not include any major human presences in all but one shot of historical Glasgow in both the archive footage about the city and the images of contemporary Glasgow's urban space she filmed herself, which can be considered as a strong example of the role psychogeography can play in mapping their domestic space and intimate cityscape. As mentioned before, artist filmmaker Emily Richardson's research and investigation have provided a lot of useful

information in analysing Syed's structural films from a psychogeographic framework. Syed's final film is made up of images about various non-human subjects, such as a large flock of birds flying in the sky, newspapers being printed, sheets of fabric being woven, roads, rails and railway bridges, piles of coal being shovelled, brick walls and buildings, and the general Glasgow cityscape (Fig. 5.6-5.8). This approach can be considered as what Richardson terms the process of 'activation' (2018: 8), namely the process of how the architectural space is translated into filmic spaces, or the spaces that are 'framed, composed, edited and constructed' (Richardson, 2018: 76) to convey meanings in moving image practices, through reflexive or critical filmmaking approaches. Through activation, viewers transport themselves into a cinematic or photographic space and occupy it temporarily to make connections between the materiality of the space with their own experiences and memories to make out the meanings and narratives hidden behind it, and it is when a cinematic space is empty of humans but still has non-human material elements such as furniture, buildings, animals and plants, that its ability to produce meaning that can connect with the audience is greatest (Richardson, 2018: 42-43). When looking at footage of empty spaces, viewers are allowed to make connections with the 'remains' (Richardson, 2018: 43), or the proofs of the unique architectural existences of people who used to live in the space, then put a narrative together from these fragments, which turns the cinematic space into lived architectural spaces (Bruno, 2014: 205). This way of producing meanings and constructing narratives by providing an immersive viewing experience is also reflected in many installation artworks; one example is the rubbing concept proposed by Suh, which was introduced in the previous chapter. In this film, the architectural space is translated into cinematic space through the works of the camera. When looking at the empty spaces, viewers are allowed to make connections with the remains, thus making connection with Suh's home-making effort and life experiences the reactivation is reflected, in that although the footage Syed chooses for the film is not unique to her own sensory experience and memories or exclusively relevant to the Glasgow Asian community, the images reconstruct the city in a way that all Glaswegians from the same period as herself would recognise. In our interview, when I describe this film as 'full of empty shots', she also corrects me by saying that even a space that is always perceived as empty, like the desert, is actually 'full of things that we don't know or we don't relate to, or that we don't see because actually we've never had the experience of that' (Wang, interview with Syed, 2021). With the seemingly mundane images,

the film successfully brings to light the existence of what might have been witnessed, normalised, and passed by many of these Glaswegians, including the city's well-established Asian community. Just as she herself convincingly points out in the interview,

‘There is no human presence, but it's not empty, because it's a built environment. And that built environment holds a history. So in actual fact, I was uncovering a built environment that is built through history, through empire and through labour, and holds those ghosts there for us to experience in a different way’ (Wang, interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021).

Apart from that, Syed mentions that instead of a receptacle, archives turn out to be ‘another tool to create a particular view of the past, which may not be necessarily true’ (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). As Gilroy points out, British society has always held a hostile attitude towards its Asian immigrants: conservative politicians such as Enoch Powell have long held the opinion that British Asians are ‘bound by cultural and biological ties which merit the status of a fully formed, alternative national identity’, making them ‘pose a threat to the British way of life by virtue of their strength and cohesion’ (2002: 45). If we connect his observations with Beaman’s discussions (2015) about cultural citizenship, it was exactly due to this mindset that the Glasgow Asians were placed outside the British cultural norm and collectively denied citizenship culturally. Here, I would argue that instead of simply documenting images from the city’s past and present, the film fundamentally reimagines the city into the location where migratory and diasporic Glaswegian’s home-making efforts take place, which can be considered as the make-strange of the city’s urban space and a reflection of the unhomely notion. Through looking at Glasgow from a human-less perspective that is deeply unsettling, the cityscape in the film offers a special version of Glasgow’s history, which adds another layer to the film’s reflectivity in two ways. Firstly, although their existence, memory and experience are absent from the official narrative, this version of Glasgow was equally witnessed and experienced by all immigrants and immigrant descendants who lived in the city during the 1970s, including migrants and diaspora members. Secondly, since both the historical archives and present-day images of Glasgow in the film are devoid of human presence, it can be said that Glasgow and the UK’s nationalistic tradition still resides in its present through its highly industrial-looking cityscape

which is built upon different waves of migration and diaspora. It is only after this complex collective memory was established sufficiently that Syed uses the only BBC archive footage she can relate to that includes a non-white child (Fig. 5.9) as the final shot of the whole film. This single human existence reinserts the presence of herself and people like her, including the city's Asian community and its whole migratory and diasporic population, into the city's urban space. In general, apart from reflecting on her own life experience, her family history and the complex history of Glasgow, the film also reflects on how the official narrative in the UK consciously or unconsciously denied the migrants and diaspora members their place in history from a highly personal and gentle perspective. This erasure can also be found in the visual representation of contemporary London immigrants and their experiences, in films such as *Dirty Pretty Things*, which restricts them and their everyday life in an unofficial and undocumented side of the global city that often appears to be dangerous and unregulated. However, while those films hide migrants from the cityscape and make them go away, here Syed reinserts their existence into the city's urban space, which enables her works to be firmly rooted in the reality faced by migrant and diaspora communities in the UK while distinguishing them from the pessimistic and melodramatic readings of migration and diaspora.



Figure 5.9 The last shot of the film and the only shot with a non-white child from BBC archive, *Points of Departure* (2014), Alia Syed, video still

Based on her own words, I would say that getting the urge to ‘unravel the threads of memory’ (Artefact, 2019: n.p.) manifested by the materiality of mundane household items when visiting her father is a crucial moment in the making of this film. During her task of searching for herself in the BBC Archive, she was essentially looking into the question of how the archive materials represent the Asian communities in Glasgow (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). From her words, I think that it is indicated that answering this question eventually became a task that was almost as important as the search for her diasporic self from the materials. As a result of this rationale, she chose to make the film almost completely with shots of Glasgow’s cityscape, and I would further argue that she responds to the situation where she found herself in the film’s voiceover. Like *Fatima’s letter*, the relationship between the image and voiceover here is not literal. Instead of describing the content of the images, or any experiences, history, and stories strictly in relation to the cinematic space in it, the voiceover here is mainly made up of Syed talking about the tablecloth that inspired this film and some relevant memories, as well as her father translating an Urdu Ghazal she discovered in the archive, a kind of poetry and folk song that expresses ‘the beauty of love and the pain of loss’, which ‘exposes a process of translation that becomes the key’ (Artefact, 2019: n.p.), and which grants a door into the labyrinth of both her recollected memory of everyday life rituals from the past and the memories of her family’s home-making experience in the previous years that had been attached to and imbued in them, as well as the BBC archive. In Cruz’s words, this soundtrack is a reflection on how ‘moments of recognition underline the incompleteness of both what we can remember and what we can’t’, or to say, ‘what is lost in the gaps of memory and in the slippages of translation’ (2022: 61). It is through the recollection of memories from the tablecloth that the rituals of home-making within the Syed family are preserved, and eventually become generational. According to Bill Brewer, a ‘recollective memory’ is the type of memory that comes into being when someone ‘recalls a special episode from their past experience’ (1999: 19), and through a relevant object allows to be perceived ‘given the continuous spatial-temporal path the subject has been tracing through the world’ (Debus, 2008: 410). Based on these discussions and Divya Tolia-Kelly’s (2004) argument that home possessions have an important role in positioning diasporic identities and narrating family histories for British South Asian communities, it can be said that Syed’s past experiences are the precipitates of another socio-political landscape refracted through the material artefact

of the tablecloth in this film. As an artefact, that tablecloth comes from the time period shown in this film. By the time she discovered it, it was also situated in her home, where the two different parts of her heritage met with each other, and the home-making effort of her family met with the particular historical background in the UK between the 1960s and 70s. Therefore, it can be understood as both an embodiment of the complexities within her family history as a person of mixed heritage and a talisman of the trans-generational homemaking efforts in her family. On top of that, it is also an embodiment of the home-making endeavour for generations of Asian migrants and diaspora members, as well as migrants and diaspora members of other ethnic backgrounds and heritages in Glasgow.

Based on Tolia-Kelly's discussions (2004), the unrehearsed attempt at translating the Urdu Ghazal from Syed's father, displayed in the film intertwined with her own narration about her memories related to that tablecloth in the voiceover, can be understood as a path through the labyrinth of both her own memory and BBC archive material, which bridges the gap between what she understands and what is perceived by the majority of British society. In other words, this audio record functions as a metaphor for how the two generations of her family negotiate their own existence in British society, and then establish a home that is not only able to fit into the socio-cultural norms of British society, but also situates the Pakistani heritage, which is a significant and meaningful part of their family. Viewers can hear that her father had a lot of difficulties in the translation of the Ghazal, which, considering that he is a first-generation immigrant who grew up immersed in Pakistani culture and speaking Urdu, would possibly be because the version of the Ghazal acquired by the BBC is significantly different from the version that her father is familiar with. From this perspective, it can also be regarded as a reference for a displaced person's relationship with their hometown, original cultural and ethnic heritage, and the countries of origin they left behind; however, when revisiting these concepts and even trying to reconcile them at a later point in their lives, displaced people often find that, despite still being more or less recognisable, as a result of the erasure of time or the distortion of memory, what is supposed to be their home is undoubtedly not what is in their memory anymore. As a result of their migratory or diasporic experience, they have also become the person that their origins usually cannot enable them to become. This is also reflected in Syed's own life and creative experiences: when talking about her current relationship with Glasgow, Syed tells

me if she had not left Glasgow, she ‘would not be a filmmaker’ (Wang, interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). Meanwhile, changes in different dimensions have also unavoidably transferred the city she once knew, making it impossible for her to really go back to the home city that she grew up in and turning it into something she does not know anymore, in a similar way that her father struggles to translate the Ghazal after it was heavily altered by the BBC. However, the whole film should not be read as a nostalgic lament for the past, because Syed also indicates multiple times in our interview that London has played a crucial role in her creative career and personal development with its great educational resources, vibrant creative environment and diverse culture and population, thus shaping the course of her life after Glasgow to a great extent²⁸ (ibid.). This is the reason why the film is entitled ‘Points of Departure’, and explains why, despite this film being a reimagination of Glasgow, London actually exists throughout it in an invisible but significant manner. This bitter-sweet interpretation of losing something which has been important in life while creating some other things that are new, vigorous and worthwhile is informative in understanding home-making from a perspective which is different from the existing ones including those introduced in Chapter 2, and not overly naïve and positive. Similar life circumstances for migrants and diaspora members are also investigated in Suh’s *Home within Home within Home*, while the spatialisation of these people’s collective history within a UK context is also the theme of *Bridging Home, London*. But compared with Suh’s works, *Points of Departure* reflects Syed’s unique interest in ‘filming the unrepresentable’ and her ability to use her own fiction ‘in counterbalance rupturing the fiction’ that official narratives ‘want us to believe’ (Syed, 2022: 85).

5.2.3 *On a Wing and a Prayer* (2016): The Collective Struggle of the Displaced against the Nation State System within British History

Earlier in this chapter, I have introduced that Syed’s works attempt to explore issues about culture, identity and diasporic experience based on her own life experiences within a spatial-temporal context. This is also reflected in her explorations of the history of the British cities that she grew up in as a mixed-race child through the materiality of the urban

²⁸ Further to her words, I would also argue that her perspective shown in the film was shaped by her London life significantly.

space in these cities in the films analysed in the two previous sections. As discussed in the previous section, autoethnography in creative practices is fundamentally an approach to drawing on the author/artist's personal experience or personal account to create extensive social understanding (Sparkes, 2000, cited in Denshire, 2014: 831-832). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that many of Syed's works show a strong autoethnographic nature. However, while it still utilises her understanding of how the personal history of migrants and diaspora members might be impacted by 'larger social formations and historical processes' and uses 'a representation of the self as a performance' (Russell, 1999: 276), Syed's 2016 film and video installation *On a Wing and a Prayer* is one of the few of her films which are based on the displacement of people other than herself and reflects how the autoethnographic framework can be used in the spatialisation of the self of the displaced people from another angle. This film was inspired by the extraordinary experience and legal case of Abdul Rahman Haroun, a Sudanese refugee who walked to the UK on foot. The whole film is 18 minutes 11 seconds long and shot in colour HD video. Since coming out, it was first exhibited as a video installation in London, and subsequently screened as a film both in and outside the UK.²⁹

Like *Points of Departure*, the title of this project is also an English idiom. 'On a Wing and a Prayer' means to do something in the hope of a successful result despite knowing that the chance of success is extremely low or without adequate preparation. The phrase can be regarded as a sum-up of Haroun's extremely dramatic story that caught the attention of human rights organisations and campaigners all over the UK. However, compared to many other cultural and visual practices that detail the misfortunes of refugees and asylum seekers, in my opinion, what makes this film stand out is that instead of framing the journey of asylum-seeking as a process of humans cutting off their relationship with the geographical spaces they left and passed through, it considers the journey of refugees practically as an ongoing struggle of negotiating their relationship with the spaces that are unknown and hostile to them: a struggle as it is, the unfortunate people who are forced out of their homeland and running for their lives are not considered suffering from a permanent

²⁹ The work was first exhibited as a video installation in the Stuart Hall Library of the Institute of International Visual Art (Iniva), London between March and May 2016. After that, it was screened as a short film at Tate Modern, London (2017), and attended group exhibitions at Talwar Gallery, New York (2017).

loss of home and self from the perspective Syed chooses for this film. Haroun's experience is especially a process of navigating between hospitality and hostility in this 'absent, ambivalent space of global communication' (Bhabha, 2011: 15), which is the reason why this film was chosen as a case study for my research. As a result, it is possible to say that the creative experience of this film can contribute to my project by arguing that all kinds of migration are fundamentally the process of migrants and members of diasporas re-establishing their existence and reinventing their selves in a place different from their places of origin, which involves a lot of negotiation with physical spaces that are previously unknown to them that can be visualised within the materiality of these spaces.

As Nadine El-Enany introduces, British politicians such as Aretas Akers-Douglas have started to use 'dehumanising and incendiary rhetoric' to describe migration to Britain since as early as 1904 (2020: 50), and the case of Abdul Rahman Haroun is simply a relatively new chapter of this history. Often sarcastically called the 'Channel Tunnel Walker', 40-year-old Haroun was first found walking on foot near the British end of the 31-mile (49 km) channel tunnel that connects Folkstone, UK and Coquelles, France in August. He fled from Sudan in 2004, after suffering from persecution from the Janjaweed militia, an Arab militia which operates from the Darfur area of West Sudan and has been accused of ethnic cleansing in that area (Dearden, 2016). He first spent several years travelling from a refugee camp at the Kari-Yari Dam at the Sudan-Chad border to the North African countries of Egypt and Libya, then crossed the Mediterranean and landed in Europe in Italy. After that, he kept on walking across different countries. At Calais, France, he jumped over the local perimeter fence and accessed the tunnel from there. Walking the Channel Tunnel is an extremely difficult and dangerous experience; as he himself recounts, after entering the tunnel, he had to walk 'sometimes on the right and sometimes on the left' due to the busy passing traffic, and 'hold on to metal pieces on the wall of the tunnel' when he 'saw trains coming' (BBC, 2016 (b): n.p.). He was arrested by the UK Border Control force as he neared the end of the journey, and then had his status as a refugee confirmed after a Home Office investigation lasting months, and was granted asylum on Christmas Eve, 2015 (ibid.). However, not too long after that, he was persecuted under the 'Malicious Damage Act 1861', a Victorian legislation that is more than a hundred years old for 'obstructing an engine or a carriage using a railway' (Dearden, 2016: n.p.), and was sentenced to nine months in prison (Harris,

2016). The judge for this case acknowledged that Haroun was ‘in a state of desperation’ but insisted on giving him the sentence because the court ‘takes a serious view of this criminality’ and could not risk to ‘have no check upon’ ‘those who enter in this way seek[ing] to evade the authorities’ (BBC, 2016: n.p.), causing an uproar among aid workers and refugee charities (Dearden, 2016).

In our interview, Syed says that Haroun’s case reminds her of British writer John Berger and Swiss photographer Jean Mohr’s famous book *A Seventh Man*, an in-depth portrayal of migrant workers in the European Union in the late 1960s and the 1970s (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). As she describes, when thinking of this case, she immediately connected it with a striking image described in the book about the poor working conditions of migrant workers who were digging a tunnel under the Swiss city that was solely for draining rainwater (ibid.), which was in the chapter named ‘Under Geneva’. And she also came up with the idea for the project not only as a response to Haroun’s experience, but also as a critical reflection on that chapter of Berger’s book, which ‘is an intense exploration of the individual and collective experience of migration from departure to work and return’ and ‘has timely resonances with the hopes and fears that are driving the movements of current migrants and refugees’ (Iniva, 2016: n.p.). In our interview, she also stresses that this film is a response to Haroun’s whole journey instead of a re-enactment or retelling. This is because she considers it impossible to experience something equivalent to Haroun’s experience; unless filmmakers suddenly become political refugees who need to escape the UK themselves, it is impossible to fully recreate his story (Who are We?, 2017: n.p.).³⁰ And when I went to read that particular chapter in Berger’s book, what struck me the most is that, even though the workers are working on the tunnel just beneath the city of Geneva, very few people actually know anything about them, or are aware of their existence at all. This can be considered as a metaphor for the relationship between a lot of underprivileged and muted displaced people and their hard work with modernity and Western civilisation. As introduced previously, from a nationalist perspective, the displaced Other of a society are considered either pre-modern or terroristic, or to say either undeserving of nationhood

³⁰ Based on my communication with Syed, it is also reasonable to say that the ethical empathetic considerations are another important reason behind her choice.

because they are considered inferior, or unworthy of nationhood because they are considered disruptive (Bhabha, 1999: x), and the receiving societies (mostly developed Western countries) also do not need them. However, migrants and diaspora members are not at the margin or bottom of modern Western civilisation, but at a remarkably central location and form an integral part of its construction and development. It is only due to the existence of the nationalist perspective that people will not pay much attention to their existence consciously or unconsciously. This is the case in many countries, including the UK. As introduced in the first few chapters and also reflected in the analysis of *Points of Departure*, although the UK is a multi-ethnic society, the existence of migrants and diaspora members, as well as their life conditions and experiences are still something that is hidden outside the official narrative of the nation.

In Syed's films and many of Suh's installation artworks like *Bridging Home, London*, both of the two artists attempt to emphasise the existence of the migratory and displaced Other in British society by highlighting their physical presence in the cityscapes of a lot of British cities including London, and how this presence and the materiality of the spaces are constantly shaping each other. Meanwhile, both artists also achieved the target of visualising the traces of the subject's movements and activities by considering the interaction between the human elements of their bodily existence, the non-human factors of the materiality of space, and the social, cultural, political or historical contexts that contain and connect them. In our interview, Syed argues that Haroun's story can be linked with the ancient sport of the marathon by pointing out that 'he was an athlete in many respects, because the physical and mental acuity and focus that somebody has to enable (himself) to do that is huge. An incredible amount of tenacity and skill is involved in this journey' (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). However, as she also points out, while a marathon athlete or someone who swims across the Channel Tunnel would be awarded medals and praise, Haroun, who completed an even longer journey in the brutal and dangerous environment of the Channel Tunnel, was humiliated and ridiculed by the right-leaning side of the British media and public, and punished by jail sentences (ibid.). His experience is fundamentally an obsession with the production and enforcement of migrant 'illegality', that is, how asylum systems in nation states 'disproportionately disqualify asylum seekers, and convert them into "illegal" and deportable migrants' (De Genova, 2013: 1181).

The existence of this huge discrepancy is as if the British authority wanted to hide him from the attention of the public and prevent the general public from developing any excessive understanding or empathy towards the most vulnerable migrants like him, just like how migrant workers and their works are hidden under Geneva and remain hidden and unacknowledged to most. All these issues made Syed wonder about Haroun's feelings about going on and completing such a tremendous but uncelebrated feat and think about 'positionalities of relative privilege in terms of mobility rights and immobilities' (OpenLearn, 2017: n.p.) in a talk with academics from the Open University. Building on these thoughts, it can be said that the most fundamental aim of the film is essentially to lead the audience to critically reflect on the socio-political system behind the production of the discourse of migrant illegality (De Genova, 2013), namely the xenophobic and racist ideologies that have historically existed within the nation state. This is achieved through visualising how the efforts of establishing their existence are often full of difficulties and met with harsh scrutiny regardless of the personal conditions of the migrant or diaspora member in question.

As Syed tells me, she considered interviewing Haroun in person in the early stage of this film's development, but could not do so because he was in prison while she was producing this project (Wang, Interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). This reality also contributed to her final decision to film herself going on a reciprocal journey to gain some first-hand experience about his journey instead of collecting information from media coverage and archive footage or waiting to interview Haroun after his sentence finished. This is the reason why she defines the film as a response to Haroun's story instead of a re-enactment or recap. The location of Syed's journey is the Rotherhithe Tunnel, a busy two-way road tunnel in inner London. It is one of the most important ways for Londoners to travel from the south of the River Thames into the City of Westminster and the City of London, which are the political and financial centres of the UK respectively. Therefore, making the film at this particular location can be considered as a gesture enabling viewers to connect her journey, Haroun's journey and the British government's attitude towards immigrants and diaspora members in the country, thus making their own critical reflections about the outdated and inhumane aspects of British immigration and border control policies. Apart from this, from a practical perspective, for Syed who resides in South London, Rotherhithe Tunnel is close to

her residence and easy for her to reach; considering the differences in physical condition, psychological capacity and long-term living status before the journey between her and Haroun, a journey through this tunnel is already enough for her to feel danger. Consequently, choosing to complete her own tunnel-walking journey here is not only financially and physically sensible, but also able to guarantee that the physical and psychological traumas she experiences in her own tunnel-walking journey are on a similar level to that experienced by Haroun. Rotherhithe Tunnel connects the Rotherhithe area in the London Borough of Southwark, which is to the south of the River Thames, and the Limehouse area in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which is to the north of the river. Since both ends of Syed's journey are historically multi-ethnic regions located in the docklands area of London which boast significant maritime connections with other parts of the world, when the film is exhibited as a video installation, the screen that plays the film is usually installed in a Register of Ships book, then placed in front of a map of London which highlights the city's major waterways, including the Thames, the Grand Union Canal and the Regents Canal (Fig. 5.10-5.11). Besides, Syed also says that Rotherhithe Tunnel is '... atmospheric and it felt older because of the tiles which I've since found out are Victorian tiles', which 'fits with the law from 1861' (Who are We?, 2017: n.p.).

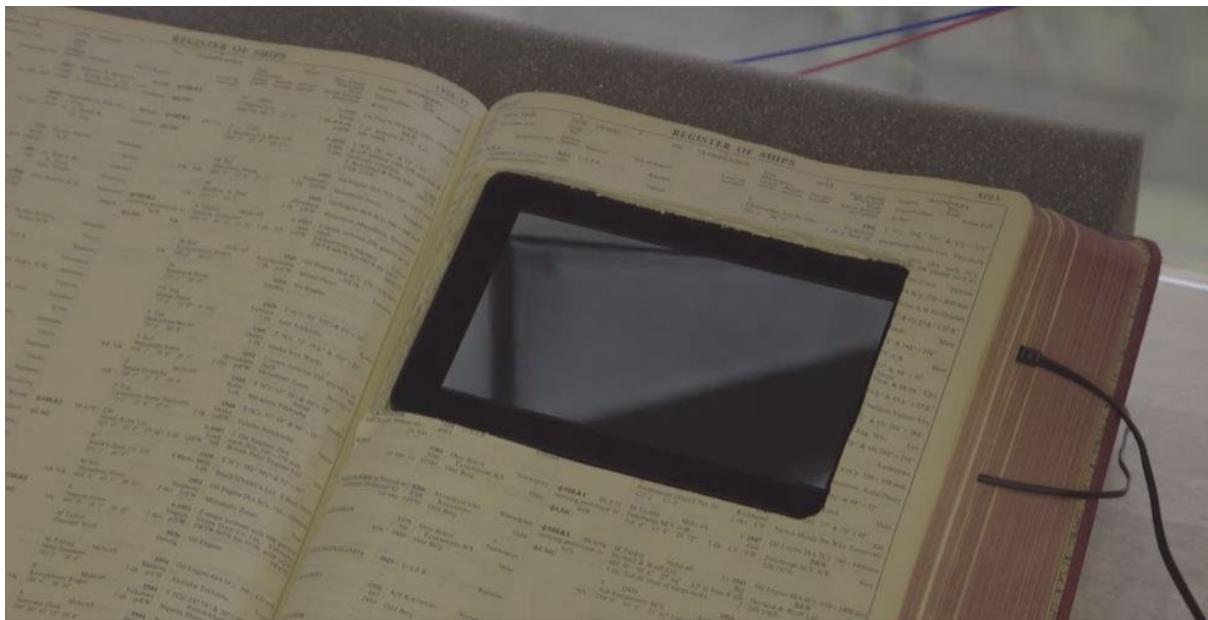


Figure 5.10 The screen that plays the film being installed into a book of ship registrations in the installation view of Alia Syed's On a Wing and a Prayer, Iniva – Institute of International Visual Arts, video still



Figure 5.11 General installation view of Alia Syed's *On a Wing and a Prayer*, Iniva – Institute of International Visual Arts, video still



Figure 5.12 Rotherhithe Tunnel from Syed's perspective, *On a Wing and a Prayer* (2016), Alia Syed, video still

Syed shot the whole film from a first-person perspective by attaching two video cameras to her body. Throughout the whole film, she uses her own eyes and body to observe and experience the environment inside the tunnel which is highly hostile and dangerous towards

pedestrians (Fig. 5.12). Throughout the whole film, it can be seen that the cameras keep tilting in all kinds of directions as she stumbles in danger of being hit by the coming and going traffic because there is no space for pedestrians in the tunnel. As her journey goes on, the irregular camera movements also reveal her worsening condition truthfully to the audience: she is getting weaker and weaker, more and more tired, and gradually losing control of her footsteps. Meanwhile, the irregular speed of camera movement over time also indicates that she is scared and panicking at times. Similar to what Haroun described when discussing his experience in the Channel Tunnel during the Home Office inquiries, she also walks sometimes on the right and sometimes on the left to avoid being hit by the traffic, struggling to keep herself safe all the time. As her journey goes on, the intentionally shaky and unedited documentation of the space inside the tunnel, which is narrow, grey, dimly lit, frightening and lonely for any pedestrian, let alone a lone woman, almost makes her journey feel depressingly endless, which is much like Haroun's original journey. Just like Umut Erel's responses to this film, watching the film leaves viewers feeling 'protective towards her ... angry that she would expose herself to the risk of walking the tunnel – without, of course knowing her at all' (OpenLearn, 2017: n.p.). With her own story of walking in a major tunnel, this film attempts to use the autoethnographic framework to open up discussions about issues such as freedom of movement and hierarchies of citizenship and belonging (ibid.). Meanwhile, considering she is a woman and a well-recognised artist, Syed filming herself walking in a tunnel the same way as Haroun did also hints at some interesting issues about how migrants and diaspora members of different genders and social statuses are perceived differently in the eyes of the nation state. Although Syed's journey of filmmaking has also been dangerous and difficult for her, she eventually completed it and finished the film without causing any real harm or attracting punishment for herself both physically and mentally. Besides, although she did not get a medal for completing her journey, Syed's artist identity makes it possible for her journey to be used in artmaking, getting seen and being appreciated by viewers, which was not the case for Haroun, who was ridiculed extensively on British media and punished according to an outlandishly ancient legislation. The film serves as a discursive example of how the 'intersections between race, class and gender mean that the material effects of racialisation vary in their degree of severity within and across differentially racialised populations' (El-Enany, 2020: 23). It speaks about the striking difference in power between the artist and the person who is being visually portrayed by

her: as pointed out by Mezzadra and Neilson, the kinds of borders 'individuals belonging to different social groups' experience are different, while they also experience even the same border 'in different ways' (2013: 4). Mezzadra and Neilson build their argument from Balibar's observations, that borders are the performers of 'several functions of demarcation and territorialization—between distinct social exchanges or flows, between distinct rights, and so forth' (Balibar, cited in Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013: 4). Through the reflection on her own journey and Haroun's journey, Syed reflect on the relationship between the socio-economic status and class difference of a migrant or a diaspora member and their different difficulty levels of integrating into the receiving society and establishing their existence, as well as the systematic hostility that is often directed at the most vulnerable migrants such as asylum seekers and refugees, which exists extensively in different parts of the world including the UK.

In general, the highly self-reflective first-person filmmaking approach in this film can be regarded as one reflection of a new type of non-fiction filmmaking culture that Susanna Helke describes as the 'culture of self-construction' and the 'emotive and psychological realm of life' (2016: 183) meeting each other, namely approaching major socio-political issues from a personal, emotional perspective to form a collective identity or collective narrative. In her discussions about first-person filmmaking, Alisa Lebow also states that the 'I' in the film is 'always social, always in relation', and always representing a plural 'we', or a social or ethnic group the filmmaker or the film is associated with (2012: 3). If we consider Syed's personal background, it can be said that in a way, she is also an alien and a member of the Other to London and British society. Meanwhile, Haroun is an African refugee who fled his home country to settle in the UK and live a safer life. Syed uses her journey to respond to Haroun's journey as an embodiment of how all migratory and diasporic persons who are attempting to navigate between the cultural and identity systems of their origins and their receiving society to negotiate their presence in an often unwelcoming and hostile environment, which Umut Erel considers as the cultivation of a sense of relationality between the audience and 'people who are fleeing and whose journeys are full of risks because of the restrictions of national borders and immigration regulations' (OpenLearn, 2017: n.p.). The film is a manifestation of how human flow across nation state borders can be considered as humans negotiating and mediating the relationship between their physical

existence and the space that surrounds them, which makes it fundamentally a psychogeographic reflection on Haroun's journey and the hostility-infested home-making process of all migrants and diaspora members. On top of that, it also reflects how, just like installation art, experimental moving image practices can also be immersive, or to say have the potential to manifest a political or ideological system into spatial and visual forms and make it possible for all members of the audience to construct different interpretations based on their own migratory or diasporic experiences, or their experiences with migrants or diasporic members. I would argue based on these analyses that it is easy to see that first-person filmmaking plays an important role in the meaning production of the whole film, which follows a long tradition of "speak" from the articulated point of view of the filmmaker who readily acknowledges her subjective position' (Lebow, 2012: 1) in filmmaking, which is again the reason why the film is a response to Haorun's story instead of a recount. Since the film's sense of embodiment is heavily reliant on Syed's experimental approaches of tying cameras onto her own body, intentionally making the camera movement shaky and unstable, it can also be argued that sometimes experimental approaches can be highly informative in conveying a condition or experience beyond conventional narrative storytelling.

Like many of Syed's other films such as *Points of Departure*, language also plays a crucial role here. Just as how her distinctive filmmaking approach creates a sense of universalness and connects the experiences of struggling and facing hardship from different individuals visually, language is also used in the film to create a sense of connectivity between different time periods to create a critical reflection on the British history of mistreating immigrants and their descendants. A reading of British writer David Herd's essay *The View from Dover* by Herd himself is chosen to accompany Syed's tunnel journey. In the essay, Herd addresses 'the darkness of the contemporary moment we need to regard the culture from the vantage of one of its unwritten locations' (2015: n.p.), and the unwritten location is the historical Citadel on Dover's Western Heights. In the 19th century, the citadel was first built to defend against an 'anticipated invasion from France' which never actually happened; in the contemporary age, it is used as the Dover Immigration Removal Centre (DIRC) (ibid.). Throughout its whole history, it has always been a location which is 'neither one place nor another, but is perched, liked all such centers, just outside' (ibid.). Herd defines the removal

centre as a kind of 'non-place' because it is characterised by the state of 'not being attached' to the people in it and the implication of 'their belonging elsewhere, in their country of origin', which is also 'significantly in doubt' (2015: n.p.), because it is full of vulnerable migrants who cannot be sure about where their future should be. In Haroun's experience, the Channel Tunnel he walked through has a similar nature to this removal centre: he is not attached to the tunnel's interior or does not belong to the tunnel, while being in the tunnel alone also does not have anything to do with his identity, socio-economic status, personal history, destinations and immigration status. However, when he is in the tunnel and walking, he turns from a unique human being into an anonymous pedestrian; he has nothing else to do other than keep on walking and waiting for the time that he can reach the end of the tunnel and was considered as a nuisance that obstructed traffic flow and endangered passengers by the British authority. He also did not know what would be ahead: whether he could make it out of the tunnel alive, and what would happen after he got out. And similar descriptions can be applied to Syed's journey in the film, which is also full of danger and uncertainty for her. In general, although Herd's essay is not directly related to Haroun's, or Syed's journey, there exists a strong critical dynamic between the cinematic space of the film and these texts, which can be used to create 'a third space, an intellectual or emotive space within the architecture of the film' (Who are We?, 2017: n.p.), or to say giving viewers a zone of expansiveness and reflectivity to form their own opinions based on different perspectives.

Syed is interested in using sound to 'opening up a space as opposed to narrowing the space' (Wang, interview with Syed, 1 Apr 2021). Here, this essay reading can give space for different emotional and intellectual responses about the conservative government's long-term obsession with border issues, immigration and freedom of movement from the audience. Apart from the content of the essay, Herd's voice itself is also an important element that helps to shape the film. As Syed recounts, she first heard Herd speaking at an academic conference in London and found that 'he had a particular intonation to his voice which felt like it belonged to an older England' (Who are We?, 2017: n.p.). This feature in his voice can potentially give the whole film a historical reflectivity about Britain's history of xenophobia, racism and anti-immigration, thus helping the viewers understand the collective struggle of all migrants and diaspora members in London and the UK against a

highly hostile system of state machines. This eventually makes Syed choose to ask him to make the voiceover instead of using her own voice, as in *On a Wing and a Prayer*, which is also informative for the presentation of commentaries and voices in other cultural and visual practices about similar topics.

Conclusion

This project was first inspired by the hostilities endured by my partner's diaspora community (the Polish community in London and the UK), then grew out of my previous training as an anthropologist and ethnographer. I started my PhD journey already with a very concrete idea as to where this project was going and what research method would be taken based on a combination of different factors, like my personal experience as a migrant living in London and my long-lasting interest in the spatial form of storytelling. Now, it has become very clear that my work eventually took a very different shape from what I had in mind then. However, I still successfully answered the same research questions that I've always been concerned about, which is how to reimagine the experience of migrants and diaspora members living in London and the UK and tell their stories in their adopted city and adopted country without framing them as collectively homeless and exploiting their Otherness.

6.1 Project Summary

I started the research by pointing out that the obsession of nation states with the idea of a spatial and static notion of home is the most fundamental reason behind what sociologist Liisa Malkki sums up as the sedentarist bias, which is the root of an ideological framework that distinguishes people into the categories of rooted and unrooted, or the us and the Other of a community and a society. Malkki posits that the sedentarist framework first came into being because of the rise and development of nation states and has been functioning as one of the most important ideological foundations of nationalism and nationalist practices ever since. Despite the ongoing development of globalisation, this bias still widely exists in relevant visual representations. It has also inspired some other influential theoretical notions and frameworks. The first one I examined in my thesis is the notion of exile. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, despite being powerful in articulating the experiences of involuntary migrants such as political exiles and refugees, Demos argues that it becomes considerably problematic when we read any migratory and diasporic experiences from an exilic narrative, 'exclusively in the negative, as solely melancholic or chaotic' (2013: 3). The second framework is the Other and Otherness, which indicates that while the experiences of migrants, diaspora members and their culture, heritage and art are attracting more and

more attention from both inside and outside the academic world, the academic discussions and creative practices of Western scholars and artists still tend to portray them based on pre-existing stereotypes and consider them as aliens instead of an integral part of the receiving society. Due to sedentarist bias, we are still more accustomed to, and willing to accept the stereotypical perceptions about all kinds of experiences related to human flow, including both migration and diaspora.

Chapter 2 provided an in-depth introduction to some of the most notable ways in which the sedentarist perspective is reflected in visual representation practices, taking existing narrative films as an example. This chapter identified two main tendencies of the perspective, including the journey and journeying narrative and migratory aesthetics. Throughout all the discussions and analyses, I referred to a wide range of both migrant and diasporic filmmakers and their counterparts without the relevant histories and identities to demonstrate how these tendencies are manifested in narrative cinematic practices, including many films which focus on migrants and diaspora members in the global city of contemporary London, like *Dirty Pretty Things*. I concluded that regardless of filmmakers' stances and personal experiences, both tendencies introduced in this chapter reflect sedentarist bias in both obvious and covert ways, which can potentially cause considerable damage to the explorations of other possibilities of constructing the figures of migrants, diaspora members and telling their stories. Indeed, many people who are involved in these representations intend to use their practices to raise awareness of the difficult situation faced by many of these people and form a criticism of nation state societies. However, these works at the same time unavoidably enhance the beliefs in many people that migratory and diasporic experiences are overwhelmingly damaging to both the people involved and the receiving society and something that should be frowned upon, while giving out the impression that all migrants and diaspora members essentially pose dangers to both their own lives and the order of their receiving society.

Chapter 3 started with a detailed theoretical analysis of how we can look beyond the existing narrative modes by looking at the writings of scholars such as Bhabha, Brah and Boccagni. For them, migration and diaspora can be considered as a process of home-making. This framework defines home-making as people building meaningful relationships with the

intimate spaces integral to their home-making, including the spaces in their home and the cityscapes essential to their daily routines, and argues that home-making exists extensively in the lives of all migrants and diaspora members. Based on these discussions, I decided to visualise this process to provide a perspective that is different from the existing ones. Since psychogeography investigates how the materiality of physical space (most importantly urban space) and the existence and experience of humans shape each other, I chose psychogeography to guide analyses and investigation of my case studies and used two frameworks, the unhomely and artistic nomadism in the analysis and discussions of each of the artworks involved. Informed by the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making, I also selected my case studies in two visual art forms that frequently make use of space to visually manifest a story or a political or ideological system, installation art and artists' moving image. The two case study chapters of artists from these two fields, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 together showed how the narrative function of spaces can be exploited in visual art practices to provide a nuanced way of manifesting the traces of the existence of migrants and diaspora members in London, and their everyday activities within the spaces that are the most intimate and meaningful to them.

As mentioned above, to evoke meaningful implications from the portrayal of migratory and diasporic experiences in London, I consciously chose for discussion two artists who are from migratory or diasporic backgrounds and are currently based in London. The visual representation of space in Suh's and Syed's practices both provide informative creative experiences to the construction of an alternative towards migration and diaspora. Both artists visualised the process of home-making by recognising and activating the tangible and visible evidence of home-making within the places that are intimate to them. Their creative practices significantly challenged the existing framework such as the ones introduced in Chapter 2 by providing insights on how migratory and diasporic Londoners and their experiences can be reimagined by recognising their capacity for home-making while not disregarding the hardships and difficulties they may experience during the process. As my first case study, Do-Ho Suh's replicas of the domestic spaces that he has lived in at different stages of his life, which are sophisticated, ethereal and with a sculptural edge, are the products of his creative vision of a personal and intimate type of space, or to say a domestic realm that can travel with him to different parts of the world. This creative exploration of

how the home can exist and evolve across the borders of nation states at different geographic locations at the same time makes Suh's practices inextricably interwoven with the core of my project. Apart from that, they are also a personal account of how Suh, as an international artist, attempted to make a home for himself while living a displaced lifestyle in the contemporary world. His experience reflects the notion of plurilocalism and forms an example of contemporary global citizens. Suh's works transcend the nationalist framework and argue that home can be made in displacement through looking at his own home-making experiences, which can be analysed with the notion of artistic nomadism.

As my second case study, Alia Syed's works are similar to Suh's in the sense that both artists are interested in exploring how the materiality of the domestic space and the intimate cityscape that are related to their everyday routines can be used to visually manifest their struggles and efforts to make a home in their receiving societies, namely to establish their unique existences and find a sense of belonging in a place that they may be deemed as an Other. Different from Suh's works, which mainly focus on how home-making can be visualised within the materiality of domestic space, Syed's works visualise the struggles and efforts and the complexities of their paradoxical identities of a diasporic person by showing how they negotiate their existence within the cityscape that surrounds them and how their home-making activities map out a global London within the city's physical urban space. It is also worth noting that despite both artists being interested in the visual storytelling of the personal realities and experiences of migrants and diaspora members in relation to the materiality of space, all three of Syed's works are not only documentations of how modern and contemporary migrants and diaspora members negotiate their receiving society, but also candid reflections on the alienations they experience and clashes between different parts of their cultural and identity systems that they often experience compared with Suh's imageries. Her works also highlight the relationship between history, memory and experience on both a personal level and a collective level and contemplate the legacies of colonialism and the interconnected histories of migration and the British Empire, a topic that is not sufficiently investigated in Suh's works.

While Suh's works focus primarily on the materiality of migratory and diasporic home-making, Syed's films delve into the subjective and emotional dimensions of diasporic

experience, covering different aspects of my research topic. But despite these differences, the works of both artists reflect on questions of identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity in the contemporary era in London and other global cities of the contemporary era through engaging with the materiality of spaces that are intimate to migrants and diaspora members and visualising how they establish their unique selves within these spaces. Through their respective practices, both artists challenge the dominant narratives on migration and diaspora and push the boundaries of how migration and diaspora should be viewed in an increasingly globalised world, offering nuanced understandings of identity, memory and belonging. In doing so, they contribute to broader discussions about the impacts of globalisation and the construction of identities beyond the paradigm of nation states. These artworks not only invite critical reflections on the fluidity and ambiguity of migratory and diasporic identities, but also prompt recognition of the diverse memories and lived experiences within London's migrant groups and diasporic communities.

As mentioned in the beginning, terms such as 'migratory and diasporic' and 'migrants and diaspora members' are used in their most generalised sense throughout my thesis to cover different types of experiences. Being aware that these broad terms alone are at risk of not being able to sum up the various conditions of the displaced people adequately, I made a conscious attempt to choose the two artists of different personal histories and cultural and ethnic backgrounds above as my case studies to reflect how elements such as 'class, gender, age and ethnocultural background' (Boccagni, 2016: xii) shape how migrants and diaspora members of different backgrounds and personal conditions can experience displacement in various ways. Some examples of how all displaced people can be viewed as a whole community through the lens of home-making are also included in the thesis. For instance, in Chapter 4, Do-Ho Suh's *Bridging Home, London* weaves together themes of identity, alienation, resilience, and the complex, emotional geography of migration to create a powerful manifestation of the collective experience shared by migrants and diaspora members of different backgrounds, including the most vulnerable ones such as refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. To reflect my previous argument that the refugee experience can be reimagined as an effort of home-making, I also investigated how the experience of refugees/asylum seekers and others who live in extreme poverty can be embodied in the materiality of space in Chapter 5 by analysing how Syed's personal,

reflective film *On a Wing and a Prayer* simultaneously made the exploration of asylum seeker Abdul Rahman Haroun, and the collective struggles of all migrants and diaspora members against the nation state.

However, due to the limited length of my thesis, I was unable to analyse in detail the works of artists who are from these vulnerable backgrounds, making the thesis unable to provide an adequate case study which reflects how their efforts in negotiating their existence in a strange and often unfriendly receiving society can be embodied in visual art practices. Besides, due to the time scale of my research, it also regrettably did not provide a timely reflection on the rapidly changing socio-political circumstances that have been highly relevant to my research topic years ago. In general, while certain flaws of my research were revealed when I look back at it right now, it nonetheless troubles the conventional order of the visual representations of migratory and diasporic experiences, thus opening up the field up for future investigations.

6.2 Propositions

6.2.1 Reimagining Migratory and Diasporic Home-making

The first step of building up a new perspective for the research topic is exploring how the migratory and diasporic home-making process can be visualised through the materiality of their intimate spaces, including both domestic spaces and other intimate cityscapes important to their everyday routines and home-making activities. I identified two reasons why the physicality of these spaces can reimagine home-making in a form which is ‘tangible and material, spatial and environmental’ (Bruno, 2014: 3). Firstly, these spaces are highly functional and significant to the everyday life of migrants and diaspora members on a practical level, which means that their materiality can embody visible traces of the bodily existence, personal histories, identities and experiences of these people and how their home-making activities unfold on an everyday basis. These traces are not only capable of being visualised in various formats, but also constantly develop and evolve in various directions as the inhabitants continue their home-making activities, and the visual explorations of these domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes over time can also reflect this developmental process. As shown in Chapter 2, although their depiction of domestic spaces

still reflects sedentarist bias in different ways, a lot of recent films related to migration or diaspora, like *Extranjeras* and *His House* indeed pay at least some attention to the environments where migrants and diaspora members live, and have no issue with using these places as one of the most important locations of the whole story. However, the portrayal of the dynamics between the bodily existence of these people and the spaces that surround them in existing narrative cinematic practices is often seriously flawed. For example, in *Extranjeras*, the house is a symbol of the immigrant women's and girls' Otherness in Spanish society. In *His House*, the house is where the two main characters are trapped together with thoughts about their traumatic past. By steering away from mainstream visual representations and choosing my case studies from two niche visual arts fields, my research has opened up a more nuanced understanding about how the physical configuration of the spaces intimate to migrants and diaspora members is connected to both their past experiences and their efforts of assimilation in the receiving society.

Based on the content of the two case study chapters, the works of Do-Ho Suh and Alia Syed can both be considered as attempts to activate the spaces they intend to investigate visually; or in Richardson's words, 'define place and the human qualities of architectural space by translating and enabling embodied qualities of experience' (2018: 117) into visual forms. This is the construction of the non-sedentarist perspective I proposed built upon the theoretical and creative explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making, which is what my project is essentially about. My research proved that, by visualising the qualities related to human activities, human experience and human identities within the domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes in their works, these visual art practices can enable the audience to understand and imagine different migratory and diasporic home-making efforts, and this creative experience is informative to different types of representational practices. By investigating how the practices of these artists sufficiently make use of the storytelling abilities of domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes, we can gain considerable knowledge of how an alternative perspective can be shaped by visualising dynamics between migrants, diaspora members and the surrounding spaces that are intimate to them, while the creative experiences of visual artists can be informative to the portrayal of different home-making

experiences from the wide variety of migrants and diaspora members living in London in various genres of cultural and visual practices.

In terms of how the creative experiences from my case study artists can be used to inform the visual representation of migratory and diasporic home-making, it is worth noticing that despite the significant differences in their creative languages, both artists have chosen to visualise the architectural traces of these home-making activities by visually exploring and mobilising the physical environment of the domestic spaces of different migrant and diaspora members and their intimate cityscapes. Through the interplay between the subjectivity of the artists, their artmaking process and the subjectivity of the viewers who will interpret the artworks and connect their own experiences to them, all the artworks selected for my case studies have first undergone what Richardson would define as the activation of the space, which initiates the 'animation of an architectural space'. The artworks then successfully achieved the reactivation of these spaces, which brings back 'feeling, atmosphere, movement and meaning to an empty space' (2018: 8). Based on these discussions, I argued that this inner logic shared by the practices of both artists shows a strong psychogeographic nature despite the artists themselves having never indicated that their practices are psychogeographic. Chapter 4 showed that Suh's works turn the domestic spaces he has lived in into the manifestation of how his migratory experience can 'define himself, assimilate, and understand difference' while making his way 'as an individual in the world' (Steiner, 2014: 7). By creating highly detailed replicas of these domestic spaces by hand, Suh metaphorically activated these spaces by imbuing a part of his unique home-making efforts and memories in these works during the making process, then reactivate them by using the works to reflect on the efforts and traumas in his process of negotiating between multiple different socio-cultural and identity systems as a long-term migrant. Meanwhile, as argued before, intimate cityscapes are the parts of urban space which are also integral to migratory and diasporic home-making; this is the reason why the investigations of intimate cityscapes in London and other cities in Syed's films are also included in my investigation of the visualisation of migratory and diasporic home-making. Through the interplay between image, sound and voiceover in her films, or what Richardson (2018) defines as the reactivation of space, Syed's works form a highly personal and intimate documentation of the construct and establishment of the diasporic person's self in

relation to the physical urban spaces that surround them. Her treatment of spaces is closely related to Michel de Certeau's discussions, that 'space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it' (1984: 117). In other words, the intimate and personal cityscapes of London and Glasgow in Syed's films are treated as integrated components in the visual representation of experiences and memories of either herself as a diaspora member of mixed heritage or other migrants, which keep developing over time and invite the audience to connect their own home-making efforts with them. Syed's works provide a wealth of creative experience in situating the self of migrants and diaspora members within a spatial-temporal context and portraying their experiences as an ongoing home-making process, thus contributing to the spatialisation of home-making in a different but equally valuable manner.

Indeed, the perspective I propose would naturally place more focus on how migratory and diasporic home-making takes place, or how migrants and diaspora members put roots down and establish their own unique existence in London and other cities in the world. However, this characteristic does not mean that it would paint the life of all kinds of migratory and diasporic people as unrealistically rosy, smooth, or easy; instead, it can also provide sufficient potential in truthfully presenting the darker and more brutal side of all migratory and diasporic experiences that unavoidably comes with the joys of growing hopes and making plans in attempting to make a home. Rooted in the investigation of the dynamics between people's bodily existence and the materialities of the spaces intimate to them, this perspective can provide insights into both the assimilation and integration processes that happen in migratory and diasporic home-making and the alienation and exclusion that the majority of migrants and diaspora members would unavoidably experience. For example, all of Suh's works in my study are created in an almost hyper-realistic manner and particularly draw attention to the visible details that can prove that he has attempted to make the place a home for himself (and his family). However, what is also quite clear is that despite being life-sized and highly accurate, the etherealness of the fabric used in these replicas indicates that they cannot be understood as the type of functional domestic spaces that can provide viewers with a domestic sphere of security, comfort and a sense of belonging. This can be considered as a metaphor for the reality that, in a world which is still largely made up of nation state societies, sedentarist bias remains an important ideological framework for

handling all issues related to transnational human flow among populist and populist-leaning governments and people with nationalist and xenophobic beliefs in many countries, including the UK. Syed's works are essentially the psychogeographic manifestations of how the materiality of cityscapes and migrants' and diaspora members' experiences can shape each other. Her films tend to not picture the people who function as the most important voices or provide the most important perspectives. Instead, they either appear as voiceovers or have their stories reflected in the voiceovers. The fact that the person who should be at the centre of these films is missing from the spaces that are supposed to contain them in a visual sense again forms an embodiment of how migrants and diaspora members in London and other parts of the world are frequently perceived as homeless and placeless in their receiving societies. Meanwhile, through structural filmmaking, it also touches on the missing of migrants and diaspora members from the UK history, the hostility towards them from the nationalist attitudes of the UK government, and the unavoidable disruptive effect migratory and diasporic experiences would have on their lives. This capacity of highlighting the migratory and diasporic home-making process while not ignoring the difficulties they encounter in the nation state society is an important part of the originality of my perspective, and is informative to different types of visual representational practices.

6.2.2 Reimagining Global London in Narrative Cinematic Practices

As summed up in the previous section, the focus of my project is how a non-sedentarist perspective can be identified in the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people involved in contemporary London. Through my examination of how artists have activated and reactivated the materialities of migratory and diasporic domestic spaces, I have found an alternative to the homeless imagery often used in the representation of both migrants and diaspora members. However, this is only the first layer of the contribution of my thesis.

Based on my analyses of Suh's *Bridging Home, London* and Syed's three films, I argued that to provide a new perspective towards migrants' and diaspora members' experiences in London, it is not only necessary to visualise their home-making within domestic spaces, but also to reimagine how they engage with the materialities of the wider urban space of

London and the sedentarist imagery of global London. As discussed in Chapter 2, many existing narrative cinematic practices about these topics have shown two major tendencies that consider migratory and diasporic experiences as homelessness, including the journey and journeying narrative and migratory aesthetics. As a result, many existing visual representational practices portray global London as a world of two strikingly different sides: as described by Fraser, ‘the gloomy and weighty and sardonic to the bright and light and shiny, the incomplete and unsatisfactory to the smooth and finished, the gritty and the multicultural to the happy and homogenous’ (2013: 230). This can be said about the portrayal of global London and the experience of migratory and diasporic Londoners, as can be shown in many films introduced in the previous chapters, such as *Dirty Pretty Things* and *The Foreigner*. As pointed out by Guha, this imagery of dividing the city’s urban space into an ‘official’, ‘iconic’ side (2015: 154) and an ‘unofficial’ side (Guha, 2015: 147), causes migrants and diaspora members in London, especially the global migrants to ‘remain invisible, illegal and unacknowledged’ (ibid.). Their crucial role in British society and British socioeconomic development which has been forged over the last few centuries and their ties with the British native community are both horrendously omitted by the narratives about British society proposed by mainstream and government-supported platforms such as the BBC, which was shown most importantly in my analysis of Syed’s *Points of Departure*. A lot of cultural and visual practices that perceive migrants and diaspora members in London and Britain in this way also tend to treat the urban spaces and cityscapes of the city as a type of static and passive structure and a vessel for the foreigners who move through them, while the people’s activities and movements are never able to leave any impact on them or the social, cultural and economic systems they embody. This is manifested in the storylines in many cultural and visual practices that use a melodramatic approach to depict the experiences of international criminals and global migrants who are vulnerable, struggling and exploited. Stephen Frears’s thriller *Dirty Pretty Things* in Chapter 2 is an important example.

But is it really necessary to divide the global London into two sides, with a better one for the natives, and a worse one for the foreigners? As outlined in the introductory chapter, London is different from many other global cities, also with an imperial past; it is a city without any definite centre and margin, which gives the city a less segregated environment that has

historically provided the cultural and socio-political opportunities for different ethnic groups to coexist and mix with each other. The two-sided perception of global London as described and discussed by Guha and Fraser does not fit the city's reality, but is more of an embodiment of an 'often-explicit political agenda' which 'resonates with the parameters of the current political climate' (Guha, 2015: 114); in other words, this perception of London is more of a reflection of the wary and hostile attitude towards globalisation and transnational human flow presented in official discourses. Based on the explorations of migratory and diasporic human flow, while migrants and diaspora members are constantly negotiating and forming their own existences and identities through home-making on an everyday basis, the materiality of London's urban space and the forces and networks behind the city are also endlessly reimagining and reinventing their experiences of home-making in London, and the dynamics between these people, their domestic space and/or cityscape and the global city as a whole can also be explored through the new perspective that I proposed. This perspective requires creators to investigate how migrants and diaspora members leave their mark on London's urban spaces and how London's urban spaces shape their experiences. This concerns the process of spatial storytelling, which is fundamentally a psychological process. In the research, I considered both installation art and artists' moving image as ways of mapping and negotiating the existence and experiences of migrants and diaspora members within the city. In all the artworks investigated in my case studies, the artists use the materiality of physical spaces intimate to the subjects, such as these people's domestic spaces or a part of a cityscape intimate to them, as a point of contact between them and the city. From this point of contact, they then visualise how a set of meaningful relations between the people and the city gradually comes into being by using the materiality of space. Consequentially, it is reasonable to argue that these artworks can indeed provide some nuanced insights on how to visualise the meaningful relationship between the physical existence of migrants and diaspora members, their home-making activities and the spaces of the city that contain them.

As the point of contact between migrants, diaspora members and the city, intimate cityscapes firstly anchor migratory and diasporic Londoners and the situationist map of their home-making experiences into the city's urban space. Furthermore, the cityscapes also locate the people in the history of global London by retracing the topographic paths of their

lived experiences into particular different periods of time. In other words, the psychogeographic investigations of the home-making experiences of migratory and diasporic Londoners are not only spatial, but also temporal. Therefore, my proposed perspective is achieved by exploring the materiality of the domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes of these people to construct a socio-cultural history of global London that 'engages with intimate geographies' (Bruno, 2002: 14) of migratory and diasporic individuals in London. Visual exploration of their domestic space and intimate cityscape can not only reflect their everyday home-making experience, but also reflect their identity and personal history. This history of generations of migrants and diaspora members can provide a valuable perspective on the history and development of global London, as well as putting London's migrant groups and diasporic communities within the temporality of London's history. This perspective would make it possible for different kinds of cultural and visual practices to explore how migratory and diasporic Londoners' personal histories and experiences have been playing into London's multi-ethnic, super-diverse present as an organic part of the city, and how this vibrant migration and diaspora landscape in contemporary global London can have an impact on its potential future.

6.3 Contributions to New Knowledge

I started my research by identifying the problematic sedentarist trend of associating migration and diaspora with homelessness. After that, based on the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making and the storytelling potential of the materiality of space, I used my examination of the narrative potential of the materiality of the physical spaces that are involved in the home-making of each migratory and diasporic people and their communities to argue that the relationship built between the human and the space can be visualised through the materiality of the space. This can challenge some of the most dominant tendencies in the existing representations of migration, diaspora and the people involved. Through the psychogeographic analyses of artworks from two relatively niche fields, installation and artists' image, my analysis offers an alternative way of viewing different human experiences of displacement in London and other global cities and the contemporary era of globalisation and hypermobility for both visual art practitioners and art/film audiences, especially in the fields without a significant tradition of utilising the materiality of space for constructing meanings and telling stories such as the narrative

cinema, by examining artworks for their imageries of home-making through the materiality of intimate spaces as an alternative to migrant itineracy. Based on my in-depth case studies of two artists, I am confident that the perspective can be applied in not only relevant theoretical and ideological discussions, but also inform new creative practices related to the topic. The originality of this perspective lies in two aspects: its shifted focus from travelling and drifting to the rebuilding of a home and its enhanced expansiveness beyond the national frame in the reading of transnational human flow and its aftermaths.

As introduced in Chapter 3, pondering my second research question led me to understand my case studies as psychogeographic. As I argue, domesticity plays an important role in both grounding the migratory and diasporic people's place in society and highlighting their similarities with their native counterparts. As discussed in Chapter 2, there have been considerable efforts in looking at migratory and diasporic experiences from a more domestic perspective even in the narrative cinema. Indeed, the perspective proposed by my project and the works I have discussed in my analysis of migratory aesthetics in Chapter 2 both focus on the home experience of migrants and diaspora members. Both also look at the topic from a personal and intimate perspective, arguing for the right to a home and domestic life for migratory and diasporic people. Works such as *Extranjeras* and *His House* tend to emphasise the fact that these people are not really 'at home' even in the places that are the most intimate and familiar to them during their migratory and diasporic experiences and use their personal domestic life as a platform for a voyeuristic presentation of their Otherness. From my analysis of the works of Alia Syed and Do-Ho Suh, we can get some insights into the dynamics and relationship between migrants, diaspora members and their domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes by looking at the materiality of these places, thus making a case for a more nuanced reading of migratory and diasporic home-making. Both Suh's life-sized fabric installations and Syed's structural films show through the emphasis on how the home-making of the people they represent takes place like people without these experiences or backgrounds while maintaining the in-depth reflections of the reality faced by those people in a world of nation state societies, which is evident especially in Suh's works. By doing so, my objective is to contribute to the gradual de-stigmatisation of migratory and diasporic experiences and provide an alternative to the existing notion of what lifestyle can be considered normal and what cannot under a nationalist framework.

This reading is especially meaningful in the contemporary age when nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise in the UK, and many other parts of the world.

Due to its psychogeographic focus on the material geographies of places that surround migratory and diasporic people, my perspective brings a sense of expansiveness to future readings of topics such as race, class, gender and sexuality, bringing them out of the national frame that is often used in relevant explorations. In other words, this perspective forms a response mindful of the sensitivities and complexities of the 'postcolonial diaspora's expanded geographies' (Demos, 2019: 32). It explains how home-making can be considered a universal phenomenon while taking place in different shapes and forms related to the individual. Artworks discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 showed the potential to challenge the fixed and bounded perceptions of the relationship between migrants, diaspora members and the notion of home through the exploration of the storytelling potential of the space, and touched on how factors such as class and gender can play into the shape of their home-making experiences differently. For example, Suh's works portray the highly mobile and plurilocal lifestyle of the global citizens, or those who are from a middle to upper socio-economic class and with the ability to migrate and integrate with relative ease even in the nation state society. Syed's works, especially *Fatima's Letter* and *Points of Departure*, investigate how diaspora members negotiate their unique selves and navigate their reality between the socio-cultural system of their places of origin and their receiving society, and between the past and the present. By visualising migratory and diasporic home-making under different circumstances through the same home-making perspective, my case studies together demonstrate how a perspective based on the explorations of migratory and diasporic home-making can better address the sensitivity and complexity regarding transnational human flow and its aftermath by arguing that the cultivation of homely feeling and sense of belonging can take place across different geographic locations and over space and time. Although my perspective is still deeply rooted in the actuality of contemporary migratory and diasporic experiences and the hostilities met by migrants and diaspora members, it has the potential to move beyond the ontological dimension of representation which is related to each person's and nation's specific identities, experiences and stories, thus challenging the root of sedentarist bias and nationalism by entering an expansive realm

which concerns the state of Londoners who are migrants and diaspora members as both unique individuals who are living and breathing and a collective community.

Epilogue: 'The Song of an Emigrant will not Change'



Figure 6.1 Moving House as the remaking of home, London, September 2022

Just before I started my first Annual Progress Review, my partner and I moved from a dusty small flat in Deptford to another dusty small flat. And a few days ago, we just finished moving house again for the first time in the last three years, into another slightly bigger but even dustier and rugged flat. As a process of packing up the relationship system that one has built with one location and reproducing it in another, moving house is the smallest example of migration and the most evocative demonstration of home-making. After sitting myself down in front of my laptop and starting to write something as an afterword for the whole research, it suddenly occurred to me that similar to the project itself, my PhD journey and my life experience in the last few years have now also been defined by my home-making efforts as a migrant Londoner: I have tried to make good enough progress with my research work, to do well enough in my part-time job and to keep it, to get by together with

my partner in the upcoming winter of energy price hikes and the cost of living crisis, to keep in touch with my friends... And in general, to maintain my established existence in London.

At this point, we have both been living in London as immigrants for a considerable while. Luckily, neither of our home-making experiences in London was the journey of homelessness or the state of placelessness and chaos presented in many of the films this project has talked about in great detail. We are young, educated, well-integrated and hard-working; all of these enable us to make our own home in London without too many doubts and worries. But when I read the media coverage on the misfortunes and difficulties faced by many other migrants and diaspora members in London and the UK, of people like the two of us, I was constantly reminded that although we had also dealt with our fair share of hardship during our life thus far, we were still among the more fortunate and privileged of migratory and diasporic Londoners, while being young, educated and capable of integrating into the British socio-cultural system, having the mental and physical capacity of finding a job in London and working hard was already an enormous advantage that made us the type of immigrants that even staunch believers of keeping most if not all foreigners out of the country would consider being of some value to British society. After reading about the misfortunes of many others on the internet and in different newspapers, I really could not help but think that if we were not who we are now, it is highly possible that our home-making in London would have turned out a completely different way.

Indeed, it is not even necessary for me to look far and wide to search for proof that can support my assumptions. Looking at any platforms on the internet, it would be clear that what has been going on in my mind since our move is not totally baseless. It has never required a lot of searching for anyone who pays attention to the comments section of any media coverage about immigration in the UK to notice large numbers of xenophobic and racist comments. Under the discussions about Brexit, there are still lots of accounts repeating that the UK should still 'get Brexit done' because that is the only way for British society to 'look after our own'. This vociferous mob has also always been able to find their support right inside the UK government: the five home secretaries that the country has had since the referendum have all made restricting immigration and limiting immigrant rights one of the top priorities in their policies. Compared to what politicians have said and done

since Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher's era, a considerable part of society has never changed in terms of how they view the issue of immigration and border control and how they fantasise about making the British socio-economic system healthy through restricting and even cleansing migrants and diaspora members. There is no doubt that the relevant discourses in contemporary British society is still largely sedentarist and xenophobic. It is the reason why global London has often appeared in cultural and visual practices as a dangerous place and an unreachable dream. It is also the reason why London can only stay as a dream that many will never afford to realise in a highly globalised contemporary world. As a result of the widespread existence of sedentarist bias in both the British general public and British politics, it is no wonder that like foreigners in many other countries, migratory and diasporic Londoners have often been perceived as lost, disoriented and disruptive. It is only due to the fact that it would be impossible for the UK to completely retreat from the increasingly connected global economic and political system that the small-minded nationalists of the country tolerated the existence of migrants and diaspora members while watching with resentment as London gradually transformed into a city of super-diversity that they could not exercise full control over.

However, regardless of how strong the wishful thinking of these people is, the song about migratory and diasporic home-making in London and the UK will not be muted or changed, and will only continue to get louder and more diverse than ever as time goes on. Generations after generations of migratory and diasporic Londoners will continue to establish their existence and practice their identities in the city through their own unique home-making efforts. Meanwhile, as the embodiment of the meaningful relationship between each of them and the city itself, their domestic spaces and intimate cityscapes will continue to spring up all over London's urban space, just as seeds burst out of the soil and sprout into saplings, then saplings grow into trees, a forest comes into being, and a landscape is fundamentally reshaped. I consider this to be a befitting final synopsis of the non-sedentarist perspective for the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences in contemporary London based on the explorations of home-making.

I did a lot of self-reflection throughout the research process. When looking back at my roots, I realised that this imagery of a forest is very closely related to how I, as an immigrant,

perceive my own migratory experiences and the home I have been making in London from a highly personal and intimate perspective. I was born and raised in a typical small town in northeast Asia. A considerable portion of my childhood was spent running wild in the local forests of birches that stab into the dreary-coloured empty sky like swords. From then, the tall, straight, and sharp silhouette of these trees has become what I associate the most with the notion of a forest. After I felt that this imagery of a forest of migratory and diasporic homes was sufficiently developed conceptually, I went to talk to my close friend, a proficient illustrator and also an immigrant who has lived in London for two decades, with his origins in continental Europe. He helped put this idea into an illustration, and we collaborated in drawing different versions of it together. Of all of them, I chose to include the version with a distorted, forest-like London map as the background. After he noticed that simply connecting empty windows in different shapes to pipe trees might make the whole image feel eerie, I further suggested that it would work better if the viewers could see how different domestic experiences are going on behind these windows because that gives the whole image a strong sense of livedness, which would further elaborate how the home-making process takes place for each and every migrants and diaspora members in London. With these thoughts in mind, I finished the second drawing of the series entitled 'My Home is a Forest', the image with a display of what is going on in the windows of different migrants. For me, the creation process of this image is not only an activity of re-inserting the existence of migratory and diasporic Londoners including myself, my partner and a lot of my friends back into the urban space, where our home-making activities take place. It is also a self-reflective practice that helps me reclaim myself and my identity as a researcher of migratory background in the ongoing explorations of the visual representation of migratory and diasporic experiences and the people who are involved both in London and worldwide. This small project, as it turned out, became an unexpected but appropriate final summary of my research over the last few years on a few different levels.



Figure 6.2 'My Home is a Forest: London', Photoshop, September 2022



Figure 6.3 'My Home is a Forest: Home-making', Photoshop, March 2023

'Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition.'

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*



Figure 6.4 'Do Naszego Domu/To Our Home', by me, rather rough watercolour and fineliner sketch, November 2022

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Appendices

Interview with Alia Syed: Transcription

1 April 2021

JW: Jing Wang

AS: Alia Syed

Conducted via Zoom.

Transcribed and organised with Adobe Premiere.

JW: The first thing I want to do is that I want to give you a little bit more detailed introduction about my project.

AS: OK.

JW: So my name is Jing, I'm Lucy's student, and I'm in the second year of my PhD. I have a background in both film and anthropology. Previously in my anthropology study, I found that in many cases, especially narrative films – by narrative films, I mean fiction films and documentaries, they tend to represent transnational experience, including migration and diaspora, and also including your case, as someone who grows up in Britain with mixed heritage. In films, people tend to represent this kind of experience as a kind of disorientation, a state of loss and a state of having no homes and having no rules.

So for my project, I aim to develop a new narrative to represent transnational experience in another way that looks at it as a kind of home-making. And by this way, I aim to look at how the transnational people - including migrants and diaspora members, and including people like you, with this kind of particular heritage – how you exist in the space of the British society, and how you build relationship with the space of the British society. I want to argue in this case we can build up a new narrative about transnational experience. And I chose you as one of my case studies because I found that your films extremely interesting in the way

how you discuss issues like identity, heritage, culture and personal experience with regard of the materiality of locations.

AS: Can I ask who else you are looking at?

JW: So far I have three. There's the installation artist who's a Korean named Do-Ho Suh. And there is Nooshin Farhid. And I also plan to get this Irish filmmaker Vivienne Dick, her *London Suite* is pretty classic³¹... But I'm still working on that. I very much appreciate that you can participate in this because you provide a very special perspective towards transnationality, which is, you know, you represent a kind of mixed heritage, and personally, I think your perspective is a very good example of contemporary transnational experience, when more and more people start to hybrid, start to mingle with each other, and start to become paradoxical: Neither really the same as the white British from a very, very traditional conservative perspective, nor the same as other migrants who just came to live here. That's why I think your perspective can be of very great value in the project.

So our first question is: I have noticed that you have a very unique approach in filmmaking, and you explore location and landscapes quite a lot. What first made you interested in that kind of issue?

AS: Well, London was new to me (when I first came here) because I was not from London. I'm from Glasgow. When I was at art school, that was also the first time I was having to negotiate the city – you know, just to get to different places, and I found that I got lost a lot. You said you studied anthropology, but I mean, I suppose I was looking at London because I was from somewhere very different. I grew up in a very suburban environment outside Glasgow, which was very white. So although I am from a mixed-race, or mixed-heritage background, and was used to different cultural spaces, I didn't know the different communities or have any experience of how London worked, both in relation to the architecture but also in relation to the communities that live there. So I found that

³¹ The plan to look into works of Farhid and Dick was eventually cancelled due to three reasons: the change of focus in my research, the time limit and the word limit of my thesis, with the first factor being the most important one.

fascinating. Another thing that I found interesting is that, in London, much more so than now, there was also a mixture of – you know, one area juxtaposed against another area both in terms of culture and race, but also in terms of class... And rich and poverty. You know, so you can have... On one street, you might have a whole section of housing council or houses and then the next street, they'll be private houses. So, you know, so that in itself I found really interesting. And I suppose the other thing is interesting (about London is) in relation to times. You know how buildings were built in different times, and then how that somehow creates different time zones that coexist in the city. That's what I was interested in.

But also I was just... you know, you're given a camera and you're told to go out and film something. So essentially you then make sense of your immediate environment. And my immediate environment was different spaces in London. And Plaistow was not one of those art schools... You know, University of East London, or North East London Polytechnic at that point was not in a very trendy and arty area of central London, so it wasn't full of Bohemian young art students. It was quite a working-class environment outside of the college. So that was another thing that was interesting to me.

JW: Oh, I see. So you started the filming locations and land/cityscapes, that kind of subject mainly as a way of making sense of the spaces around you. Am I correct?

AS: I don't know that I thought about it like that at the time. But in hindsight, I think that... Yeah.

JW: Yeah, I understand. And also do you think, over your more than 25 years of creative experience –

AS: (laughs) It's probably 30! Because I'm about to be 57, and I went to art school... I joined University of East London when I was 21 or 20, I can't remember... That's more than 30 years. I need to change that.

JW: (laughs) Okay. Well, so over your whole creative career, do you think your way of dealing with this kind of subject, like the space and the land or cityscape, do you think there has been any developments or changes or evolutions? Anything you want to say about that?

AS: Yeah, there have been, because obviously initially it was something, as a young person, this is what, you do. You work with what you've got, and you work a lot with what is near to you both in relation to location of what is accessible, but also what is accessible and near to you and within yourself. You know, you yourself are saying that you are analysing and exploring. But as you get older then there are other things that prompt you into different situations; like I became more interested in history and because of my interest in Postcolonialism, I look at the history of spaces in a particular way. And then also I'm also asked to respond to things. For instance, I was asked to respond to Tate Britain. That was probably the first time that I started to investigate a history of a site and that actually had nothing to do with me. That's how it's developed. And yeah, so then different locations, I'll be guided to those locations because of the history of those locations.

JW: I see. Am I right to understand that this is the reason why you make films like the *Panopticon Letters*?

AS: Yeah.

JW: I see. Thank you. You have made a lot of very interesting creative explorations in terms of culture, diaspora experience and location. In terms of these words, how do you think your works can fit into the contemporary debate about these topics? And do you think there are any systematic political or ideological rationale between your works?

AS: Yes, I perceive myself as to be a political filmmaker. I'm interested in politics, I'm interested in relations of power, and I suppose within my work that gets reflected in the way that I edit or in the way that I put things together. I'm interested in language, interested in the power of the voiceover, and how that positions you differently in relation to who you are, the subject, the viewer, and also in relation to who I am as the maker. I'm interested in ideas of race and culture, and these things that have affected me. Islamophobia was one of

the first things that I became aware of when I was at Slade, because then, historically, that was the moment when Salman Rushdie's book came out, *The Satanic Verses*. Within my life span, as an adult, that have affected me personally. Then I use my personal experiences as a barometer, or almost a turning fork, so I like to become aware of how these things affect me bodily and emotionally. I think that answers your question.

JW: I see what you mean.

AS: And I don't know what you mean with the term 'contemporary'.

JW: I think I also mean that in a very political way. For example, you know Brexit and the... You know, anti-immigrant far-right people, and the debate is between them and the left-wing people who welcome refugees and welcome migrants... Because from any perspectives, you know, we can see that in terms of migration that Britain is being very divided now. So I'm thinking in regards of, that kind of –

AS: People say that, oh, Britain is very divided now, but when has Britain not been divided?

JW: (laughs) It's a good point.

AS: (laughs) You know, countries are divided. It's not just Britain. Countries are divided because people are interested in power, you know, people who have power don't want to let go of it, so society itself creates ways of distinguish between groups of people in relation to labour... I don't necessarily think division is a bad thing, but I think that division is... If the division exists in relation to differences in accessibility, in power, in money, in inequality of love, that's when it becomes something else.

JW: I see. And also, if you don't mind, growing up as a mixed child in the... As you said, a very white neighbourhood in suburban Glasgow. How's your childhood experience? Was it smooth, was it difficult? And how do you often feel as a child at the time? If that is a little bit awkward, you can choose to not answer that.

AS: Well, I won't answer it fully. But I mean, obviously there's always the feeling of not belonging, and of being somehow outside continually. And also, in relation to history or religion, having a very different point of view. So I think that these sort of things formulate your character in a particular way.

JW: I understand. And talking about your experience of growing up in Glasgow leads us to your video *Points of Departure*. Did you make the film in that particular way that is based on, you know, mostly shots that there are no people involved. Do you make the film this way as a response to your... I would say, kind of paradoxical status?

AS: That was very intentional. You know, *Points of Departure* is me going back to Glasgow and again, actually trying to make sense of the place that I grew up in. And because, you know, the place that you grew up in is actually the place sometimes - if you've left, it is the thing that you try to get away from. So it's forgotten in a way. It's only accessed through where you are, but not through the actual specifics of that place. That was my agenda, if you want. It was to then go back and look at how Scottish society and the media in Scotland had sort of represented its minorities. But at the same time I was interested in... It is like sometimes you give yourself a question or an agenda that you know is going to fail. And in that failure, you uncover other stuff, so you set yourself on a path. You sort of know the answer to the question, but you still pursue that path to its logical end because actually in doing that, it will uncover other things. So my question to the archives was how have you represented the Asian communities in Glasgow. But also my question, you know, (is) if what we believe the archive is supposed to be a receptacle for society so that we find our histories ourselves somehow in that, it's like a Pandora's box or that's what it sets itself up to be. But in reality, it's also another tool to create a particular view of the past, which may not be necessarily true.

So I went through the archive trying to find myself in the archive. I knew I wasn't going to find myself in the archive, and I didn't. I didn't really think it was going to be as empty as it was: it was empty of me, of my experience. Because I couldn't find anyone who I could relate to, I didn't want to put any human presence in any of those shots. So that's why I made that decision – not early on, but you know, you, you sort of go through. You set

yourself a task. And in doing that task, you then have to respond to the material that you uncover, but then also be sensitive to how that material affects you. So that is what I was doing. And because I then became invested in this question, which I knew rationally was not going to be fruitful, I invest my emotional investment then had to be expressed in a way of an emptiness... Or something as yet to be put there. That something was missing, and I had to put that missing thing there. That was my canvas, if you want. It was an empty canvas, but also, an empty canvas is full of potential.

JW: I see. So this film, being full of empty shots, do you think that can be a response to your status in Glasgow, as of your heritage? As a member of the Asian diaspora that you are here, but you are not here... Am I right to say that?

AS: Well, I'm not sure actually. Because like when you're talking about the emptiness and empty, there is nothing ever that is empty. You know, emptiness implies nothing. We think of the desert as being empty, but actually it's full of things that we don't know or we don't relate to, or that we don't see because actually we've never had the experience of that. There is no human presence, but it's not empty, because it's a built environment. And that built environment holds a history. So in actual fact, I was uncovering a built environment that is built through history, through empire and through labour, and holds those ghosts there for us to experience in a different way. Because as soon as you have a human presence, one is concentrated on that human presence. And I think if we see emptiness, we reflect back on our own selves as a viewer. So that's always what I'm interested in.

JW: I understand. Thank you. And yeah, so let's move on to your days in London right now. So about two decades ago, you said in an interview that as a young mixed woman from Scotland, you are 'identity yet unknown'. And blending in Plaistow feels positively weird and confusing to you. So after some research, I understood actually, you were referring to your experience of coming to London and studying at the University of East London. And we know that at that time, it has a very vibrant film and art department. So I'm kind of curious, how do you describe your art school experience?

AS: Well, University of London or North East London Polytechnic - I like the idea that it was a polytechnic because there's sort of a snobbery between polytechnic and university, you know. I became very engaged and I was inspired quite a lot. For me, it was very positive. I mean, first of all, I applied as a painter, and then I was quite involved in politics at that time: I was a researcher, I became involved in the feminist movement, it was when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister. You know, now people describe that moment as - I can't remember the term that's used... She was restructuring society; in fact, as she said herself, she was trying to about get rid of this notion of 'society'. There was a class war essentially in relation to the miners. I was quite engaged with all of these ideas. Although I was someone who drew constantly and I then just became very interested in these ideas and the people, the students who were thinking about these things were the people who are in the film department. So I just gravitated towards the film department. But actually the other thing that happened in my first year is that you did six weeks in each department. When I was in the film department, they introduced us to the cameras, they showed us 60-millimetre cameras. And I was someone who had never done photography before even. I was very traditional in my view of what art was, so to see a camera was like 'wow, that was very exciting'. Also I just thought that it was a very beautiful object, and I suddenly realised that I could use a camera. I had access to using the camera. It was just something that I never really thought about before. I've never had a desire to become a filmmaker. It wasn't - if anything - even crossed my mind. I thought about being an artist, but it wasn't that I wanted to be an artist. It was just that I could I was good at art so I could go to art school. It wasn't like I had this image of myself as becoming an artist. That wasn't my agenda. My agenda was much smaller (laughs).

JW: I understand. So eventually you started to get so engaged in filmmaking because of, you know, the political status of both British society and your involvement in the political movement in that area.

AS: Well, it's correct. But also I was equally excited about being able to develop film in the darkroom. So it wasn't just that, you know, there's always different thing tangents that cross each other. So, yes, I was interested in that, and I am really involved and really excited by the possibilities of processing my own black-and-white film, learning how to use the printer,

a contact printer. My dad was a scientist, so I had that (curiosity about technology). Actually, the thing that I really wanted to be when I was little was an astrophysicist. I was really interested in science fiction, and these things about objects and technology. So then to have this equipment, and this mechanic that you could take apart that you could see the connections with, was also really exciting for me.

JW: I understand. And considering the time slot, am I right to say that it is also in your University of East London times that you started to get involved with London Filmmakers' Co-op?

AS: Yes. I mean, all of the people who taught me were involved in the London Filmmakers' Co-op, and they would hire films from the London Filmmakers' Co-op, or from the BFI. And someone called A. L. Rees initially would take these lectures, and those films would be projected, and we would talk about them, so I was aware of the London filmmakers. I didn't really go to the London Filmmakers' Co-op until after I left North East London Polytechnic. I mean, I must have gone to occasional screenings, but I don't really remember it until, actually, my third year. But then I've not got a very good memory... That's another thing. I mean, I must have gone. I don't. I remember more like going to the Ritzy, going to independent cinemas, and the Metro, which used to be in... I don't know what it's called now, but you know, there were various cinemas that showed independent films that I remember going to, more than I remember going to the London Filmmakers' Co-op, because I wasn't someone who came from a film background or who knew about experimental film or film in any way, really. Obviously I'd watched just sort of the mainstream cinema, but it wasn't something that I had done a lot of. I was an avid reader, so I read a lot. That's the world that I inhabited as opposed to the cinematic world. So when I was at university in North East London Polytechnic, I became more and more excited about cinema in general.

JW: I understand. And so after you started working with the Co-op, how would you describe the experience of working with them? Like, you know, do they have a vibrant and supportive environment for all the filmmakers involved in this?

AS: I mean, different people got attracted and worked at the London Filmmakers' Co-op, so I became very involved in it and it was a supportive environment, although I don't know that I experienced it in that way when I was there. There was also quite a lot of friction there, but there were other people who felt slightly outside of the mainstream of the London Filmmakers' Co-op, whom I formed allegiances with. Then, because I had processed and printed my own films at North East London Polytechnic, because I had that skill, I was taught how to use the processor and the printer at the London Filmmakers' Co-op. And then I ran the printing process, and that's how I earn some money: doing prints and process of black and white film. That extended my experience of film, and the materiality of film. I worked there for two years and then I applied to the Slade.

JW: So do you think your experience in the Co-op has any influence on your creative approach in general? If you think so, can you describe it?

AS: That approach had already been initiated while I was at art school because I was taught by experimental filmmakers, and A. L. Rees was an old Marxist, you know, so I was already engaged in those ideas. That idea of film as a language that you take a part which has different elements in it, and that you interrogate those elements, you interrogate the sort of relationships between the elements of the film, are central to my process. The people who talked about that were people like A. L. Rees and Peter Gidal, but also the feminist movement, Liz Rhodes, and Mary Pat Leece was someone who I was very close to... So yes, I mean, it was a formative experience, and it's one that has held me in good stead in relation to ideas of postcolonialism. Actually, it's part and parcel of the same investigation as far as I'm concerned, in how film has perpetuated particular mythologies, ideologies... And that was part and parcel of the avant-garde.

JW: Okay. So in general, do you think living and working in London is different from living and working in Glasgow? And would you say that London has given you the opportunity to establish, let's say, your own unique presence?

AS: Yeah, I think if I had not left Glasgow, I would not be a filmmaker. The fact that I left Glasgow and went to art school and went to the University of East London, North East

London Polytechnic allowed me to become who I am. So in that in that respect, yes. London... But then, you know, the London of today is different to the London that I grew up in (as an artist).

JW: Can you expand on that?

AS: Well, I think it's become more and more gentrified, the housing... You know, because there was a big squatting culture, I was also a member of a housing Co-Op. And because I was a member of a housing co-op, I ended up living in New Cross. And now I've got my house in New Cross. That's my home. But you know, these things, they may be accidental, but you land in particular spaces that are already being structured, and are now open in particular ways. And I think that sort of increased gentrification of the housing has totally shifted the landscape of London so that, you know, people don't have that opportunity anymore. The privatisation of the education system has changed who goes to university, who has access to university, how people even think about education. It's been there has been a huge, huge, huge shift in how we live. And actually, if I was growing up now, I might leave London and go to Glasgow (laughs)...

JW: (laughs) Because of the price.

AS: Yeah.

JW: I see. And do you think this gentrifying development, this process of London becoming more and more expensive has been kind of reflected in your works in the last decade or two decades?

AS: Erm, no. I don't think so. Because I saw it... Well, it must have, but I'm not aware of it. I mean, I don't deal with this aspect in my work.

JW: Yeah, yeah, I understand.

AS: But I think everything reflects on you. I don't believe that these things don't make a difference. I haven't (reflected on the changes in London very much in my work) because I'm lucky. I've always lived in Southeast London, and New Cross is not a particularly gentrified area, although it is becoming more gentrified.

JW: And now that you are talking about your life and works and experience in London, one work you produce in London that really interests me is *On a Wing and a Prayer*, which is that film you actually filmed in Rotherhithe, Rotherhithe tunnel. It is about the experience of that refugee who walked the Channel Tunnel from Calais, France to the UK –

AS: Abdul Rahman Haroun.

JW: Yes, yes.

AS: Yes, he was a refugee, but I think it's very important to name people.

JW: Yes. I will pay attention to that. Yeah. And as far as I know, London is not the first place he's going to arrive at when he arrived in the United Kingdom, on the island. So, you know, out of all the Southeastern and Southern England, which has a (more) direct connection to mainland Europe, why did you choose to film this film in London? Apart from, you know, it is your current home and Rotherhithe is very close, so it's very convenient. Do you have any other reasons for that?

AS: Oh, yeah. So I made the film about him. Or rather, I was inspired by Abdul Haroun's story. But at the same time, I was also reading John Berger's book *A Seventh Man*, and then the particular image that stuck with me was when he was describing the workers building a tunnel in Switzerland. He was describing the space, and that they would have to operate in the shifts. And then he would describe how the workers were shift to - driven to their place of work and then driven out, so their whole experiences was controlled through this. I really like just the image of this tunnel. And then, of course, Abdul Haroun had walked through a tunnel. I very much felt that it was a fate that he had succeeded in. It was a physical feat. You know, he was an athlete in many respects, because the physical and mental acuity and

focus that somebody has to enable (himself) to do that is huge. An incredible amount of tenacity and skill is involved in this journey.

So I was thinking about that in relation to the Marathon. You get medals for (completing) this. You are rewarded for your physical prowess. You know, if you swim the Channel Tunnel, you get a medal, whereas he walks through the Channel Tunnel, and he's put into prison.

JW: Yes.

AS: So there's a huge discrepancy there, in relation to how particular bodies are rewarded for their physical strength, their prowess and other ones are not. And actually, I think it's 31 miles, the Channel Tunnel, but actually he's walked thousands of miles before that.

JW: Yes.

AS: It's not that I wasn't interested (in talking to Haroun directly)... I couldn't have interviewed him because he was in prison, you know. But also my first response was: what did that feel like to walk through a tunnel? The nearest tunnel to me is the Rotherhithe Tunnel. So I thought, well, for me to comprehend that in any small way, I want to make a reciprocal journey. Obviously that journey has actually no real bearing on the journey of walking through the Channel Tunnel, but it was the closest that I could get. And also for me, to walk through the Rotherhithe Tunnel felt dangerous. I wanted to put myself in a similar situation and understand what that felt like.

JW: Yeah, of course. And also apart from those quite significant themes such as postcolonialism, journey, memory, you also have a few films with a more domestic setting. For example, there is this small piece named *Snow* that you said on your personal website. You keep visiting the videotape made by your father. Now that if we want to discuss this one in relation to your identity and your experience, I think it can be regarded as a metaphor for how you carry on your family history and your unique identity in your everyday life. And through this process, you get access to an uncovered and important part

of your family history, and you also rediscover and renegotiate your identities. Do you think that my understanding kind of makes sense, or do you think I'm stretching it?

AS: The thing about my work is that it's not - I'm not wanting people to find the truth about it. I think if that is your understanding, I think that's really interesting. And I would like to hear more of that. I mean, I didn't think about it in those specific terms when I was doing it. And I do think it was about renegotiating. It was about going back to a moment of my relationship with my father, and definitely, because I discovered something that I didn't know. I suppose we like to think that we know our parents and what they get up to; we don't... You know, they have their own lives as well. So for me, that was a surprise because I didn't know that he'd made these tapes. The point being I didn't know that he'd made those tapes. He made those tapes at a point where we were not speaking. So that was another fascination with those tapes.

But also I'd been thinking, when you make every new piece of work that you make, then opens up a whole other world. Like when I made *Priya*, I was thinking about the materiality of film in a very different way; and then, because I was thinking about the materiality of film in a different way or in a very much more in-depth way, let's put it, because I was always aware of the materiality of film, but because of my experience of editing on video or on a computer, I sort of then reflected back on how I edited the film. And that's one of the things that I answered through *Priya*, because often if you are going to make a piece of work, there's a question, and you don't know what the answer to the question is. So it's not like the work is envisaged: the question is envisaged, and then the work comes from the question. Because of *Priya*, I was then thinking about videotape and, you know, there's this whole thing about glitching. I was invited to a conference where my work was shown in Whitechapel called... The Glitch? I think I can't remember exactly. And also my work was shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival in a programme by. Then I became aware of contemporary filmmakers who were working in similar ways, and people who were using video in a similar way, you know. taking the codes apart. Then also, it was a response to Ruth Noack asking me to make a piece of work for her show, for her curation called *Sleeping with a Vengeance, Dreaming of a Life*. Those tapes had been asleep because nobody had watched them, and I reactivated them.

JW: Ah, I see.

AS: You know, there's never, ever one thing that makes you make a work. There're always many things that push you into that. Often, that's how I like to work. I get engaged in the world around me and what's going on. And because of how I am engaged or because of the relationships I have, I get pushed into situations where I will be propelled into making a piece of work.

JW: I understand, yeah. And you know, I have noticed that you have mentioned quite a few times during our interview about the materiality of films and the film as a material process. How do you describe your creative practices' relationship with structural films? Especially you have worked in London Filmmakers' Co-op, whose main agenda include structural filmmaking. Are there any relationships or...

AS: I think there are relationships there. But I also think that the material is also just actually observation and... You know, for instance, when I was making *Wallpaper*, there was the video camera that was recording the movement of my family, that movement through space. So, that movement through space is the body moving through space, and the body was confined through the set. Although you might not understand or we might not talk about it in those ways, that is a material engagement. So, I suppose I'm being quite interested in ideas about phenomenology also, and how our bodies become situated through these structures that are seen, that are actual structures but are also the abstract structures and ideological structures. So yes, I am interested in that, and the materiality of film.

I love film. I don't love video (laughs), I love 16-millimetre films. It excites me in a way that video doesn't. Video has sort of become better and better and better, apparently, because it's giving us more and more information. But actually the video camera now records more information than actually our eyes can even see. So there's a sort of strange paradox there. Whereas with film and with the image in, I think always it's what you don't see that actually has a lot more power than what you do see, because that is the space of the imagination.

JW: I understand. Yes. And speaking of your creative approach, apart from the visuals, actually, you also said that language and sound also play an important role in your films. Can you please introduce what is your process of working with these elements in your films? And also how do you decide their relationship to the visual contents in each of your works?

AS: Well, the first rule is that there should never be a literal relationship between the sound and the image. And so I like if you hear the sound of a train, I probably wouldn't choose to show a train - but actually that's a contradiction, because actually I do in *Points of Departure* (laughs)... But I suppose what I'm interested in is opening up a space as opposed to narrowing the space. When things become too literal, I think they become quite boring. For instance, I'm showing you London, but I'm talking about an entirely different space in Pakistan or a fictional space that could be Pakistan. That's something that I like. I like to bring these things because even if you're from the place that you're born in, if you've grown up in that place, you still experience that space through your memory, through the past. So, you know, spaces are not clean in those ways. I like to... Not to confuse (people), but I like to try to make people think, well, what is it that I am looking at and how am I looking at this? What is it that I am hearing? And where is the sound from? So that you're forced to renegotiate or negotiate a space when you're watching my films. It's not like you're given the answers; you're given these guides (to the answers) that maybe are unexpected. And then you have to think about what your relationship is to what you're watching. It's not a given. So silence for me is very important. I spend more time thinking about sound than I do about image in the end, in every single film. The soundtrack, it's actually the space where I think most conceptually, because I'll have the image (at the time when I start sound design), and sometimes the sound comes before an image.

I really like recording sound. (When) I grew up, my mum played the piano. I played the flute. I've always played a musical instrument. I studied the sitar. I wouldn't ever say that I played the sitar. But anyway. So, you know, I think music is very important and sound is very important, and we're much more sensitive to sound than we are to image. And I like the idea that the way that sound seeps: images can be contained, but sound can't, so I like that about it.

JW: I see. On Luxonline, you mentioned that your works are based within this fine arts context. And you also just mentioned that you first applied to the University of East London as a painter. Do you think there are any fine arts creative traditions that have influenced your practice and in what ways are they influential? And also among all different kinds of fine art (painting) practices, I especially want to ask: do you think your creative practices are somehow related to or influenced by the British landscape painting tradition?

AS: (laughs) British landscape painting tradition in particular? Why? Why British landscape... Is that because of the *Panopticon Letters* or because of *Meta Incognita*?

JW: (laughs) Yes.

AS: So funny... I was thinking it's one of them. I was asked to talk about a piece of work at the Tate Britain. I then had to think about Tate Britain. And then, I suppose when looking at Tate Britain, I was looking at painters, and also this whole notion of the museum and the idea of the Enlightenment, the things that I saw and encountered, in a different way as to how I had encountered them before, or let's say that I looked at them with a different lens. I was looking at Turner's paintings in particular, because then I was looking at the River Thames. Because then this whole idea of... I can't remember who wrote it, but it was a writer who writes a lot about London, an English writer, he said this thing about Tate Britain, and he was talking about it in relation to Turner. He said he couldn't help thinking that if Turner was alive now, Turner would be trying to bring the river into the building, into Tate Britain, so that he'd be like knocking down the walls. But, how could the sort of noise, the dirt, the sort of messiness of the river (be brought into the museum)... Although Tate Britain is on the side of the river, it's got this pristine structure around the history of the river, but also the river is this natural force. I really like that. So I started looking at the river, and then I was also thinking about Turner, and how he travelled up and down the river. And then I made an equivalent journey up and walking down the river, and found that in many of Turner's paintings, something that's very apparent often because it's not there is the horizon. The horizon somehow becomes obliterated in his paintings through his actions of the paint, so you think about it in a different way. Although the paintings are not like my

films at all, I suppose you have to negotiate yourself in relation to those paintings because the land is the way that you described or painted the land; it's full of these very gestural marks. And then I looked at paintings prior to Turner. I was very much looking at how the horizon is used, how ideas of perspective are used, and how there's an ordering in the landscape painting prior to Turner and after Turner. But Turner does something very different.

So... Influenced? I don't know that I'm influenced by British landscape painting. But I am thinking about it, or thinking how the British landscape has been depicted - or very specifically, how the English landscape has been depicted. Because Britain, it's got lots of very, very different types of landscape. And I suppose that something that was very apparent to me coming from Scotland was actually the landscapes that I knew were very dramatic. And the Thames and the Kent coastline, for me, was very, very insipid. It was more like a puddle, and didn't have the vastness or the power of the hills; nor did it have the power of the cliffs in Wales which I know. Or the Gower coastline, very dramatic... And so on. I was also influenced by people like Doris Lessing. She does a Book... Or a series of books that were about people from different lands and different geographies, and how that changed their physique³². I always think about that and the landscape, and what we don't see, what we're not aware of because we don't know, we haven't looked carefully enough, we haven't given ourselves the time. And again, this goes back to your idea of what is material - materiality. To understand the depth of how different landscapes work and the fact that they have on you, that was the moment making *Panopticon Letters* and making *Meta Incognita*. And it goes back to your idea of home, which I think is very interesting. That's when I familiarised myself with those landscapes; I began to understand them differently. Although there's no drama, there are very subtle and intricate shifts because of how the land works in relation to light and the currents and all these things. So to go back to the idea of landscape painting in order for me to get a clear bit of sky and a clear horizon to film, I had to follow the Thames. I had to go further and further out in order to then get

³² Syed did not specify the title of the book as she could not remember it at the time of the interview. Based on my knowledge of Lessing's works, I think Syed was referring to her collection of short stories, *African Stories*.

images that I could actually then work in relation to this idea of landscape that I seldom really visited.

JW: And also from my previous research, I have discovered that your works place an emphasis on how physical spaces or landscapes can provide a narrative coherence and a sense of realism, or to say you have an interest in the spatial dimensions of experiences and historical existences. Our interview so far has proved to prove this observation to be right. So in that sense, would you say that your film has a certain sculptural characteristic?

AS: Yes. I mean, definitely. I'm very interested in the sculptural characteristics, and that goes back to the first moment where I got excited by film, where the light actually etches onto the celluloid. That's a sculptural moment. I'm very interested in shape, and I think I edit in relation to finding shape. I guess there is a strong sculptural element (in my creative practices), and then that does become more pronounced because I was working in the gallery for such a long time and that was my primary space for quite a long time. So yeah, I am interested in the sort of sculptural, spatial elements about how time and space shifts in relation to sound, light and rhythm.

JW: And also do you think certain characteristics of sculptures or installation art, those three-dimensional, very spatial visual art forms can have any influence on constructing a two-dimensional visual narrative? If we want to focus on spatial dimension of something – for example, in my projects I'm focusing on the spatial dimension of migration and diaspora and transnational experience. In my case study, I interviewed some artist filmmakers and also introduced the one installation artist. Do you think this makes sense?

AS: Yes, I do think it makes sense. And I do think that I have made work differently because it's been shown in the gallery as opposed to making it for the cinema. When I first started making films, I was very certain that I was not interested in showing in that gallery space. So I had to rethink that. And I do think that it alters how you view work, but I also think for a filmmaker, it's very, very frustrating because actually you know, I've never been in that situation where I've been able to control everything in the gallery. It's quite frustrating. I first started making films, I was very certain that I was not interested in showing in that

gallery space. And also because now nobody really wants to show 16 millimetres... You know, there's always this question of expertise, and also money. So it's a difficult one. But my *Panopticon Letters* trilogy is very much to do with that space of the gallery. And then, I ultimately want those works to be situated in the gallery together. How that sounds and the narratives from the three films will then create a third, or fourth narrative, or multiple narratives in relation to where you are situated is something that I am interested in.

JW: And so do you think there are any creative experiences from installation, from sculpture that can be put into use in filmmaking? Filmmaking as a visual practice genre in general.

AS: Yeah. Well, like the avant-garde traditions, (is) always being influenced by sculptural stuff, you know, physical manipulation if you go back to what Malcolm Le Grice does with the cameras, and how even somebody like Annabel Nicholson, who put the film through the projector and then projected the film as it was going through the projector and going through the sewing machine. That's always been a very strong tradition. For me personally, I think scale is very important. And it's not always that the scale should be large, you know. But also, how (and) where you place the speakers is quite important. How the sound operates in that space is important. Even when my work was shown in Yale recently, and, you know, the sounds of the films changed the whole space of that whole gallery, and the light shifts in darkness was as important. So yeah, I can't really articulate this sculptural thing... But yes, I think it does affect (the making of a film), you know. How you project your work in a space is not as important, but it is still very important because it does add to the meaning of the experience of the work.

JW: Yes. I get it. And now we come to a last question finally. So for artists who work in the UK and British artists who are... You know, historically a little bit marginalised because they are not straight white males... Do you think, for this type of artist, the creative environment has changed over time?

AS: I'm thinking that when you say changed, you implied that it's getting better.

JW: Yeah.

AS: I just think it's different. I don't know that it's necessarily better.

JW: Can you specify that?

AS: Um, I think it's changed for the better in the fact that there's been, a lot of, uh historical re-thinking about the influence of artists from different places. There's been a re-evaluation of black and Asian artists' work, which is good, and it's being taking the ideas of the 'writers diaspora' for writers and the sort of intellectual engagement around all of that, which has created a very fruitful and questioning space. You know, it's a very nourishing space and these things are much more accessible now compared with when I was growing up. There were none of these debates, or these debates were still very much in their infancy. Or even if those debates were there, they weren't... I mean, because people had written (about this topic) a long time before me, obviously, but they weren't readily accessible. So I think things like that are very important, are much better for younger artists.

But I think there's still a very narrow expectation of what black and Asian artists should talk about, even if what they're talking about might be things other than identity, it's talked about in very narrow terms. And I think the art world's need for stars - you know, art stars - is not helpful: you usually have one person who's the go-to person, like Steve McQueen. I also think that there seem to be a lot more black male art stars who have made it than there are women, you know, Asian women, black women; only now (have non-white women) be given the same sort of standing. There's always this need to have what the dominant society believes should be talked about at that moment by an artist. I think some things have got easier and some things have got more difficult.

JW: I see. And I also have similar observation when I first tried to, you know, pick up some of the artists for my study. I want them to be British (based), and I want them to talk about it and to be kind of relating to transnational experiences in contemporary UK. And then I discovered that those who talk about this kind of issue are indeed overwhelmingly female and Asian female, right?

AS: Yes.

JW: Yeah. So you were asking me about so who my other case studies at the beginning. And you are like, oh, they're all females. And yeah, now that's sort of become the reason this kind of explains the reason why all my three filmmakers now who are my case studies actually makes I think.

AS: Yeah. I really think that's a impossible question to answer because I think everyone will answer that differently, also.

JW: I understand, I understand. Yeah. Okay. So that's all for our interview session today. I really thank you so much for spending so much time with me and yeah, thank you so much.

AS: All right. Thank you very much.

JW: Bye-bye.

AS: Bye-bye.

Email Exchanges with Victoria Miro, the Gallery that Represents Do-Ho Suh

25/04/2023, 17:24

University of Westminster Mail - Interview Questions for Mr. Do Ho Suh.

**UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER**

Jing Wang <[REDACTED]@my.westminster.ac.uk>

Interview Questions for Mr. Do Ho Suh.

6 messages

Jing Wang <[REDACTED]@my.westminster.ac.uk>
To: [REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com

10 February 2021 at 17:29

Dear Valeska,

My name is Claire Jing Wang. Previously I have emailed you in the hope of interviewing Mr. Do Ho Suh on some questions as part of my PhD project, and you asked me to send the questions from my Westminster University email address to verify my identity. This is my university email address, and please find my interview question sheet in the attachment.

Please inform me if his studio would like me to delete or change some of the questions. I would try my best to adjust and suit their needs and requirements. I can be reached through both this email and previous email of claire.jing.wang.160589@gmail.com, and would also be more than willing to attend meetings on Zoom or Skype.

I would send the detailed consent and release forms after Mr. Suh's studio finally approved my interview questions and formally agreed to participate.

If there are any other documentations or paperworks you or Mr. Suh's studio may need, please kindly let me know.

Thank you very much and look forward to hearing from you soon.

All the best,
Claire

 **Interview Question Sheet - Mr. Do Ho Suh.docx**
17K

Valeska Wittig <[REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com>
To: Jing Wang <[REDACTED]@my.westminster.ac.uk>

12 February 2021 at 10:33

Thank you, Claire!

I have passed on your email to Do Ho Suh's studio and will get back to you as soon as I hear back from them.

With best wishes,

Valeska

Valeska Wittig
Exhibitions Associate
+44 [REDACTED]
+44 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com

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Valeska Wittig <[redacted]@victoria-miro.com>
To: Jing Wang <[redacted]@my.westminster.ac.uk>

18 February 2021 at 12:11

Dear Jing,

Thank you so much for your email which I have passed on to his studio. Unfortunately, in the wake of his father passing away, Do Ho Suh is dealing with a lot of complicated matters and has declined the interview. I am so sorry to pass on disappointing news and hope the enclosed documents will help.

Wishing you the best of luck with your PhD and all best wishes,

Valeska

Valeska Wittig
Exhibitions Associate
+44 [redacted]
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[redacted]@victoria-miro.com

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2 attachments

Vivian Li In Conversation with Do Ho Suh.pdf
1317K

 **Texts_Drawings book_2013.pdf**
1787K

Jing Wang <w1670167@my.westminster.ac.uk>
To: Valeska Wittig <valeska@victoria-miro.com>

23 February 2021 at 14:56

Dear Valeska,

Sorry to hear that. Still, thank you very much for passing on the news and sending me the resources, I believe that these will also make useful references to my future research.

Please pass on my condolences to Mr. Suh and his team.

All the best,
Jing

[Quoted text hidden]

Jing Wang <[REDACTED]@my.westminster.ac.uk>
To: Valeska Wittig <[REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com>

23 November 2021 at 17:19

Dear Valeska,

My name is Claire Jing Wang and I am a PhD student of the University of Westminster, London.

Earlier this year I first wrote to you in the hope to interview Mr. Do Ho Suh as part of my PhD research. Unluckily, at that time Mr. Suh declined my request because he was grieving for his father. You also gave me some resources about his creative practices which are useful for my research, for which I am really grateful.

However, although the resources you kindly shared with me have provided me a lot of useful information, as my research progressed over the last nine months, I still found that it would be very helpful if he can kindly answer some of my questions in person. And as a result, I am writing again to see if it would be possible for you to help me invite Mr. Suh for another interview.

I am able to conduct my interview at any time that is convenient for Mr. Suh, and the interview can be done through Zoom, Skype, MS Team or email. Besides, I would send Mr. Suh and his team my list of interview questions after they confirm that they are able to participate, and then send the detailed consent and release forms after my interview questions are approved. If Mr. Suh is still unwilling to personally participate in my interview, I would also be very happy to speak to his team members.

If there are any other documents or information you or Mr. Suh's studio may need, please kindly let me know.

Thank you very much and look forward to hearing from you.

All the best,
Claire

On Thu, 18 Feb 2021 at 12:11, Valeska Wittig <[REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com> wrote:

[Quoted text hidden]

Valeska Gerson <[REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com>
To: Jing Wang <[REDACTED]@my.westminster.ac.uk>

14 December 2021 at 11:24

Dear Claire,

Thank you for your email and continued interest in Do Ho Suh's work. Unfortunately, Do Ho Suh is simply too busy at the moment and has asked us to decline on his behalf! I am sorry to pass on disappointing news. His studio manager would be happy to speak briefly with you in January if that's helpful at all: Amie Corry [amie@dohosuh.art].

Wishing you the best of luck, and Happy Holidays!

25/04/2023, 17:24

University of Westminster Mail - Interview Questions for Mr. Do Ho Suh.

Valeska

Valeska Gerson
Exhibitions Associate
+44 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@victoria-miro.com

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EXHIBITIONS

[Inka Essenhigh](#)

6 November–11 December 2021
Victoria Miro, Venice

[Paula Rego: *The Forgotten*](#)

19 November 2021–22 January 2022
Victoria Miro, London

ONLINE

[Victoria Miro x OUT Collective](#)

15 September–31 December 2021
Victoria Miro on Vortic

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