

Living Together through the Asylum Process: Affective Proximity in Home Accommodation of Asylum Seekers

Sociology

2022, Vol. 56(6) 1200–1216

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DOI: 10.1177/00380385221091124

journals.sagepub.com/home/soc**Paula Merikoski**

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Abstract

This article examines the home accommodation of asylum seekers in Finland from the perspective of hosts' affective experiences of living through the asylum process from proximity. This study contributes to the research on the affective dimension of pro-asylum solidarity beyond the framework of compassion. Instead of being observers of distant suffering, hosts are personally affected by the asylum seekers' past involving war and conflict and their present struggle for asylum, which are inseparably intertwined. As a result, the hosts' homes and domestic lives are transformed. The boundaries between home and faraway events blur when daily life includes technology-mediated connections to war. Affective proximity to asylum struggles may cause an emotional burden for hosts, which can also be politicising. Living together often leads to a shared mission of fighting for the right to remain and increased awareness of the political question of asylum.

Keywords

affective, asylum seekers, emotions, home, liminality, proximity

Introduction

We humans are quite unable to feel empathy. When Tarik lived with us, [war] came close to us, Aleppo came close as well and the news touched in a different way. You need some personal contact before you can really be moved by it, to really feel it. Other people's suffering doesn't really touch you before it's personal.

This article examines the experiences of living with an asylum seeker and how cohabitation affects hosts and transforms their domestic lives. In the above quotation, one of

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the interviewed hosts, Tuomo¹, describes how living with an asylum seeker changed how he felt about faraway war and suffering. Following the 2015 asylum ‘crisis’,² in Finland, opening one’s home to an asylum seeker during the long asylum process gained popularity as a form of pro-asylum solidarity. Recent studies have explored pro-asylum volunteers’ and activists’ motivations and the emotions supporting these efforts, typically through the framework of compassion (Karakayali, 2017; Kleres, 2018; Maestri and Monforte, 2020; Monforte et al., 2021; Sutter, 2017; Tonkiss, 2021). By examining how asylum seekers’ struggles become personal for hosts, this article contributes to the literature on the affective dimension of pro-asylum solidarity mobilisations. The article widens the perspective from compassion, which denotes distance and inequality (Berlant, 2004), and introduces *affective proximity* as a conceptualisation that depicts what sharing a home through the liminal in-between phase of seeking asylum produces.

The research contributes both to multidisciplinary discussions around asylum and solidarity mobilisations and to sociological enquiry on the home. As an empirical case, home accommodation offers a unique view of the domestic everyday and the affective experience of home. In sociological research, home has been approached as a material and sensorial – as well as relational and affective site – of everyday life (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Mallet, 2004; Pink, 2004), a continuing process (Massey, 1994) and increasingly understood as spatially and temporally unfixed and varying in its subjective meanings (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2003). This article contributes to these multifaceted understandings of home as a transforming rather than fixed experience by examining the ways in which asylum struggles affect home and domestic life. In this article, the relational and affective meaning of home is approached from unconventional perspectives of sensorial connection to war, asylum struggles, solidarity and liminality. Asylum seekers may spend years in a liminal in-between time/space, physically separated from society in reception centres (e.g. Brun, 2015; Jacobsen et al., 2020; Seppälä et al., 2020), and local people are rarely close to that liminality. In home accommodation, the asylum process is lived together, challenging the norm of the social and physical separation of asylum seekers from the surrounding community (Merikoski, 2021).

I begin by introducing home accommodation and discussions in the literature that form the framework of this research. These include the role of affectivity and emotions in pro-asylum mobilisations and conceptualisations of home and liminality. In the empirical analysis, I argue that asylum seekers’ past and present struggles are often inseparably intertwined in the hosts’ affective experiences. I demonstrate that affective proximity, which refers to the new relationship and the presence of the asylum seeker’s past and present struggles, transforms home and everyday life. Furthermore, the boundaries between home and faraway blur when domestic life includes a technology-mediated sensorial connection to areas of conflict. However, some hosts do not experience proximity in home accommodations, and the lack of a transformative experience can be disappointing.

A Hospitable Response to the Asylum ‘Crisis’

In 2015, the number of migrants seeking asylum in Finland was almost tenfold that of the previous year, with 32,477 new applications. The situation was highly politicised and

characterised as uncontrollable in mainstream political discourse (Seppälä et al., 2020). The Finnish reception system was challenged as reception centres became crowded and the already long asylum processing times in the immigration office increased. The government proposed new measures explicitly intended to make Finland an undesirable destination for asylum seekers, further strengthening policies upheld for years (see Näre, 2020). The measures implemented in 2016 included degradations to legal assistance, the removal of the possibility of humanitarian protection and the introduction of income limits to family reunification and country evaluations, determining it safe to return to most of Iraq and Afghanistan (Migri, 2016). Societal polarisation around humanitarian migration was visible in the media, rendering the ‘crisis’ even more politicised.

Following the summer of migration in 2015, solidarity mobilisations, including different forms of protests and grassroots initiatives by migrants and their supporters, proliferated across Europe (Della Porta, 2018; Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018). Reception centres saw a surge of volunteers, and activists held demonstrations with and in support of deportable migrants. One grassroots solidarity initiative in Finland was the Home Accommodation Network, which was established by local activists with asylum seekers in 2015. The network’s volunteers match potential hosts to asylum seekers who wish to live in a private accommodation instead of a reception centre during the process. Many accommodations were also arranged through connections made during volunteering or activism without the help of the network. This practice is voluntary and non-remunerated for the hosts. In my data, the typical accommodation duration was around six months, ranging from a couple of months to more than two years. In many cases, the accommodation had ended by the time of the interview.

I call the migrants ‘asylum seekers’ in line with the term used by the network and its volunteers. However, the term is problematic. The figure of an ‘asylum seeker’ is heavily influenced by media and political discourse around the contentious discourse of the ‘crisis’ (e.g. Holzberg et al., 2018). An ‘asylum seeker’ is an administrative category of the immigration system that tells little about an individual. Asylum seekers in home accommodation are diverse and include people fleeing war or political instabilities or people who have been persecuted for their sexual orientation, political activities or ethnicity or for some other reason. While many asylum seekers are men in their 20s, they include people of all genders, ages, professions, classes, religions and nationalities. What is common to them is that they have all sought asylum in Finland, and most of them, based on the hosts’ understanding of the situation, share the negative experience of being an object of institutional suspicion during the asylum process. Many eventually applied for a residence permit under some other immigration category, for example, based on employment. In fact, several of the interviewed hosts helped their guests find employment so that they could stay in the country, even if their need for protection would not be recognised by the immigration service.

Emotions and Affectivity in Solidarity Mobilisations – from Compassion to Shared Struggles

Recent research on pro-asylum volunteering and activism has studied the emotions and motivations of locals participating in these activities (Doidge and Sandri, 2018;

Karakayali, 2017; Kleres, 2018; Maestri and Monforte, 2020; Milan, 2018); these studies have shown that anger triggered by injustices, along with feelings of shared humanity and compassion, mobilised locals in solidarity with people on the move. Similarly, many of the hosts I interviewed expressed being motivated by feelings of anger and compassion (Merikoski, 2019, 2021). The empirical scope of this article moves beyond the initial motivation and explores the affective outcomes of living together.

The emotional basis of pro-asylum activism and volunteering is often named compassion, the ‘basic social emotion’ that is the concern for the well-being of others (Nussbaum, 1996), which can be perceived as a ‘feeling rule’ in these efforts (Kleres, 2018, following Hochschild). Compassion is a moral sentiment that moves beyond sympathy because it contains a ‘directive to action’ (Sirriyeh, 2018: 9). Hoggett (2006: 146) argues for a need to move away from understanding compassion as pity and more as solidarity: a ‘fusion of compassion towards social suffering with anger at the injustices which underlie that suffering’. Even though compassion is undeniably part of their affective orientation, especially in getting involved in the first place, I find compassion inadequate for describing the hosts’ broader affective experience. Although the word originates from *suffering with*, compassion denotes a distance between the unfortunate and the compassionate – the sufferer is *over there* (Berlant, 2004: 4) – and an unequal social relation between the two (Fassin, 2012). Moreover, compassion evokes the need to assess the deservingness of its recipient (Nussbaum, 1996), which can cause moral and emotional dilemmas for volunteers and hosts (Maestri and Monforte, 2020; also Malkki, 2015). This unequal power position between the compassionate and the sufferer blurs when sharing a home and changes the related physical and emotional proximity. Although initially not personally affected by war or crisis, the hosts move from being spectators of distant suffering (Boltanski, 1999) to living through these struggles from proximity. I use the term ‘struggles’ because it encapsulates both the suffering endured before and during the asylum process and the political fight for one’s right for asylum. Furthermore, like struggles, solidarity has the power to transform people and is experienced together. Rather than understanding it as something people feel towards others or do for others, I perceive pro-asylum solidarity as a joint effort.

Affective proximity refers to affective closeness and intimacy with another person formed when living together and to the shortened distance to asylum seekers’ struggles. I use the adjective affective to capture the emotional, embodied, social and relational nature of the experience. I do not intend to engage in the conceptual debate on the differences between the use of ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’, and following Fortier (2016: 1039), I understand affects as entangled with embodied feelings and emotions through which we experience the world. Affects are relational, circulating in spaces of encounter, recreating bonds and attachments (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010). I relate to Ahmed’s (2014) work on the sociality of emotions, in which there is no need to distinguish between pre-discursive affects and discursive emotions belonging to different spheres of experience (also Fischer, 2016). According to Brennan (2004: 3) affects are social, which ‘come via an interaction with other people and an environment’. Hosts are affected by the intersubjectivity of emotions in the relationship formed at home and by the affects circulating between people, home and non-human objects, such as news and social media. Thus, I find affectivity an appropriate angle to describe and analyse the transforming home experience from a relational perspective.

Some important sociological investigations into human suffering surrounding institutional practices of migration control and its effects on asylum-seeking migrants have recently been conducted (e.g. Fontanari, 2018; Jacobsen et al., 2020; Mayblin et al., 2020; Näre, 2020). Volunteers' experiences and their emotional burden have been less examined, with some exceptions (e.g. Doidge and Sandri, 2018; Maestri and Monforte, 2020), although their importance in asylum seekers' well-being is great. Peterie (2019: 182) argues that while asylum seekers' experiences are of primary importance, volunteer experiences should also be studied because they reveal the human costs of border securitisation beyond what is typically documented, and the support they offer is often highly important in asylum seekers' daily lives. Moreover, citizens' crumbling trust in institutions such as immigration services and the police is significant in democracies such as Finland, where the level of institutional trust has typically been high (Merikoski, 2021; Pirkkalainen et al., forthcoming). Locals supporting pro-asylum movements spread awareness about asylum seekers' issues and use their position and resources to make sure decision makers hear the claims.

Home and Liminality

Home accommodation stands out as a pro-asylum solidarity practice because it occurs in the intimacy of private homes. The home is both a scene where the shared struggle for asylum takes place and an affective experience that transforms. The home has been a subject of growing interest in sociology and the social sciences over the past few decades (Mallet, 2004). Critical approaches have challenged taken-for-granted assumptions of home and domesticity, approaching home as a historical, contextual and intersectional concept (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2003; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). I draw from the feminist understanding of homes as sites of intersection and interaction between public and private rather than secluded and non-politicised spaces. As Massey (1994) describes, home is a continuing process constructed out of movement, communication and social relations. As a place of belonging, home is empowering and has political meaning; having a home is a precondition for resisting social structures, and it is a privilege not everyone enjoys (hooks, 1990).

I have argued that hospitality can challenge the discursive public/private division and that it emphasises the social and political importance of the home space and the privilege of having one (Merikoski, 2021). The host's home is revealed as stable compared to the asylum seekers' in-betweenness, but it also transforms and gains new meanings when it is shared, thus reaffirming the relationality of the home. The experienced divide between outside and inside, distant and proximate, shifts. Establishing borders between the inside and outside, the familiar and the strange, is inherent in the construction of the modern notion of home as a place of security (Johansson and Saarikangas, 2009). However, this is not always the case because, for many, the home is a place of exclusion, oppression or violence (e.g. Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Furthermore, hospitality practices, such as home accommodation, bring the previously foreign and unknown inside, highlighting the political importance of home.

Although migration and homemaking are social and relational processes, migrants' homes are often studied separately from non-migrants' homes. Transnational mobility is always intertwined with those who stay put; when some people migrate, others' homes

and domestic lives are affected. In earlier research, this relationality has been examined in the context of transnational care: many elderly people's everyday experiences of home are affected by the transnational lives of others, by their own children moving to other countries or by migrant domestic workers caring for them (Walsh and Näre, 2016). Home is a sensorial experience in which smells, textures and images are part of what makes it familiar (Pink, 2004). In home accommodation, the new inhabitants' habits, tastes and domestic culture coexist with the host's, changing the home's sensorial landscape with new sounds, smells and flavours. However, the changes in the host's home are not simply different or exciting. The asylum seeker usually moves in with a history of traumatic events and a present marked by the liminality of the asylum process, affecting the hosts' home and domestic lives in many unexpected ways. Liminality refers to an in-between-ness, time or space of transition or process (Turner, 1967). Seeking asylum often entails long periods of waiting and (im)mobility (Conlon, 2011), interlinked with hope (Brun, 2015), and can be characterised as temporal and spatial liminality. However, people living in liminality can actively challenge it through everyday practices and attachments (O'Reilly, 2018), and the waiting period can be active, productive and agential (Brun, 2015). Furthermore, we need to avoid constructing waiting and liminality as temporalities that distinguish migrants from others, as othering features of mobile lives (Jacobsen et al., 2020). This research exemplifies how the liminality of the asylum process can be a shared rather than differentiating experience.

Data and Methods

I conducted interviews with 30 hosts who accommodated asylum seekers in their homes during and after the asylum 'crisis' of 2015. I found the participants through my personal contacts, snowballing and advertising in social media groups. The interviewed hosts were aged between 30 and 70 years (women $n=21$, men $n=9$) and were Finnish citizens, although some had migration backgrounds. The hosts lived either alone or with their partner and/or families, and some lived communally. I conducted most of the interviews in the participants' homes. Besides being a peaceful place to talk about an emotional topic, visiting the home permitted me to see the specific rooms and features referred to during the interview and to get a sense of how the place was used during the accommodation.

The semi-structured interviews were a combination of free-flowing conversations and questions. I let the participants discuss what was important to them while also ensuring that the main topics were covered. Asylum seekers are in a precarious situation, and locals helping them are sometimes targeted by hostile groups, rendering the topic and much of the information received sensitive. Hence, I ensured the anonymity of the transcripts by changing names and other recognisable information and by choosing excerpts that did not reveal anyone's identity. Throughout the process, I followed ethical guidelines regarding data collection and storage. The anonymised interview transcripts were thematically coded and analysed several times in relation to the key concepts and specific viewpoints; therefore, theorising and empirical analysis progressed together rather than in distinct phases. I focused on the description of life at home during the accommodation and how the everyday had changed. Already at that stage, I noticed how intertwined the hosts' accounts of the presence of war and signs of trauma in everyday life

were with those referring to the asylum process. Thus, the notion that the past before arrival and the present in Finland were not experienced as linear and distinct phases but as an ongoing liminal state guided my analysis.

Affective Proximity in Home Accommodation

Wars and conflicts have been highly mediated lately, along with fleeing migrants' journeys and struggles. Although news media brings home the pain of strangers (Berlant, 2004: 5), for most people, it remains distant. The distance between the hosts' lives in Finland and the faraway war becomes dramatically shorter through these sensorial technology-mediated connections and emotional and physical proximity to the person with whom they share their home. I first illustrate how asylum seekers' past and current connections to areas of conflict are present in the domestic lives of hosts in an affective and sensorial way.

Sensorial Proximity to Suffering and War

When living together, the home transforms as everyone sharing it adapts to each other's domestic routines and habits. A 'double movement of transformation' occurs when a home is shared by a migrant and a local, and they both integrate into each other's space and presence (Näre, 2009: 10). When the hosts recounted the changes in their everyday lives, they often mentioned sensorial aspects. Many are positive: the home becomes livelier with more people inhabiting it and with new scents and cuisines, new sounds, such as music, foreign TV shows, languages and laughter, making the home feel different but often homelier.

Other sensorial changes are less positive and even shocking, and they are often transmitted through communication technologies utilised by asylum seekers to keep in touch with their loved ones. Many asylum seekers have family and friends in very unstable situations. 'Polymedia', such as video calls and instant messaging, creates a sense of presence and allows care and communication to continue among transnational migrants and their families left behind (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Polymedia also affects the hosts' experienced proximity to what is 'there', bringing it closer in an immediate, unfiltered and unexpected way. One host, Tuomo, described a visceral memory of a moment when the horrors of war materialised at home. At that moment, Tuomo, his spouse and Tarik, the Syrian asylum seeker living with them, were on a video call with Tarik's parents in their living room:

At the time, there was a full-on war going on in Aleppo. [. . .] We were talking here and from the background we could hear gunshots and grenade explosions coming out from those speakers. It was really . . . There it was, the war in Syria, right here in the middle of our living room.

The situation described by Tuomo exemplifies how technology blurs the experienced boundaries between home and outside. Technology transfers parts of the world inside the home, even sensorial experiences of war, which become frequent occurrences in the participants' domestic lives, making the distance to faraway places seem shorter. Kaisa

also talked about the conflicts being present all the time. Following the news and trying to reach people was a daily routine:

He could not reach anyone in Mosul for a while. I also followed the bombings and all that. In that relationship, his past and his situation here came very much into our lives. [. . .] Especially when we watched videos from there, so I could in a way also go there with him, and it was very moving. And like so real, that his life had been there. The news kind of materialised in my home through him, and it is quite a lot.

Although still physically in her home, Kaisa could go ‘there’ to the asylum seeker’s life that is no longer his life. While it is possible to carry on as usual, almost unaffected, when reading news about faraway war and suffering (Boltanski, 1999), it becomes real and personal when living with someone whose life is part of those events. These affective experiences are relational, and it is with another person that the events become tangible: Kaisa could go there ‘with him’, and the news materialises ‘through him’.

Sometimes, these affective experiences take their toll on the hosts. Pro-asylum volunteers typically try to avoid emotional proximity and being too affected (Karakayali, 2017). Malkki (2015) writes about volunteers’ affect management, referring to maintaining a balance between professionalism and less manageable affects. By contrast, the hosts rarely succeeded in or even attempted such management, and most were greatly affected by the experience. Being non-professionals without tools to process such affects, volunteers and activists often suffer personally from depression, trauma and burn out (Doidge and Sandri, 2018; Milan, 2018; Peterie, 2019). Mari, a single mother, hosted two Syrian asylum seekers – a parent and a child – with whom she became close during the accommodation. During that time, the war in Syria became excessively part of everyday life at Mari’s home:

Looking in retrospect, I can see I was also a bit depressed; the war had kind of stuck on me, too. I didn’t even realise it then, but the more I saw it, the more I lived it. At one point, I had to ask Nour that I know it’s important for you, but can we please have one day break from talking about the war. I’m afraid I can’t take it anymore.

Although Mari was not ignorant about her guests’ background, the affectively experienced proximity to war and suffering was unexpected. Milan (2018: 197) argues that in a pro-asylum mobilisation, a mix of emotions emerges, ranging from negative to positive, and they all make the experience a turning point in the participants’ lives. Many hosts described the experience as life changing in good and bad ways. They experienced new relationships, experiences and often a widened perception of privacy at home, but also personal burden and an inability to close one’s eyes to the injustice asylum seekers face. Regardless of hosting being burdensome, Mari emphasised that the overall experience was rewarding and that she was not the one who suffered the most. However, their home’s constant connection to war through media, traumatic memories and discussions among adults also affected her child, which she mentioned as the worst unexpected outcome:

I could also see it in my son’s drawings, which I was not prepared for. That was the only truly negative thing. Unintentionally, the war came close to my child as well. Even though he was never shown any images, of course not. But children talk with each other, and they hear things.

With constant news from friends and family reaching the asylum seekers in Mari's home, her personal space became so filled with distressing war news that it started affecting her and her son's well-being. While the hosts repeatedly emphasised that their burden does not compete with asylum seekers' hardships, they are no longer merely distant observers of someone else's suffering. Although a few described themselves as 'naturally Teflon' and kept a distance for self-protection, these accounts were surprisingly rare. Not only did most of the participants describe their initial involvement in affective terms, but many actively sought intimacy and expected some level of emotional burden. Sharing a home produces intimacy: people sharing the same space are affected by each other's affects (Brennan, 2004) and it makes keeping distance difficult and maybe even unwanted.

The war and human suffering 'out there' is often not experienced as a single dramatic event but as an ongoing state. Asylum seekers hearing horrific news from 'back home' become entwined with the mundane routines and positive aspects of communal living. Niina described how the Iraqi asylum seeker her family hosted used to talk about the news:

He would say in the morning, when he came to make breakfast, showing from his phone, 'See 80 people have died, this girl doesn't have a head', or 'do you remember my friend who helped me to move in? He got deported, he's dead now.' But he wasn't furious. He would just say something like 'how can Finnish authorities claim Iraq is safe?' and then continue to make his porridge. It was like . . . That's the state of things.

For many asylum-seeking migrants, like Niina's guest, instability is a constant rather than exceptional state of the world. Refugee mobility is often circular, and many have lived insecure lives for years (e.g. Fontanari, 2018). These events become part of the everyday in the shared home, but life continues. The everyday may involve happiness and richness of experience, even if the underlying fear does not cease (Mayblin et al., 2020). Furthermore, her statement reflects how the asylum seekers' past and current situations in the country of origin become entangled with the frustration the asylum process in Finland causes.

Affective Proximity to Asylum Struggles

Hearing about the asylum seeker's past hardships, while observing how they were subject to suspicion and misrecognition during the asylum process, significantly increases the hosts' political interest in the contentious question of asylum and asylum seekers' struggles for their rights. The hosts feel that these moments also underline the unjustness and arbitrary nature of the asylum system, as Jukka explained:

It was crazy how the official record was that Baghdad was safe! One night, Q came home in tears because a bomb had killed two or three of his friends in a shopping centre. And his parents had to keep moving [. . .] and once they moved just in the nick of time before there was another bomb right where they lived. [. . .] That time, when his friends were killed in the blast, it really got under my skin. It felt unreal.

It is difficult to ignore such injustices when they materialise in one's home, and the emerging emotions have a strong politicising effect, often leading to some form of activism (Merikoski, 2021). The fear and stress caused by the asylum process become entangled with experiences of war and other hardships. Following the situation in Iraq became a daily routine for Laila and the asylum seekers she hosted. Sarcastically, she explained that she used to worry about Mosul becoming peaceful because the moment an active conflict is over, Finnish immigration authorities may rule the area safe for return:

'To be honest, we were actually scared when they finally got Isis out of there, because then we were worried what Migri [Finnish Immigration Service] would come up with in their next country evaluations!'

Here, Laila referred to the Finnish asylum policy changes in 2016, which ruled Iraq as safe enough for internal flight, making it difficult for Iraqis to be granted asylum in Finland (Saarikkomäki et al., 2018). Laila's comment is a reminder that fear and insecurity do not end when an asylum seeker arrives at the destination. Just as they incessantly follow the political instabilities and terror that threaten friends and family abroad, they are also afraid of what will happen to asylum seekers in Finland. In fact, most participants expressed the view that the asylum process itself causes most of the stress and fear, as Kaisa described:

We did not talk so much about his past. But the fear of not getting asylum was present all the time. He kept asking me, 'When will I get the news?' and 'How can it take this long? What will happen? Will they send me back?' So, a lot of uncertainty and fear.

In many cases, like theirs, the fight over the right to remain dominates daily life, and it is characterised by waiting and feelings of being stuck, intertwined with mundane routines and positive aspects of domestic and daily life (also O'Reilly, 2018). Kaisa continued: 'The waiting is just so terrible. Of course, it's horrible also in home accommodation; it doesn't make it rosier. But at least sharing everyday life, cooking and going out can at least bring something else to the waiting.' Although living circumstances in home accommodation may be more comfortable than in institutional housing, the uncertainty and fear imposed by the potential denial of asylum remains. Whereas reception centres are often deliberately unhomelike (Van der Horst, 2004), home accommodation permits an alternative environment for waiting and, more importantly, people to share it with.

During the asylum process, the situation may change rapidly from seemingly endless waiting to a sudden rupture, such as a forced removal from the country within days of receiving a negative decision (Griffiths, 2014). Sonja's family's domestic life was completely altered after having shared their home with a young asylum seeker, Hanan, whose asylum case was, according to Sonja, ambiguously and hastily processed. The young man, still practically a child, had become part of their family during the months they lived together. Hanan was detained and deported quickly after receiving a negative decision, despite his hosts' greatest efforts to help him with his strong but lost asylum case:

We were all completely broken. Our children were panicking. 'Did they take him there? Will Hanan die there?' And what can I tell them . . . ? We felt so unsafe that we all slept together for

a long time, our whole family in one bedroom. Because we felt so unsafe after one of us was taken away like that.

Hanan's deportation was traumatising for the whole family, and they never recovered the feelings of safety they used to experience at home. Sonja's example illustrates how the affective experience of the home can quickly transform and how the bureaucratic violence (Näre, 2020) exercised by immigration authorities can directly rupture the lives and homes of locals. For citizens usually not in proximity to the insecurity of seeking asylum, the personal attachments formed at home make it impossible to ignore the violations of asylum seekers' rights and the disappointment of not being believed. Although hosts are not personally at risk, the struggle for asylum becomes part of their everyday lives, often permanently changing the way they follow politics and take part in societal debates around migration.

Despite being traumatic, Sonja's family's experiences also transformed their lives and home in positive ways: 'Last weekend, we had one person's residence permit party here. Our house was full of people from different countries and lovely food. [. . .] Often, we have someone staying for the night. It is nothing special anymore'. She elaborated that their lives used to be centred around home and family and that nothing like this would have taken place before. Her story exemplifies that, regardless of the possible emotional burden, sharing the domestic space and the asylum struggle may lead to unexpected positive changes, such as wider boundaries of privacy.

Affected by the Liminality of Seeking Asylum

Although sharing a home is intimate, physical proximity alone does not always lead to an affectively transformative experience of home and domestic life. The state of liminality in which asylum seekers live affects the relationship and sense of proximity. Some hosts feel it would be unreasonable to expect asylum seekers to be at home and attach to people when their futures are unknown. A liminal state of seeking asylum entails being physically somewhere yet not fully accepted there, with the prospect of being forced to leave as a constant reminder of in-betweenness, during which a chronic sense of insecurity is internalised (O'Reilly, 2018). Furthermore, liminality refers to living in a temporal state between the past and the present. Some participants observed asylum seekers as not entirely oriented towards the future in Finland, but instead 'living on the phone' or immersing themselves in news from home, in what Seppälä and others (2020) call in-between space/time. Although understanding the difficulty of their situation, some hosts expressed disappointment about the asylum seeker's lack of effort to get out of the mental liminal state and look towards a life in Finland. Many of the participants were hesitant to admit that things did not go as expected. Also Maestri and Monforte (2020) noticed that hosts and volunteers face moral and emotional dilemmas, especially when encountering asylum seekers who do not fit the image of the deserving and 'integratable' refugee. However, by detaching themselves from the discourse of deservingness, they may challenge idealised notions of refugees, turning the gaze on the politics causing asylum seekers' vulnerability (Maestri and Monforte, 2020). Similarly, the hosts rarely made any judgements about the deservingness of individual guests even on the rare occasions

where conflicts arose, and as Hoggett (2006: 156) puts it, learned to withstand disillusionment.

Some hosts experience tiredness after realising that sharing their home is something other than expected or when home and its breathing space become too tight after a while. Even a large home can seem to shrink with the continuous presence of liminality. Aino admitted that she got a 'little bit fed up with hosting'. She had wanted to support the two asylum seekers in finding a foothold in Finland, and in her opinion, they did not even try to get out of the liminal state. Instead, they were indoors all the time, and Aino felt that they did not seize any opportunities that she offered:

As girls, they had gotten used to staying in during the last years and probably they were also depressed and disappointed; of course, I understand that. [. . .] I wanted them to leave this apartment sometimes and do something, but they just slept late, then started making loud phone calls to their friends in Iraq and watched some romantic TV shows on their phones.

Aino understood that the young women were in a difficult situation, with few prospects for staying in Finland and no real future in Iraq, but she also felt that the liminal in-between space in which they continued to inhabit took over her home and made it smaller than it actually was: 'Even though I have a lot of space here, it's also a matter of air space, and I felt that it was full all the time'. In the end, Aino felt her personal space was shrinking and the accommodation did not seem to help the girls move forward. She ended the accommodation, and the young women moved back to a reception. Her story resonates with what Fassin (2012: 3) called 'compassion fatigue': the wearing down of moral sentiments leading to a feeling of indifference. However, Aino did not conclude that the young women did not deserve to be included because of their lack of effort to integrate. Instead, she believed that their example highlights the flaws in Finnish asylum policy because it does not count gendered systemic and cultural oppression as a basis for asylum. Her story is an example of how even a slightly negative experience can challenge the discourse of compassion and deservingness, evoking political awareness regarding structural inequalities (Hoggett, 2006; Maestri and Monforte, 2020).

While for many, the accommodation experience is life-changing, others are slightly disappointed by the lack of proximity. These cases reveal what the ideal accommodation experience is: one that feels meaningful, even if it includes some emotional burden (also Monforte et al., 2021). The hosts have a genuine wish to see asylum seekers welcomed and integrated, and many want to be part of that process. Arttu mentioned that he was expecting to be more involved in the start of a new life:

I was expecting that the crisis would be more present daily, and it would be talked about and processed, and that integrating into Finnish society would have been a way to work the crisis. That he would have worked on it more. He had a volunteer job, which was great; he could help himself and others. But I guess I thought we would have been closer to that [integration], maybe it happened elsewhere. We were just a home.

Arttu had expected to be a link between the 'crisis' and integrating into Finnish society, but their role ended up being 'just a home', not an environment for processing the past or planning the future, but a place to cook and sleep in. The lack of intimacy and

transformation in their daily lives also meant that his family was spared most of the stress that affected many others. Their home returned to how it used to be, almost unchanged, after the accommodation. These cases reflect the hosts' privilege: although they may be temporarily – or some permanently – affected by asylum seekers' struggles, they can leave those behind. As citizens and recognised members of society, they have a position of power that allows them to alter their domestic lives by offering hospitality, choosing to whom it is offered and under which conditions (Derrida, 2005), and to end the accommodation if they want to.

Conclusion

This article examined how living together through the liminal phase of seeking asylum transforms the hosts' domestic lives. The findings contribute to knowledge on the affective dimension of pro-asylum solidarity mobilisations beyond the framework of compassion and approach asylum struggles as a shared affective experience. During home accommodation, the asylum seekers' past hardships and current struggles for asylum are revealed to the hosts as intertwined and take part in daily life at home in sensorial and affective ways. The distant suffering and pain of strangers materialise at home through communication technologies and news media, blurring the experienced boundaries and distance between the home and the outside (Berlant, 2004; Boltanski, 1999). Hosts no longer feel like mere observers of suffering and are affectively moved by these events and the relationship.

The hosting experience was rewarding for most participants. Widening one's perspectives, getting to know new people and cultures, and being able to do something practical for someone in need make the experience irreplaceable for them, regardless of the possible burden it entails. The hosts find themselves in unforeseen proximity to asylum seekers' traumatic experiences of war or persecution, which are strongly entangled with the present struggle for asylum. The process of seeking asylum, marked by stress, waiting and a sense of in-betweenness, often takes over everyday domestic life, and the fight for asylum becomes a shared struggle. However, sometimes the hosts do not experience proximity to the person and their struggles, and for some, living together differed from their expectations. Although the lack of intimacy meant they were spared emotional burden, the hosts hoped to be part of the struggle, and they found the lack of affective proximity disappointing. Besides offering immediate assistance and support, most were prepared to be personally affected.

Although the heaviest impact of bureaucratic and slow violence is carried by migrants whose right to safety and a stable life is being questioned (Mayblin et al., 2020), through encounters and relationships, the crisis of asylum comes into the homes of non-migrant locals. Suffering caused by institutions, such as the immigration system and asylum policy, is revealed to non-precarious members of society in an exceptional way, affecting their domestic lives. The transformation that happens touches not only upon their experience of home, but more widely on their everyday lives and awareness of the politics of asylum. With the loss of trust and feelings of alienation from society that many of the hosts experience (Merikoski, 2021), that transformation is a societally significant outcome of home accommodation. While these data do not allow for an analysis of the

transformations in the hosts' domestic and political lives lasting years beyond the experience, it would be a valuable topic for a follow-up study. As the suffering related to the asylum process is co-lived by citizens usually not in proximity to it, the hosts may use their position of privilege to further political claims. Thus, the home accommodation experience and affective proximity it produces are potentially both life-changing and societally significant.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the anonymous referees for their valuable comments and for Lena Näre, Camilla Nordberg and Sirpa Wrede for discussing earlier versions of this article with me.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: this research was funded by the University of Helsinki Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences, University of Oslo (UiO: Nordic) and the Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation.

Notes

1. All interview quotes are translated from Finnish by author. All names are pseudonyms.
2. I do not use the problematic phrase 'refugee crisis' although it is still commonly used by scholars and journalists alike. By asylum 'crisis', I aim to make clear that the framing of crisis is questionable and that if there is one, it is a crisis of European asylum and border system (see Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018; Karakayali, 2018).

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Date submitted March 2021

Date accepted February 2022