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Accumulated Homelessness: Analysing Protracted Displacement along Eritreans' Life Histories

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This article introduces the notion of 'accumulated homelessness' to account for the repeated loss and lack of home experienced by many migrants in Europe today. Through the lens of home and homelessness, we argue that the debate on protracted displacement—often applied only to developing countries—should be extended to Europe. Going beyond the idea of shelterlessness, we consider homelessness as a multidimensional and multiscalar condition which encompasses material and emotional aspects. By analysing two life histories of Eritrean men living in Italy and in the Netherlands, we examine the set of structural, social, and individual conditions leading them to lose home in different places and times as well as their attempts—such as finding accommodation, establishing a community organisation, or moving onwards—to reconstruct home.

Keywords: protracted displacement, home, homelessness, Eritreans, Europe, refugees

Introduction

How many times can someone lose home due to war, lack of liberties, economic crisis, or the displacement effects of urban policies? If the experience of losing home can in a sense be considered a universal one, some groups of people are systematically exposed to the risk of losing home, not once, but several times. Many refugees and migrants in Europe today not only have to leave their home behind, but cope with the perduring issue of finding, making, and then losing a home during their migration projects. The process of losing home seems never ending for many of them as their attempts to build new familiar, secure, and free spaces for them, and their families often fail against the legal, social, and economic

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challenges that they face not only in the first safe neighbouring country, but also once they arrive in Europe. This article introduces the notion of 'accumulated homelessness' to refer to the continuous sense of material and emotional lack of security, familiarity, and control associated with a place that can be called 'home'.

The category of protracted displacement has mostly been used in a policy context to define those legal and functional elements that prevent refugees from accessing long-term solutions. Adding to this, our focus on homelessness allows us to account for the many social, cultural, and subjective dimensions which characterise refugees' limited attachment in their new place of residence. We argue that the vocabulary on home and the lack of it (Brun and Fábos 2015) is better suited to make sense of a condition that is both material and emotional. Going beyond the idea of shelterlessness, we consider homelessness as a multidimensional and multiscalar condition that encompasses material and emotional aspects (Boccagni 2017; Moore 2007).

By analysing two life histories of Eritrean refugees living in Italy and the Netherlands, we point to the cumulative dimension of migrants' experiences of home-making and unmaking across times and spaces. On one hand, we analyse the structural conditions which led our research participants to lose home again and again; on the other hand, we illustrate their daily search for home in their new place of residence. The long-lasting Eritrean experience with violence, war, political instability, displacement, and migration provides significant examples to investigate accumulated homelessness. The country is one of the world's leading refugee-producing territories (UNHCR 2019). Nearly half a million people have crossed Eritrean borders and reached neighbouring countries, such as Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as Europe, North America, and far-eastern areas.

By using a biographical approach to our long-term ethnographies, we illustrate how Eritrean migrants often lost their homes innumerable times: first due to the lack of freedom back in Eritrea, then due to the limited possibility of finding a safe haven in the first countries of asylum, then due to difficulties of establishing a stable living both in Southern and in Northern European countries (Belloni 2019; Van Heelsum 2017). Drawing from the case of Eritrean migration, we aim to build a frame of analysis for understanding the experience of other groups of refugees and displaced people living in Europe and beyond. As our paper shows, their accumulated homelessness emerges as a multifaceted and shifting condition, which is related to their biographies of displacement as much as with housing and job precariousness, social isolation, and limited possibilities to fulfil gender expectations within their families.

Making Homes in Protracted Displacement: A Review of the Debate

Since the early 2000s, academics as well as humanitarian workers in NGOs have increasingly debated the issue of protracted displacement as the key feature of refugee problems today (Crisp 2003; Hyndman and Giles 2018; Milner and Loescher 2011). The UNHCR (2019: 22) commonly defines a protracted refugee situation (PRS) 'as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same

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nationality have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given asylum country' with little prospect for repatriation, resettlement, or local integration. According to this definition, the UNHCR (2019: 22) calculates that there are about 15.9 million refugees, 78 per cent of the total population, living in protracted displacement at the end of 2018.

The bureaucratic use of the category 'protracted refugee situations' provides the UNHRC with greater flexibility to extend its mandate beyond only a focus on time-limited emergencies. However, the statistical definition of protracted displacement has several limitations, as the UNHCR (2019: 22) itself acknowledges. Above all, it establishes an arbitrary threshold (25,000 units) and an arbitrary time frame (5 years) for identifying a PRS. This does not take into account smaller or more dispersed refugee populations, nor does it consider that often refugees may have experienced protracted displacement in several different countries. Moreover, whilst the 5-year time limit offers a static bureaucratic time frame defining protracted displacement in the policy definition, the condition of protractedness needs to be understood through how displaced people make sense of the time they spend in exile (Etzold et al. 2019). Unlike the policy-oriented category of protracted displacement, the concept of accumulated homelessness, which we propose here, accounts for individual and group experience of displacement as well as their multiple attempts to emplace. This allows us to consider the loss of home in more than one temporal and geographic stage.

The literature on displacement is overwhelmingly focussed on low- and middle-income host countries, mostly situated in Africa and Asia. However, similar conditions are often reproduced in high-income countries. Marginality, lack of durable solutions and institutionalised precariousness characterise refugees' lives even after reaching Europe (e.g. Korac 2003; Van Heelsum 2017). It is here useful to consider displacement, following Horst and Grabska (2015: 3), as "a prolonged subjective experience of disenfranchisement in exile" associated with high level of uncertainty produced not only by the conflict left behind but also by apparatuses of the asylum regime. This subjective understanding is especially crucial to account for the multiple dimensions of protracted displacement beyond the moment in which refugees leave the first country of refuge and try to make a new life in Europe.

Current scenarios require a refocusing of theoretical framing to grasp continuities across first countries of asylum and further destinations and an analytical framework that connects the literature on protracted displacement with the one on refugees' pathways in Europe. Following Brun and Fábos (2015), we suggest the need to shift towards a vocabulary that not only accounts for people's marginalisation—limbo—but also for their active attempts to make home whilst awaiting in camps or in other conditions of extended displacement. However, as much as refugees strive to make home, many of the biographies we collected illustrate continual processes of unmaking home (Baxter and Brickell 2014), which reproduce marginalisation and precariousness across space and time. In spite of home-making strategies that our research participants put in place to feel at home

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in different locations, their pathways are characterised by the repeated loss of home.

Pathways of Home. . .

As other scholars highlighted (Easthope 2004; Kusenbach and Paulsen 2013; Rapport and Williksen 2020), the search for a home is a human feature that is continually unfolding. We conceptualise home not as a given nor simply an ideal, but as a daily process involving individuals, families, and communities in navigating the power dynamics and structural features of a place, whilst developing personal and social attachments that give meaning to it. These processes often remain implicit when the connection between place and belonging is viewed as natural. The efforts associated with home-making, however, become evident when people move, not only because migrants experience a disconnection from a familiar place where their memories and feeling of belonging are rooted, but also because they have to struggle to recreate an existential connection to their new environments.

However, home is not singular. As scholars of home and migration show (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Erdal 2014), the experience of transnational migrants is characterised by multiple and shifting senses of attachment to different places. Whilst cultivating and renegotiating a strong feeling of belonging to the place they left behind, migrants can also associate home with their new dwelling environment (Miranda Nieto, Massa, Bonfanti 2020). As Hammond (2004) puts it regarding the repatriation of the Ethiopian refugees from Sudan, migrants 'might be able to feel equally "at home" in two or more places simultaneously', and this 'sense of being "at home" can be derived from several different types of attachment to different places' (42). Different dimensions of home can be achieved in different places.

Although some parts of home—the ones which are rooted in the environment and its history—may be lost in exile, other dimensions of home can be gained by migrating. For instance, by fleeing a violent and suffocating home, refugees may recover security and freedom. A sense of belonging can be reconstructed in diasporic communities, which perceive themselves as rooted back home. Moreover, meaningful connections to a new place can emerge through experience, creating memories and important social ties (Antonisich 2010).

Drawing from Boccagni (2017), we argue that a sense of home is ideally regained when subjects can develop feelings of security, control, and familiarity towards a certain place. This place can be identified with a dwelling, or expand to a neighbourhood, a city or a nation (this is the multiscalar character of home). Security refers to a sense of material and existential protection and integrity. Familiarity points, both in an emotional and in a cognitive sense, to intimacy, comfort, and stability. It also entails a reciprocal process of recognition and dynamic categorisation as insiders and outsiders between the individual and the wider social and institutional context. Control indicates autonomy in acting upon the environment and in expressing oneself, as well as in planning and projecting oneself into the future. As such, reconstructing home means to

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reappropriate one's present by reconciling one's past with one's aspirations for the future (Hage 1997; Jansen and Lofving 2009).

In this perspective, as we show in this article, the impossibility to emplace one's self is more than the result of violence and the structural obstacles to access decent housing and stable employment. It also concerns the capabilities of individuals to realise their aspirations in the new place of residence, their reappropriation of space through the establishment of significant interactions with locals and through the daily negotiations between individuals, and their communities and different actors of the receiving society (Boccagni 2017). Because of this capacity to bring together the material, practical, sensorial, emotional, and spatial negotiation of place attachment, we argue that the vocabulary of home and homelessness is more suited than the policy-oriented one of displacement to make sense of refugees' pathways.

. . .and Homelessness

Whilst scholars have tended to analyse the positive process of home-making, less attention has been given to those dynamics that destabilise it—the home-unmaking. As Baxter and Brickell (2014: 188) write: 'Home unmaking is the precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed'. There is a general agreement that home-making and unmaking are integral parts of everyone's biography: every individual goes through moments of precariousness in which some elements of home, its meanings, and its features are destroyed. However, as we argue in this article, some social groups are systematically exposed to conditions that continuously undermine their attempts to develop a sense of home in their present.

Whilst at a very descriptive level homeless, people can be seen as ranging from those living in the street to those living in precarious housing and those living in public shelters, just to mention a few cases, it is increasingly acknowledged that homelessness is—like home—a socially and locally determined concept which cannot be reduced to the kind or the quality of one's accommodation (Sommerville 1992). As Moore (2007: 152) clarifies, indeed, 'it is possible to feel out-of-home whilst living in permanent and stable accommodation as it is to find small pockets of home whilst on the street'. Thus, home and homelessness can be better understood as a continuum, as two elements of a fluid and porous relationship (Bennett 2011; Kellett and Moore 2003).

Rather than a state of being, the condition of homelessness appears as a stage in a pathway (Chamberlain and Johnson 2013; Clapham 2003). The pathway approach has been employed in housing studies to understand the interaction between structural and individual factors, such as policy measures, family relations, and employment status, leading to physical homelessness. In this perspective, 'the pathways framework can shed light on the factors that lead to homelessness, influence the nature of the experience, and enable some people to move out of it" (Clapham 2003: 123). In the case of our research participants, the pathway

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unfolds in their life course and in their migratory trajectory across different countries. As Kissoon (2015: 4) notes, 'refugee homelessness elongates the concept of pathways to homelessness, by describing journeys over hundreds and thousands of miles'. As home—here understood as a feeling, a practice, and a conception—is a matter of making and remaking, likewise, it can also go through processes of unmaking.

Drawing from two life histories, the rest of the article focuses on three levels of home-unmaking factors: macro (institutional and structural), meso (social networks) and micro (subjective). At a structural level, our informants' narratives are characterised by state violence (in Eritrea), institutional neglect and othering asylum policies (in Italy and the Netherlands). At a social level, their stories are marked by racism and perceived discrimination characterising their relationships with the local population, and by the feeling of distance from their meaningful others. At a subjective level, they perceive a gap between their personal and family expectations and the impossibility to meet them.

Methodology

Although the article examines two life histories, our empirical analysis is based on multi-sited ethnographies which we have separately conducted at different stages of Eritreans' migration process in the last decade (Belloni 2019; Massa 2020a). Moreover, between 2017 and 2020 we collected 30 life histories of Eritrean migrants in Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK in the frame of the HOMInG project. Interviews were mostly carried out in urban settings and were designed to grasp the various meanings of home in interviewees' life trajectories. Whilst investigating people's feelings about home, we realised how important it is to account for the continuous attempts to reconstruct home away from home, in spite of huge obstacles.

We chose two life histories that exemplify different and overlapping aspects of the repeated loss of home in Eritreans' pathways. By using a biographical approach, we aim to untangle the diachronic interaction of structural, social and subjective aspects in refugees' search for home (cf. BenEzer and Zetter 2015). The focus on 'accumulation' allows us to overcome a rigid separation between country of origin and receiving country which often characterises studies on protracted displacement, showing the experiential and emotional continuities in their migratory and biographical paths. This is why, without undermining the material, emotional and social home-making efforts of our research participants, it is especially important to explore the various conditions limiting their possibilities to emplace themselves at several steps in their life histories. These life histories are not exceptional but represent key cases to delve into the widespread experience of home/homelessness, which characterise the trajectories of many Eritreans. Although international mobility from the region dates back to the 60 s, our analysis focuses on the so-called 'generation asylum' (Hepner 2015), namely on those migrants who have fled the current authoritarian regime. Their journeys are shaped by the combined effect of different mobility regimes (Eritrean emigration restrictions,

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international asylum system, EU regulations, etc.) which stratify mobility across borders (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013). We decided to focus on male informants to account for the role that a certain idea of masculinity plays in the capabilities and aspirations of home (cf. Gorman-Murray 2012) in the context of migration (Gallo 2006).

As the experience of home is culturally and socially defined, before analysing the two life histories in the next section we focus our attention on a local understanding of what home is in the Eritrean context.

Home and Homeless in the Eritrean Context: A Local Perspective

In Tigrinya language—the mother tongue of almost all of our interlocutors—there are different expressions to indicate the semantic constellation of the English terms house/home/being at home. Whilst *geza* is the general word for house, used as a prefix of a personal male name (e.g. *geza* Haile) it can describe his domestic group or as part of the expression *gezauti* (litt. group of houses) can indicate agnatic lineages (cf. Tronvoll 1998). The same interlacement of place and family ties emerges from the words *enda*, a term with a territorial and/or genealogical meaning and which today is much used in the general sense of 'place of..' (Smidt 2007), and *sidrabet*, the household. Composed by two words *sidra* (family) and *bet* (house), the *sidrabet* is formed around a married couple, who share the core functions of the domestic domain according to their different gender roles. *Adi* (land), instead, is a polysemic term that, in the *strictu sensu,* indicates one's village of origin and one's farmland, defined according to the patrilineal principle (Hammond 2004). Moreover, in general, this term provides a strong source of belonging and locates each person in a wider family, communal and spatial unit. It can refer to different scales, from a village to a region, to a neighbourhood to the nation (Massa 2017). Finally, the term *hager* refers to wider geographical spaces and has a patriotic value.

The richness of this, albeit partial, terminological review is also reflected in the life and practices of many Eritrean migrants living abroad. As we discovered through our ethnographies, their social bonds and feelings of belonging are often shaped by genealogical and geographical criteria and have concentric structures, connecting the person to their nuclear and extended family and lineage, as well as to their village (*addi*) and to larger entities, such as the Eritrean nation (*hager*). Many research participants cultivated these bonds and feelings through transnational practices, such as remittances, visits back home, political and economic engagements with 'Eritrean issues', through the reproduction of certain lifestyles and participation in fragmented diasporic communities. Whilst making home in their new places of settlements, our interlocutors do not shift their previous sense of belonging, but create new kinds of attachments to different places. However, their efforts to make a new home were constantly challenged as the stories of Mateos and Aaron show. The names and the personal circumstances of the protagonists have been changed in order to protect their privacy and safety.

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Mateos: Aspiring to Become a Man Away from Home

In September 2017, Mateos was staying at a friend's flat, because a few days earlier, the squat called Piazza Indipendenza where he lived was abruptly cleared out by police. As many other evicted people, in those days, Mateos expressed feelings of anger, despair, but also resignation. Indeed, it was not the first time he lost his home; rather his experience of homelessness dated back to his life in his country of origin.

By adopting the analytical lens of home and homelessness, his migration can be understood as the result of a progressive loss of the sense of being at home in Eritrea. This is a rather common situation among forced migrants: unsafety and progressive or sudden changes of a context that used to be perceived as secure and familiar can lead to processes of estrangement (Belloni 2018a; Khosravi 2010; Löfving 2009). In the last two decades, the Eritrean authoritarian government has deeply transformed some features of the country by imposing a system of control and oppression. Since the conflict with Ethiopia (1998–2000), all citizens above 18 must serve the country for an unlimited number of years, during which they are assigned to jobs and locations they cannot choose, for a very limited salary. For many Eritreans, the national service turns their homeland into an open-air prison from which they want to escape. Furthermore, it moves conscripts away from their home, herein understood as the place of habitual residence and belonging. For example, Mateos was born in a transhumant community and, being enrolled in the national service, he lost the possibility to contribute to the domestic and economic activities of his household and to live with his family. After 2 years of forced labour, he deserted and went back to his village, where he lived hidden for a while, sleeping at neighbours' homes and in abandoned shelters. It was during that period, when his family home was close yet inaccessible, that Mateos decided to emigrate.

Mateos reached the Italian coast by crossing the Mediterranean Sea in 2005. He was hosted in a reception centre in Rome, but was dismissed as soon as he was granted refugee status. 'In Italy they [the institutions] give you this paper and then don't care about you', he said, whilst placing his finger on his resident permit carefully kept in his wallet. Speaking poor Italian and having a precarious job, he did not have the resources to navigate the city's housing rent market and eventually moved to an informal settlement, called Ponte Mammolo, with a group of Eritrean friends. For refugees in Rome, living in an informal settlement is not unusual, but an ordinary solution to fight housing precariousness. Due to the emergency approach of the reception system (Campesi 2018; Marchetti 2014), local and national institutions often do not provide long-term solutions for refugees' successful inclusion and have rarely planned specific housing policies. Thus, even once obtaining formal international protection, refugees can face the risk of shelterlessness. This risk is aggravated by the peculiarities of a labour market that relegates migrants to underpaid and irregular occupations.

Mateos lived in Ponte Mammolo for 6 years, during which he was part of a cohesive community, based on feelings of solidarity and mutualism. Together with

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his friends, he turned the shanties made of makeshift materials into masonry huts, to find protection against the cold. As we and other scholars show (Belloni 2016; Costantini 2015; Massa 2020b), these informal settlements offer not only a solution to a basic need, but can also be interpreted as creative instances of re-establishing familiarity, control, security and, hence, a home in a difficult social and political space. However, living in a squat also makes inhabitants vulnerable to evictions that, due to the current local and national policies on poverty and marginality, are increasingly frequent. Indeed, the concrete wall of Ponte Mammolo could not protect Mateos when the settlement was cleared out in 2013. For the second time since he was in Rome, he found himself without a dwelling, and, by relying again on the Eritrean solidarity network, he moved in the squat of Piazza Indipendenza. When in 2017 Piazza Indipendenza was cleared out, he was still surviving on occasional jobs and thus ended up homeless again.

Mateos's case is not an exception but summarises the job fluctuations and the residential instability of many of our interlocutors living in Italy. Their housing trajectories are rarely progressive pathways towards a condition of security and inclusion. Many of them go back and forth from squats and rented accommodations, moving among different towns and even countries, frantically looking for stability. Although the condition of homelessness experienced by our research cannot be reduced to shelterness, as Brun (2015) argues the material dwelling plays a crucial role in the negotiation of a sense of home occurring in protracted displacement. Residual integration policies and labour market instability result in an accumulation of housing vulnerability which fuels feelings of discouragement and disempowerment. However, Eritrean migrants can rely on a large community of co-nationals and a plurality of meeting points, such as café, restaurants and churches located in different areas of the city. Mateos, for example, daily attended these meeting points to fill time whilst unemployed, and shared frustrations with his friends. These social practices recreate a sense of diasporic community, but can only partially mitigate his feeling of being out of place.

Mateos' experience of accumulated homelessness was nurtured also by the obstacle in establishing a *sidrabet*, a household or, in its etymological meaning, a family house. Despite being alone in Italy, Mateos has been married since 2014 to an Eritrean woman living in Ethiopia who gave birth to his daughter in 2017. However, due to the stringent requirements for family reunification, Mateos' attempts to bring his wife from Ethiopia to Italy failed, as the consulate did not believe the marriage was 'real'. The impossibility of recreating a new family whose members cohabitate fuelled Mateos' sense of frustration with respect to his aspirations to fulfil the social role of adult man, where having a home and becoming the household's head are important steps. When at the end of 2018 he found accommodation with the help of the municipality, he claimed that he still did not feel at 'home', because his wife and daughter were not there. This frustration recalls, once again, what he experienced back in Eritrea, where he had to live far from his family without being able to make a household on his own.

His sense of homelessness was reproduced by a sort of historical disorientation: whilst the Italian colonial experience plays a crucial role in Eritrean national

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identity and culture (Belloni 2018b; Chelati-Dirar 2007), the Italian public discourse has been characterised by a 'colonial amnesia' (Triulzi 2006). This lack of collective re-elaboration of a key chapter of Italian recent history has arguably had an effect on the common reading of contemporary migrations—rarely associated to the long-term consequences of colonial rule—and of Eritrean migrants as complete 'outsiders'. In this context of historical misrecognition of a common past, the perception of discrimination becomes even more acute. In his narrative, Mateos highlighted a range of perceived injustices, ranging from patronising to overtly racist attitudes (Oliveri 2018), that occurred at an institutional level and informed the relation with the local population. Although Mateos has some friends outside his Eritrean circle, like many other Eritrean refugees in Rome his interaction with the majority white population was minimal.

Similar to what happened to him in Eritrea, Mateos' struggle for home resulted in the desire for a better future elsewhere. As he explained soon after being evicted: 'In Italy they destroy our life, in Italy they break our life. Right now, I only want to go away: to Europe, to Africa, I do not care, I want to go away!'. However, as the next section shows, living in another European country may offer new challenges and frustrations.

Aaron and Struggles to Find a Community Home in Exile

Aaron's narrative points to a more communitarian dimension of the concept of home and the lack of it. In spite of many overlapping aspects—estrangement from home, the gendered dimension of homelessness—Aaron's accumulated homelessness mainly concerns his inability to reconstruct an active role for himself within the new society as well as a space for the community to feel more at home.

In his early forties, divorced and father of a little girl, in 2017 Aaron was working with some friends to establish an association called *Hudmona* ('our home' in Tigrinya) in a small city in the Netherlands. This association was created to encourage Eritreans living in the surrounding area to get together in a safe and familiar place to drink a *macchiato*, chat together and celebrate together away from 'the judgemental looks of the locals', to put it in Aaron's words. *Hudmona* would have been something in between a diasporic *adi*, a neighbourhood association in Asmara and a Dutch cultural centre. Aaron did not want to exclude locals from participating—that was also one of the main requirements set by the municipality to allow the establishment of the association. However, he wanted a space where Eritreans had control, where they could change the channel of the TV when they wanted and listen to their music. As he explained: 'When we arrive here, we all have traumas, and we need a place where we can share our experience, feel safe and exchange ideas on how to deal with our new lives here'.

Aaron's idea for an Eritrean association was not only a social charity for his community, but a way to reconstruct an active role for himself. Highly educated and used to playing an important role in the development of Eritrea, exile for him had meant not only distance from home, but a regression in his social and professional status. After several years working in Juba as a hotel manager, in 2014

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Aaron managed to secure a visa to come to the Netherlands hoping for a better future for him and his family. Although work did not seem to be a problem in Juba, the high level of insecurity (war-related tensions as well as criminality often targeting Eritreans) did not allow him to bring his family over (*sidrabet*). His wife and daughter were indeed living in Kampala, the capital of Uganda and he would visit them only every 2 months. Kampala was a beautiful place according to Aaron, but employment was not easy to find and his wife and family were pushing him to find ways to reach Europe and apply for family reunion.

However, his life in the Netherlands was much harder than he thought. Although Aaron as with the other Eritreans in the city had been granted comfortable housing and a monthly income, they struggled to feel at home in a relatively small city with limited levels of ethnic diversity and no previous generations of Eritrean migrants. Limited contacts with neighbours and locals, in general, were often mentioned in the interviews: The people are friendly, but I have no contact with them—Aaron says talking about his social relationships—I have never considered myself an immigrant, but when I came here all of the sudden they told me 'you are a refugee'. Even after 5 years of learning the language well, Aaron says that he has not manged to develop friendships with locals. Eritreans there and in surrounding towns tended to spend time visiting each other's homes, but did not share places, such as bars or restaurants where they could gather. The aim of *Hudmona* was to reconstruct a common space for Eritreans in the city.

The sense of homelessness here is not produced by a lack of shelter, but by the limited social contacts with neighbours and locals. Other Eritreans interviewed reported not knowing their neighbours or finding them unfriendly. Meaningful ties with locals are crucial for migrants to emplace themselves: 'Back in Eritrea—as a 36-year-old Eritrean man living in the same city for 4 years said—the house is not what we mean by home. Our neighbourhood instead is what we call home, the friends, the people, and the ground'.

Aaron's feeling of homelessness, however, was also linked to his impossibility to find a job that suited him. With a master's degree in economy and long experience as a manager, Aaron had a hard time accepting unskilled jobs like his co-nationals: 'Waitering and working in a factory are not my things. I want to feel useful for my people and for my country'. He was volunteering in several social organisations as a translator, studying as an undergraduate in economy and writing Tigrinya books on the side, but whenever he was trying to find a job with his linguistic skills, he was rejected. He felt categorised again and again in the position of the unskilled refugee. The impossibility to restore an active role for himself in society and to be a breadwinner for his own family ultimately led him to a material loss of home. As Clapham (2003) and other scholars of housing argue, shelterlessness is a moment in someone's life produced by a set of biographic and structural circumstances, which are related to policy measures, family life and employment status. The divorce forced him out of the house with little resources to pay another rent (not covered by the Dutch refugee support) and the hardship to find a job suitable for his skills. 'I have never been stable for the last...I have

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changed 4 camps and I have changed 3 houses, for a couple of months I had no house, I was leaving with friends of mine so, yeah it was a trauma for me'.

Aaron's case shows that even those who manage to secure legal protection in their favourite destination are not beyond the feeling of protracted uncertainty that characterise the first phases of displacement. Not only economic constraints (Van Heelsum 2017) but also cultural distance and social isolation play a huge role in a long-standing feeling of estrangement tinted with nostalgia for those left behind. Even if all Eritreans interviewed in the Netherlands (September 2018–September 2019) enjoyed a higher standard of material conditions and shelter than those in Italy, many reported a sense of helplessness. Many men in unemployment felt emasculated, not unlike when they were in Eritrea caught in perennial adolescence (Treiber 2009) or in refugee camps in Ethiopia trapped in dependency on relatives abroad. The interview questions related to future aspirations were often received with sadness or frustration. Some answered talking about the day they will be able to go back home to Eritrea. Many thought it was impossible for them to learn Dutch and find a job, others felt deeply depressed and mentioned how the traumas they collected along the way became suddenly unbearable in the context of inactivity and isolation produced by the Dutch reception system (Bakker et al. 2016).

After working for more than 2 years on securing funding from the local municipality, Aaron rented and furnished a place in the city centre. He was proud of the big Eritrean carpet that hung in the hall and the brand new coffee machine with which he learned to prepare macchiato 'the original way'. However, the police came to close the place down only 2 months after its official opening. The police stated that the place was supposed to be used for commercial activity and not for a social association. 'It was just an excuse...—Aaron reflected—the neighbours did not want to see so many black people around... what I want now is just to have my citizenship and then leave for another place. I cannot live here anymore'. The closure of the association represented for him the ultimate failure to settle in the Netherlands. 'They took away my home. Again. That was the only place where I felt I belonged here'. The ongoing precariousness and the perceived inability to act in the new society resulted in the aspiration to move elsewhere, as in Mateos' case.

Discussion: The Structural, Social, and Subjective Dimension of Homelessness

Mateos and Aaron's cases show how the subjective experience of protracted displacement cannot be understood without taking into account the accumulated losses of home that followed them along their migratory trajectories. Their accumulated experiences of loss can be explored following the three levels of home-unmaking factors we advanced before. At the macro and structural level, the biographical trajectories of Mateos and Aaron are characterised by recurring negative encounters with the institutions of the countries where they lived. This started in Eritrea, where insecurity and governmental oppression can elicit feelings of 'estrangement' (Ahmed 1999) and fuel the aspiration to leave the country and remake a home elsewhere. This desire to feel at home elsewhere is often broken not

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only in the first countries of refuge, where they experienced the lack of institutional protection and asylum recognition, but also in European countries of settlements (Belloni 2019).

Institutional neglect in Italy left Mateos in a condition of housing and economic precariousness which led him to lose and change his dwellings, again and again, frustrating his desire for a stable home. Regarding Aaron, whilst the Dutch reception system granted him housing and a monthly income, he was unable to gain a stable job that suited him and this led to his physical homelessness and family breakup. Furthermore, Mateos life trajectory demonstrates how migrants' attempts to make a home are hindered by the border regimes that continue to act upon them, by preventing his family reunification processes and trapping his wife and daughter in Ethiopia.

This feeling of being out of place also emerges if we move to the meso and social level of analysis. Whilst the support of his social group allowed Mateos to partially mitigate (but not overcome) institutional abandonment, economic precarity and social exclusion, Aaron's biography highlights the significance of creating a space for his diasporic community to feel more at home. Moreover, both Mateos and Aaron experienced feelings of isolation elicited by exclusion and perceived discrimination which marked, in Italy, in the Netherland as elsewhere in Europe, the relationships between poor and foreign others and the local population (Calavita and Kitty 2005; Schuster 2003), with deep consequences for the possibility of making home. Taken together, these cases illuminate the importance to scale up our perspective on home and take into consideration diasporic community relationships and communal spaces (the neighbourhood).

This meso level also allows us to observe how the distance of important others, in particular family members, can obstacle migrants' efforts of making a home. We showed how Aaron was pushed by his wife and family to resettle in the Netherlands where he could reunite his *sidrabet*, a reunification that was impossible in Juba and Kampala. We also described how Mateos struggled to bring his wife and daughter to Italy. Although transnational migration has been reshaping intimate ties within Eritrean families (Massa 2020c), the normative dimension of the ideal model of *sidrabet*, of the family home, emerges here. Besides being a process and a practice, indeed home holds also a prescriptive base although mutable in time and space. As Boccagni (2017: 14) argues, the symbolic and material attempts of homemaking 'reflect predominant expectations about what feeling at home entails, and what a proper home should look like' according to cultural and social scripts and political and ideological stances.

The relevance of the expectations is even more evident if we take into consideration how home unmaking factors act at the micro level which concerns the subjective experience. Both Mateos' and Aaron's attempts of emplacement were frustrated by their difficulties in achieving their personal and family expectations regarding their professional life and the role they felt they had to play in their community. Unable to accomplish their role of breadwinner, they saw their masculinity under attack.

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As many studies show (e.g. Jansen 2008; Kleist 2010) forced migration can have deep consequences on gendered subjectivities and particularly on masculinities, which also affect the possibility of making a home. If, on the one hand, gender, herein intended as socially constructed and performed, plays here a crucial role in shaping complex and shifting meanings of home (Gorman-Murray 2012; Pink 2004), on the other hand, men's experiences of home and homelessness are moulded by global forces, changing local systems and immigration regimes.

As a consequence of these accumulated experiences of homelessness, Aaron, Mateos and other Eritrean men we met in Italy and in the Netherlands experienced frustration and discouragement that led many to desire to move to another country, again. This desire can be interpreted as an expression of the feeling of being out of place or of not-belonging, but also of active attempts to overcome the condition of accumulated homelessness once for all. In this perspective, our research suggests that refugees' onward mobilities (or their aspiration to move) can be directly analysed as an ongoing search of home.

This does not mean that the entire experience of being a refugee in Italy or in the Netherlands can be automatically reduced to a constant sense of homelessness. As we showed, the informal social ties in Rome as well as the institutional support offered by the Dutch provisions (i.e. shelter, job-seeking programs, and monthly allowances) allow Eritrean refugees to develop bits and pieces of a sense of home there. However, for many of them, these feelings of security and familiarity contrast with constraints, lacks, and limitations that make the sense of an accumulated homelessness prevail. Of course, temporality plays a crucial role in the process of making a home (Miranda Nieto et al. 2020), and the time spent in a certain location can decrease in some cases the sense of homelessness. At the same time, our empirical research shows how the subjective experience of displacement can endure after 12 years (as in Mateos' case).

Conclusions

Whilst at common sense level, displaced people are those who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, several studies have highlighted how displacement is not only an escape from conditions of violence or oppression nor simply the loss of place. It entails a 'search for cool ground' (Allen 1996; Turton 1996), that is, for a new place to emplace and (re)make home (Korac 2009). This is critical for those who live in circumstances of protracted displacement, where to feel at home is not a given but an everyday challenge. Practical quotidian negotiations surrounding place and belonging are key aspects to understand how home is made and unmade in the micro-physics of displacement. This implies that protracted displacement does not end until displaced people regain a sense of home.

By joining the different stages of the migration journey into one single narration about precariousness and ongoing uncertainty, this article aimed to bridge the gap between the studies of protracted displacement in first countries of asylum and the

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study of refugees' integration in Europe, by using the lens of home (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Boccagni 2017). First, the vocabulary of home allows us not only to consider the institutional and legal aspects of protracted displacement, but also the intersection of public and private, intimate, and social dimensions related to it (Brun and Fábos 2015). Then, through the idea of accumulated homelessness, this article showed how the feeling of being out of place affects our informants in different phases of their lives, not only depending on their capability to secure legal status and stable housing. Structural marginalisation and precarisation processes interact with individual circumstances, gender aspirations, family expectations and feelings of belonging and emplacement rooted in their background. Finally, the focus on biographic pathways allowed us to overcome a rigid separation between country of origin and receiving country typical of studies on protracted displacement, showing the experiential and emotional continuities—the accumulation—in their migratory trajectories and biographies.

Although these are specific examples, in many aspects, we believe that the case of Eritrean refugees can be useful to illustrate how protracted displacement follows many migrants in Europe and beyond. Illegalised migrants in Europe, asylum seekers affected by Dublin transfers, or migrants who deal with temporary status, revocations, or other forms of precariousness are only some examples of those social groups which are systematically exposed to the risks of 'accumulated homelessness'. More in general, if we take seriously the call of many scholars for overcoming a rigid migrant/non-migrant distinction (cf., among others, Çağlar 2016; Dahiden 2016; Ramsay 2020), we may envision that precariousness, marginality, and exclusion are indeed a dominant reality of life for many people that struggle to settle down and establish homes.

There is a general agreement that home-making and unmaking are integral parts of everyone's biography and need to be analysed as a continuum (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Moore 2007). Every individual goes through moments of precariousness in which some elements of home, its meanings, and its features are destroyed. This resonates Ramsay's critique of current analyses on displacement, which she defines as 'an existential experience of contested temporal being, in which a person cannot reconcile the contemporary circumstances of their life with their aspirations for, and sense of, the future'. Ramsay (2020) argues that protracted displacement is not a condition typical of refugees and migrants but rather a feature of our contemporary world shaped by global capitalism. It also resonates with criticism towards the essentialisation of vulnerability as a feature specific to some social groups (Mackenzie et al. 2014). These anti-essentialist arguments are extremely important to avoid patronising and exceptionalising views of refugees and migrants as intrinsically vulnerable or displaced. However, it is equally important not to be blinded to the fact that certain social groups are systematically exposed to the risks of precarisation. As we show in this article, contemporary migrants are structurally exposed across their journeys to the risk of homelessness.

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Authors' Contributions

This article is the product of co-writing. Both authors have equally engaged in all the sections of this paper. However, for formal purposes of Italian assessment of research output, we declare that the following sections should be assigned to M.Belloni: 'Introduction', 'Making homes in protracted displacement: a review of the debate', '... and homelessness', 'Methodology', and 'Aaron and struggles to find a community home in exile'. The following sections should be assigned to A.Massa: 'Pathways of home...', 'Home and homeless in the Eritrean context: a local perspective', 'Mateos: aspiring to become a man away from home', 'Discussion: the structural, social and subjective dimension of homelessness', and 'Conclusions'.

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