

# Chapter 5

## Shared Flats in Madrid: Accessing and Analysing Migrants' Sense of Home



Alejandro Miranda-Nieto

### 5.1 Introduction: Accessing the Shared Household

Shared flats are households in multiple occupation in which people who have no family ties or close relationship inhabit a common dwelling place. This type of households has been portrayed as one of the many forms of housing precariousness, particularly in urban settings (Veness, 1993; Garvie, 2001), as well as a way to cope with the shortage of affordable housing in large cities (Parutis, 2011). Although sharing accommodation has also been associated with forms of student housing and young people (Thomsen, 2007), there is evidence that the decline in home ownership and increasing housing precarity in many cities around the world is leading people to share accommodation for longer periods of time, across widening age groups (Maalsen, 2019). It is clear that people resort to this arrangement mostly because of issues of housing affordability (Nasreen & Ruming, 2020). Yet, shared flats are more than an outcome of precarity. They are also an entry point to the analysis of a variety of meanings of home that emerge from the roles flatmates play within these dwelling places. This chapter addresses some methodological issues arising from an ethnographic examination of such roles. It particularly focuses on the tension between dwelling and developing a sense of home in the context of shared flats, and some of the ways in which this tension can be approached from an ethnographic angle. I argue that the subjective meanings of dwelling in a shared flat emerge through conscious volition: dwellers voluntarily attach a sense of home in various ways – or refuse to do so. Examining the roles played out within shared flats and the control that flatmates exert over very small settings within the flat offer entry points to the study of people's sense of home (or its refusal) in conditions of informality and marginality.

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A. Miranda-Nieto (✉)  
Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway

My access to shared flats, and the opportunity to conduct participant observation in them, was inadvertent. Between 2018 and 2019 I conducted fieldwork in Madrid, seeking to understand how South Americans living in that city develop a sense of home in relation to their migratory experiences. I started building a network of research participants through snowball sampling that allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews and gave me access to some of their dwelling places. Parallel to this process, I became a member of a WhatsApp group of Peruvians living in Madrid. The group aimed to gather people of that nationality to go out to eat, drink and socialise. When I met them at first and mentioned that I do not come from Peru, but from Mexico, they appeared surprised, although my interest in joining the group became clearer when I explained that I was conducting fieldwork for a research project on home and migration. Academic research was unfamiliar to most of them, but neither my role as a researcher, nor my nationality were an obstacle to the members of the group. They welcomed me with a gentle curiosity and over time I developed a friendly relationship with some of them. We always communicated in Spanish, our first language. Their ages ranged between 30 and late 40s (I was in my mid-30s at that time), there was about the same number of men and women in the group, most came from urban backgrounds in Peru and none of them had higher education degrees, although some had technical or vocational degrees. The difference in our educational backgrounds was sometimes brought up in the conversations in the form of jokes, to which I also contributed, making the issue a matter of laughter. Most people in this group were permanent residents in Spain or had dual citizenship, although a few had arrived rather recently, had expired tourist visas and were expecting to regularise their migratory status at some point. Still, neither migratory status, nor educational background constituted significant markers of difference because the group's main objective was to socialise in a friendly atmosphere.

We first gathered in cafes, restaurants and bars; later on we met in their own apartments because eating and drinking in their places was more affordable. I expressed to them my intent to conduct participant observation in their dwelling places, to which several agreed. Although I conducted one-on-one interviews in their apartments, I also attended gatherings that allowed me to participate in the dynamics of the flats, meeting other flatmates and interacting as a guest. In this group there were about 10 regulars, from which 8 were renting individual bedrooms or subletting bedrooms to others in their own apartments. Only another person and I were renting non-shared studios.

In this chapter I take four cases from this group to illustrate how their sense of home is constructed in the context of shared accommodation. This chapter draws from empirical materials stemming from HOMInG, a larger project that involved semi-structured interviews, participant observation and life histories. The four cases on which I concentrate show how dwelling and developing a sense of home are related, yet distinct spheres of homemaking. To some of these research participants, there is ambiguity in the way in which their flat constitutes a place of home attachment, while for others, the shared flat is a place devoid of the aura of familiarity, security and control that is often associated with the notion of home (Bocagni, 2017). Either home or non-home, shared flats offer the possibility of looking at the

home-migration nexus from a special angle because dwelling with strangers produces a peculiar relation between attachment to place and control over space (cf. Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022).

The following sections of this chapter briefly situate the discussion about shared flats in recent changes in household composition, particularly in the city of Madrid. I then turn to three different ways of dwelling in a shared flat, namely as a tenant, lease-leader and landlord. While these roles may change along people's housing trajectories, they produce specific engagements with the flat in question and the development of a sense of home. The meanings stemming from these dwelling practices also show certain agency among dwellers, despite their disadvantaged housing conditions.

## 5.2 Sharing Rentals in Madrid

Housing has considerably changed in many European cities over the last 50 years. Since the 1970s there has been an upsurge of new household arrangements that differ substantially from the nuclear family (Clapham, 2005). Single-person households and couples with no children have been relatively well documented in the literature (Kurz & Blossfeld, 2004), as well as groups of students sharing accommodation, against a background of pervasive gentrification in large cities (Moos et al., 2018). Yet, shared housing has received less scholarly attention, perhaps owing to the fact that most studies focus on housing markets in which a family or individuals rent or acquire a dwelling place (Dräger, 2020).

As with many other countries, household structures have changed in Spain over the last decades. The prevalence of a housing model based on home ownership has given place to more diversified housing contexts (Módenes et al., 2012). Data from the latest census of 2011 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021a) show that 9% of the total households in the country are composed of one person. Couples with no children have doubled from 2001 to 2011, and the figure is expected to turn higher in the upcoming census results. In Madrid, 10.5% of the total number of households are shared among people who are not from the same family (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021b). Calculating the exact number of shared households, however, is a daunting task because of the informal character of the majority of the arrangements and the speed at which they are formed and dissolved, as most people offering or soliciting bedrooms for rent use online platforms or hand-written advertisements on phone booths, as illustrated in Figs. 5.1 and 5.2.

In a qualitative study in the early 2000s, García Almirall and Frizzera (2008) describe the housing careers of migrants in Madrid in relation to their arrival, settling and stabilisation in the housing market. The first period, often lasting a few years, tends to be spent in shared flats found in the informal market (García Almirall & Frizzera, 2008: 45). The settling phase involves longer-term rent contracts in non-shared accommodation. During the stabilisation period, some opt for buying a flat, although – as we will see in the following section –, sharing a flat with strangers



Fig. 5.1 Hand-written advertisements stuck on a telephone booth, offering bedrooms for rent in shared flats in 2018. (Author’s picture)

may continue over several years. Transitioning from renting a bedroom to paying a mortgage while subletting single bedrooms to strangers is a common housing trajectory in which people continue sharing accommodation for extended periods of time, while changing their role within the flat. Identified as an ‘ascendant trajectory’ by García Almirall and Frizzera, shifting from renting a single bedroom to renting bedrooms to others is a progression from insecure and precarious living conditions to relatively more stable arrangements. Over the last decades, these housing trajectories have been greatly impacted by economic crises, particularly during the bursting of the so-called *burbuja inmobiliaria española*, the Spanish housing bubble (Campos Echeverría, 2008). García Almirall and Frizzera note that many housing trajectories are not always ascendant, but full of vicissitudes, as migrants’ capacity to access the Spanish housing market depends on complex configurations of economic, social and cultural dynamics.

The motivation for sharing a flat with strangers is indeed affordability, but there are other aspects that require further investigation. Some dwellers, for instance, share accommodation because it is close to work or public transport, or because they prefer to live in a specific neighbourhood instead of moving to a cheaper, yet distant part of the city. In doing so, they develop distinct senses of home that stem from the entangled relations with dwelling places, flatmates and the status as migrant or non-migrant. Sharing a flat is a common experience in the city of Madrid;



**Fig. 5.2** Exchange of messages among members of a group of Peruvians in Madrid, soliciting and offering a bedroom for rent on a social media platform in 2019. (Author's picture)

a living arrangement that differs from other forms of co-housing, such as student lodges, living with friends or dwelling with one's extended family. In Spain, this form of subletting is regulated by the 'Ley de Arrendamientos Urbanos' [Law of Urban Renting] (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2019), requiring a written consent from the landlord, as well as tax declarations from both the landlord and the tenant subletting the bedroom. In practice, however, many subletting agreements are informal.

Subletting arrangements that are mere verbal agreements are part of larger social dynamics in which precarious work and living conditions are often intertwined. On the one hand, spatial segregation has long been identified by studies documenting how migrants tend to find it more difficult to access the rental market (López-Gay et al., 2019). Bosch et al. (2015), for instance, show how in Madrid and Barcelona there is a negative attitude towards migrants looking for rented accommodation, in comparison with the local population. On the other, many migrants in Madrid face precarious work conditions while having to confront a comparatively expensive housing market. In the specific case of Latin American migrants in Madrid, the structural dynamics that shape the precarious housing conditions of many of them are not fully considered in the literature (Masterson-Algar, 2016: 94). It is clear that migrants and non-migrants who resort to sharing flats, do so as a strategy to solve basic housing needs. So, what happens to people's sense of home while they share a flat? In what follows I analyse four cases to illustrate how different roles are related to the development of this sense, or its refusal.

## 5.3 Geometries of Flat Sharing

### 5.3.1 *The Tenants*

Karlita<sup>1</sup> is subletting a bedroom in a peripheral district in the south of Madrid. A Peruvian immigrant who moved to Spain in 2018, she found accommodation through friends she had in her previous place of residence, Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a serial migrant with an open outlook for further displacement (Ossman, 2013), Karlita has had a long experience renting single bedrooms: first moving from her hometown in a northern province in Peru to Lima, the capital; then migrating to Buenos Aires and living in different shared flats for 15 years. The economic instability and inflation in that country made it difficult for her to see any gains from her work as a cook, so she decided to move to Madrid as an undocumented migrant. She has worked in kitchens most of her life, first washing dishes as a teenager, then learning to cook full dishes by observing and assisting cooks in the restaurants that employed her. In our conversations she emphasised the importance of the relative economic independence that she gained from her work. Since an early age, earning her own money and renting her own space gave her the emotional force to assume and assert her identity as transgender. Throughout her migratory trajectory she has sought help from friends or acquaintances to find her next dwelling place. ‘It is not easy to find accommodation, there is a lot of prejudice against people like me, I’ve always relied on friends, or friends of friends’, she said. She would certainly prefer to have a flat of her own, but has not been able to afford it so far.

In talking about her relationship with the Spanish couple subletting her current bedroom, she mentions that her friend from Buenos Aires ‘told them how I am and they were OK with it, they understand’. A young couple with no children, they leave early in the morning and return late in the evening. She sees them occasionally, even on weekends. Karlita and I met several times in the flat where she lives, a small two-bedroom apartment on the ground floor. When I asked her if she felt at home in that place, she shrugged her shoulders and stared outside through the window. ‘I’ll be home when I go back to Peru, when I have my own business and I’m close to my mom. She knows how I am and understands me’. ‘So, if home is back in Peru, what is this flat to you?’, I asked. She then described the ambiguous feelings of having the whole flat almost to herself because her flatmates are not home most of the time. Yet, she cannot change the place of the objects, modify the decoration beyond her bedroom, leave a corner untidy or buy and accumulate things. That flat was indeed small and already filled with the couple’s furniture and personal objects. Her bedroom and the kitchen were the only realms that allowed her to exercise a degree of domesticity. Still, her way of practising domesticity lacks the security and control that characterises a sense of home (Easthope, 2014).

If home takes the shape of an imagined future for Karlita, in the case of Ricardo there is a sound refusal to cultivate a sense of home. Ricardo has lived in different

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<sup>1</sup>All participants’ names are pseudonyms.



shared flats since he moved from Lima to Madrid 15 years ago. As a documented immigrant with a technical certification and a stable job, he is not in a precarious job situation. He could probably access the rental market if he wanted to, although in our conversations he was reluctant to elaborate if he had any experiences of dismissal or discrimination in searching for a place to live. In any case, he finds renting single bedrooms a more convenient arrangement. He is convinced that renting a bedroom requires less maintenance, less money and less worries. For him, home is neither back in the place of origin, nor in an idealised past or in future expectations. Ricardo simply relegates a sense of home in the ranking of his personal priorities. Compared to other personal issues, such as doing well at work or being careful with his spending habits, a sense of home is simply irrelevant. This is not to say that Ricardo does not like comfort in dwelling. He sublets a bedroom in eastern Madrid, one more in his long list of shared flats. He has got a double bed and a large closet in which he tries not to accumulate too many things because storage is limited to his bedroom. He also tries not to keep too much food in the kitchen because his flatmates sometimes pick things from his cupboard or side of the fridge. His approach to dwelling is pragmatic: as he spends little time in the flat, he merely needs a place in which to sleep, shower and eat simple meals.

Cultivating a sense of home is crucial to many of the people I met during my fieldwork in Madrid. Located either in their current dwelling places, or constructed as an idealised past or anticipated future, home constitutes an emotional locus for their migratory trajectories. Contrastingly, Ricardo dwells in a realm of functionality where cleaning up, cooking and spending casual moments with flatmates – a young woman from Peru and a couple from Chile – are felt as unavoidable home-making activities. Dwelling is a human condition, but for Ricardo, a sense of home is not a necessity. Deciding not to evoke feelings and emotions of home in his current and previous shared dwelling places does not bring him into a precarious or disempowered condition. He merely prefers to share a flat because it suits his way of life, bringing him closer to an indifferent hotel guest than to an enthusiastic homemaker. In doing so, he creates a wide distance between dwelling and attaching a sense of home.

### ***5.3.2 The Lease Leader***

Olga has been living in her current flat located in the south of Madrid for more than a decade. Her relationship with this place started when she and a group of acquaintances – also recently arrived migrants from Peru – teamed up to look for a flat to rent. She portrays these early years as a truly collective effort: re-painting the walls and sourcing second-hand furniture allowed them to develop a shared sense of home. Over time, the members of the initial group left and new flatmates moved in. Since then, Olga has taken the lead in managing these transitions, searching for and carefully choosing new flatmates. Her daughter and her have shared the same bedroom all these years, while the other two bedrooms change guests every now and

then. Throughout, she has achieved certain security of occupancy by developing a good relationship with her landlord, who accepts the subletting arrangement and trusts her as the person in front of the lease contract. Her situation, however, is just slightly more secure than that of Karlita and Ricardo.

García Almirall and Frizzera (2008: 46) identify the figure of the *encargado del piso* (person in charge of the flat), which refers to the person holding either a rent contract or a mortgage. This role brings certain benefits: they generally pay less than their flatmates for their accommodation, and can establish rules of interaction within the flat (regulating gatherings, noise levels or even the use of common areas at certain times of the day). Throughout these years, Olga has been the *encargada*, in charge of her rented flat. A sense of attachment to this apartment has grown from the fact of having spent a part of her adult life and seeing her daughter growing up there. When we conversed about her emotions towards the flat, she unequivocally feels at home in it despite having to share common spaces with people she barely knows. This is not to say that the relationship with her flatmates is totally distant; in some cases she has developed long-lasting friendships. Yet, her privileged position in the flat produces asymmetrical and rather distant relationships with most of her flatmates.

Her sense of home does not stem from her relationships with co-dwellers, but rather from having certain control over some settings inside the flat. This control is not evident at first sight: the unadorned character of the living room resembles more a semi-public space than a private environment. There are practically no personal items (no photos or mementos), but plain, functional furniture and walls decorated with a small mirror and a painting of a generic landscape. On weekdays Olga eats dinner in her living room while watching TV, sometimes with her daughter, often by herself because their schedules differ. The other flatmates – a Bolivian couple and an Argentinian man – eat in their bedrooms, mostly at the end of the day. The kitchen is austere and practical, compartmentalised in clearly defined cupboards, sides of the fridge and drawers that flatmates tend to use at different moments of the day to avoid overlapping on the same reduced space.

In a flat only to her daughter and herself, Olga highlighted during our interview, she could have more space and privacy. But she cannot afford to rent a flat so close to her workplace and daughter's school. Why risk going to a distant and more expensive location when she is content? She knows the neighbours, gets along with some of her flatmates and does not plan to seek other living arrangements for the time being.

### 5.3.3 *The Landlords*

Berta and Juan are a couple from Lima who obtained a credit for a three-bedroom apartment in eastern Madrid in 2007, just one year before an economic crisis that had dramatic consequences on the housing market in Spain (Albertos Puebla & Sánchez Hernández, 2014). They do not exaggerate when considering themselves



lucky to have kept their flat all these years. Because they could not afford to pay the mortgage with their salaries, they have been subletting two bedrooms in their three-bedroom apartment since they moved in. For them, subletting is a mere spoken agreement that generally lasts for some months or years.

Their current flatmates are a Spanish young man who works night shifts as a security guard and sleeps during the day. The other is a Canadian teacher of French who spends three days a week in Madrid and then goes back to Valladolid, where her partner lives. They find the current arrangement convenient because the place is all to themselves at different points of the week. Sharing their flat is a compromise between affordability and discomfort: it allows them to pay the mortgage while losing certain intimacy. Similarly, for their tenants it provides an affordable place in which to fulfil basic needs. They have sustained this arrangement for almost two years and it seems to work well for all the parties. 'They are the longest tenants we have had so far!', Berta proudly said, indicating that the stability of this living arrangement is benefiting everyone involved.

The length of the sublease is important to Berta and Juan because it reflects a certain stability in the way the flat is used. There are routines and rituals that they control: the times and ways of having dinner, the availability of their living room to watch TV at night. They use the kitchen and living room with ease, almost as if they had the whole flat to themselves.

### ***5.3.4 Roles, Attachment and Control***

A shared flat is an arrangement of multiple trajectories, a geometry that structures different dwelling experiences and domestic roles. The apartments to which I referred above are materially similar to each other: three-bedroom units located in the South and East of Madrid, with a small living room, bathroom and kitchen. Yet, the relationships that are forged and dissolved in them, and the uses of the different settings within the flats vary substantially. These dynamics are framed by the flatmates' roles.

The common denominator among these cases is the fact that several (migrant and non-migrant) people in Spanish cities cannot afford renting or buying a flat for them and their nuclear family (Nasarre Aznar, 2016). Sharing a flat is a strategy to confront this situation, producing various domestic configurations. Berta and Juan, the landlords, have a clear sense of control and ownership over the space, which is reflected in the decoration of the living room and their prominent use of the kitchen. For Olga, the lease-leader, the situation is similar in some regards, as she exercises certain control over the use of the living room and the general dynamics of the flat. She can influence, for instance, how the other flatmates use the common areas or how often they invite guests. But despite her 'managerial' role, the material culture in the common areas remains rather impersonal, sober and functional. Karlita and Ricardo, the tenants, have a similar role in their respective flats, but their approach

to home is driven by their volition. While Karlita projects a sense of home into a future located in her country of origin, Ricardo deems irrelevant such a sense.

Control over space is an important mechanism through which people develop a sense of home, but in the context of a shared flat, it is crucial (Easthope, 2014: 583). The roles that the aforementioned dwellers play in their shared flats allow them to exercise different degrees of control. On one side, the landlords are able to regulate the activities in the flat to a certain degree and use of the living room and kitchen with ease. The lease-leader can also control certain dynamics in the flat and, ultimately, decide who stays and who leaves. At the other end, the two tenants described above have similar dwelling circumstances (subletting a single bedroom), while emotionally evoking home in contrastingly different ways.

The sense of home of most of my research participants is loosely connected to their current dwelling place. In their narratives, they rather described the relationship of such a sense to diverse spatial locations (places of origin and other locations that have been relevant in their migratory trajectories), as well as past, present and future circumstances. This variety of spatial and temporal dimensions give a durable quality to their sense of home because it is constructed as a sedimentation of relationships and emotions.

Dwelling, on the contrary, consists in living in a specific place which in the context of the shared flat tends to be rather impermanent. In contrasting dwelling and the development of a sense of home I do not intend to present them as opposite processes. Instead, I am arguing that they are related, yet distinct social dimensions of home – which raises a number of methodological issues, to which now we turn.

## 5.4 Dwelling and Developing a Sense of Home

The discussion above about three different roles in shared flats is intended as cases of engagements with domestic space and emotions of home. I have suggested that there is a degree of agency involved in the development of a sense of home – or its refusal in one of the cases. For the landlords and the lease-leader, home is cultivated through a series of practices that rely on spatial control. For the tenants, home is also a matter of control, yet, their subordinate position gives them a less privileged access to the semi-public settings in the flat. A methodological issue that arises is how to examine the ways in which the dwellers of a shared flat exercise degrees of control over pockets of domesticity and how their sense of home develops within and beyond the domestic space.

It is worth noticing that in the cases that I referred to, people spend most of their active time outside, in public space. At the end of the day, when the dwellers retreat to the privacy of their own bedrooms, they are only related to each other by the fact of living under the same roof. These households are not integrated by people who compose a community such as a family or a group of friends. Since their personal objectives and trajectories are significantly different, their only common aim is reduced to the fulfilment of basic housing needs. They have an individual sense of

home; that is, a subjective construction of the idea of home evoked through feelings and emotions. But this sense is disassociated from the interaction among dwellers: they are homing separately while living in the same locale.

This 'atomised' development of a sense of home is one of the key characteristics of the shared flat, at least in the experience of South American migrants in Madrid. Therefore, the analysis of shared flats constitutes an entry point to the development of individual emotions of home that emerge in the context of semi-public and very private settings within the same dwelling place. Bedrooms are the setting for the very personal: one retreats to an intimate outpost from which the other co-dwellers are excluded. This character contrasts with the dynamics of the rest of the apartment: the use of bathroom and kitchen are negotiated, mostly through unspoken understandings of each other's routines. The living room is mostly used by those who can exercise direct control over the flat. This spatial differentiation takes place through everyday rituals: times for showering and length of individual showers, specific moments for cooking or eating; or ways of watching TV in the living room, as opposed to retiring to one's bedroom. Yet, the individuality and privacy of the bedrooms is protected, regardless of their individual roles in the flat. Bedroom doors are closed most of the time, as keeping this intimate space away from the sight of others becomes crucial to differentiate it from the other semi-public settings of the flat. From a methodological point of view, the analysis of how discrete pockets of privacy are sustained can give us access as researchers to the nuances of the power relationships among dwellers. Most importantly for the ethnographer of a shared flat, it reveals how control over the domestic space is a matter of compartmentalisation.

### ***5.4.1 Compartmentalising Domestic Space***

The compartmentalisation of space into semi-public settings, such as living rooms and kitchens contrasts with the very private character of bedrooms. Can a bed feel like home? (Ramphela, 1993). Can a bedroom become a home? (cf. Cancellieri, Chap. 2; Boccagni, Chap. 7). The use of very different settings in a reduced space raises the question of access to the researchers seeking to observe and participate in these places. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, I began my encounters with these shared flats by conducting semi-structured interviews and life histories with these and other research participants. Those were occasions in which we explicitly talked about their current home and migratory experiences, their past and future expectations. I also conducted participant observation in their flats by paying them a visit in which we casually talked about different topics, as well as joining the gatherings in which the roles of researcher/researched were put aside, as we were merely 'hanging out'.

The narratives of my research participants were crucial to understand what home means to them, particularly in relation to the geographical and temporal dispersion of their sense of home. It was through dialogue that I could capture how their sense of being at home is not tied to a particular place, but spread across several locations,

mostly connected to family and other meaningful relationships, and situated in past, present experiences and future hopes. But it was by being there, in their flats, that I became more familiarised with their homemaking practices, with their tacit ways of relating to materials and people. Despite the trust and amicability that we developed with each other, the compartmentalised flats were never fully accessible to me. Here I refer to bedrooms, which constitute an important threshold of domesticity and a stronghold of privacy and intimacy. In the context of the participant observation I conducted, it would be atypical for a man like me, in his late thirties, to have access to the bedroom of somebody else, be it a woman, a man or a couple. Notions of privacy among the Latin American migrants I met – which are probably similar to those found in many other places of the world – afford unproblematic access to semi-public settings of the shared flat, while foreclosing the entry to bedrooms. If I brought the topic of their bedrooms into the conversation, the issue was addressed with just a few words. This is perhaps not just a matter of privacy. My interpretation is that, for these research participants, there was not much home to look at or to talk about in those bedrooms, as the very personal was sometimes regarded as trivial.

#### *5.4.2 A Dispersed Sense of Home*

How to interpret narratives of home and migration when people's sense of home is not clearly related to their dwelling place? For example, in the case of Karlita there is a marked distinction between where she lives and what home is to her. Her current shared apartment is a way to fulfil housing needs, while home is located in her place of origin, constructed as a hopeful return. While people's sense of home is closely associated with their biographical past, recreating such a sense in the context of a shared flat is often condensed to ordinary experiences: the smell of a dish (Taylor, 2015: 111), a song (Schreffler, 2012), a conversation with friends or family through a video call (Bonfanti, 2020). Many of these ordinary activities may occur or not in their actual dwelling place. This is not to say, of course, that location is irrelevant to develop a sense of home. Rather, that migrants' sense of home is related to their dwelling place in intricate ways that the ethnographer needs to disentangle. Miller et al. (2021: 221), for instance, highlight how a sense of home can be produced in a 'transportal home' through the use of smartphones, which reinforces the idea that a sense of home and a dwelling place are increasingly different phenomena.

What is home for those sharing an apartment? It is a set of relationships beyond their bedrooms and their flats. This is so because for many people (including those not sharing a flat), a dwelling is at its core a place in which to sleep, store things, eat and shower. Ethnographers seeking to understand people's experiences of home in a shared flat may benefit from approaching these settings in a flexible way, making enough conceptual and methodological space for addressing multiple ways of dwelling that might not fall into conventional definitions of home. In other words, if we researchers look for homes, we may probably find them – not only in the places

people inhabit, but in their imaginaries, memories, future expectations, or across geographically dispersed locations.

The difference between dwelling in place and attaching a sense of home to a place (or multiple places) is a matter of depth. A sense of home requires a relatively durable and established set of relationships and emotions. Dwelling, on the contrary, can span across a variety of temporal scales, from the fleeting experience of the traveller to the long-term resident of a particular location. This temporal difference is significant for the study of shared flats because these living arrangements tend to be transient: although some flatmates can remain years in the same apartment, most of them change places with great speed that ranges from a few months to a few weeks (see, for instance, Nasreen & Ruming, 2020). Precarious or not, the experience of the shared flat is that of a lack of continuity, which often produces a great need for anchoring a sense of home beyond the dwelling place. This is why people's efforts to make themselves at home are not always tied to their actual address. Herein lies the relevance of shared flats as an area of investigation in which senses of home are contradictory, frequently referring to past experiences, future expectations or distant locales, while ambiguously alluding to people's dwelling places. Furthermore, shared flats show how the material bases of a dwelling place and the development of a sense of home among its dwellers might be discordant, since homing and dwelling are not the same.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how shared flats are a context in which migrants' sense of home can take multiple forms beyond the quest to solve issues of finding affordable accommodation. Through four cases of Peruvian migrants in Madrid, I have argued that there are various ways of engaging with the domestic space and other dwellers. These relationships are to a large extent shaped by the roles that the members of the household play; that is, the variation in their entitlement to shape the material culture (through personal decoration, for example) or use more or less actively certain settings (such as the living room or kitchen). The cases I present are, of course, not exhaustive and further studies would encounter many other ways of dwelling in a shared flat. Based on the cases that I studied in Madrid, I have emphasised the methodological relevance of looking at the control that dwellers exert over the domestic space and the ways in which the flat is compartmentalised.

Control, a well identified component of home (Douglas, 1991: 289), is the engine that sustains the dynamics of domesticity within the shared flat. When and how to engage in certain activities in a setting of the apartment – think of inviting friends over for dinner in the semi-public living room – differs among dwellers. This fact differentiates the dynamics of control in the shared flat from those exercised in other kinds of households. A single-family household, for example, may never pose certain kinds of questions that in a shared flat are crucial for cohabiting. Keeping areas

out of the gaze of strangers, which in a single-family household is less of a problem, becomes a crucial marker of privacy in the shared flat.

Behaviours and self-expression are also shaped by living with strangers because of the coexistence of semi-public and private settings in just a few metres. This compartmentalisation of private and semi-public in a small space is reminiscent of the ‘compartmentalised intimacy’ that Sammells (2016) finds in migrant-run restaurants in Madrid. Intimacy that extends across various scales, from cabinets, cupboards, and corners in the fridge to doors preventing flatmates to stare at or access individual rooms. There is much to be investigated regarding homemaking and domesticity at different spatial and temporal scales. Studies comparing a variety of dwelling arrangements at multiple scales hold the potential of refreshing our current approaches to home and bringing new questions to current debates.

Shared flats are provisional spaces: despite having the role of the tenant, lease leader or landlord, my research participants hope that such a dwelling arrangement will change at some point. Tenants and lease leaders look forward to having their own space, and landlords dream about the necessary solvency to have their whole flat for themselves. However, there are cases in which a shared flat is more convenient than renting a full flat: apart from being more affordable, it requires less commitment and maintenance. Overall, sharing a flat is a strategy to confront socio-structural difficulties, but there is a volitional component in it. For those refusing to cultivate a sense of home in their dwelling place, the distinction between home and dwelling is clearly marked. In methodological terms, we should avoid conflating these two by looking carefully at how people’s sense of home is developed, helping us to better understand some of the ways through which people make themselves at home.

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