Suffering and Surviving Homelessness:

Psychopolitical Journeys of Resilience through Gender, Culture, Psyche in India
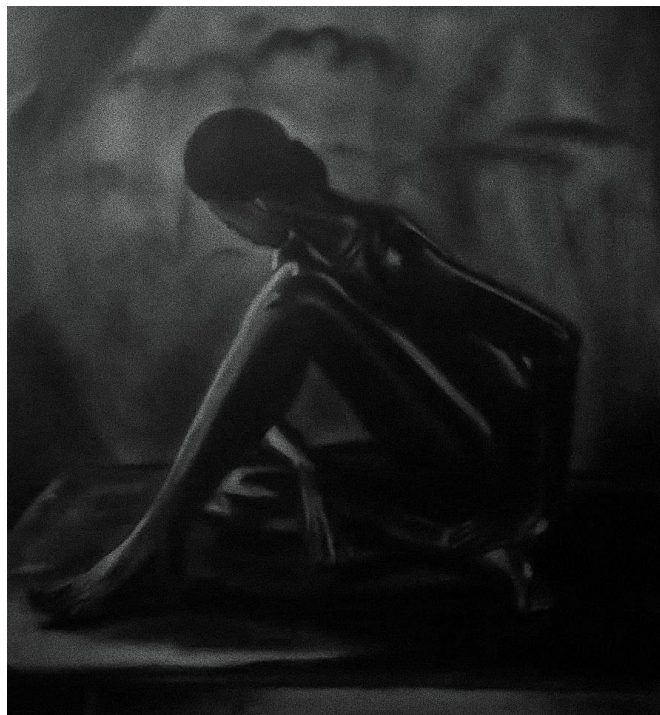
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Charcoal on Paper, by Ekta Srivastava

"...I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits…."

– Edith Wharton

To the ones who arrive

And summon

Unexpectedly

Defiantly

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Abstract

The *sense* of 'home', rarely addressed in its own right as an inner world condition, is uniquely transcultural and psychosocial – and, through these attributes, of value to understanding the nuanced experience of displacement as a psychopolitical phenomenon. Millions of migrant women in India struggle against a dual displacement: *geographical* and *structural*, located respectively in the multi-layered placeless-ness that accompanies migration through the harsh conditions surrounding rural-urban movement within the country, and in the un-belonging which contours the experience of a culturally-embedded womanhood.

This thesis weaves together and applies a conceptual language for understanding the sense of 'home' – drawing upon psychoanalysis both as a theory of subjective being and becoming through intersubjective and unconscious processes, and as a methodological frame suited to such an interpersonal unfolding across a set of interviews – to foray into this dual homelessness in the lives of 8 rural-urban migrant women residing in urban villages around Delhi. In this encounter between the frames of psychoanalysis (particularly drawing from what have been called 'relational' perspectives), the faith-based cultural orientation in India (towards Self, suffering, healing, and rootedness in everyday life), and socio-politico-historical realities, what emerges is a set of stories containing the subjective tellings of inhabiting an objectifying life-world.

These stories speak of suffering and survival, revealing some of the inter-psychic sources of resilience which can be made available through gender, culture, and psyche, to allow the inner anguish of homelessness to be borne: continually inhabited, as well as personally transformed. Locating the mutuality and recognition which makes 'home' possible in the cultural self, in bonds of women, and in interspecies kinship with the more-than-human, they allow for a discernment of often-overlooked shades of subjectivity and subjective belonging in the world, buttressed by a new breadth of relational possibilities.

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Keywords: Home, displacement, gender, culture, psychoanalysis

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Acknowledgments

Research, particularly research carried out in the space between different cultural, linguistic and geographical landscapes, can be an isolating journey – I'm extremely grateful for the ones who provided companionship, encouragement, and mentorship along the way, without whom I could not have seen it through:

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I'm tremendously grateful to the organisers of the IPA's Asia-Pacific Conference for offering me a valuable platform through which I could share my work with a diverse and insightful group of colleagues from (and beyond) the region, through whose feedback and engagement my own thinking could be significantly deepened, alongside my personal sense of belonging in the world of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic research. The presentation was also shared at a webinar organised by the Indian Psychoanalytical Society, to whom I extend my sincere gratitude for involving me.

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Before I started off on this journey, there were many who encouraged me and made it feel possible: most importantly, my teachers during Master's study – Prof. Honey Oberoi Vahali,

Prof. Rachana Johri, Dr. Deepti Sachdev and Dr. Mamatha Karollil. It was through them that I fell in love with psychoanalysis, with engaging with the 'psychosocial', with research and researching – my gratitude for this initiation will likely continue through my professional life in the field. I was fortunate to have been introduced to analytic ideas amidst the critical atmosphere – and dilapidated, graffiti-filled walls, which seemed held up by the spirit that adorned them – of Ambedkar University Delhi. My gratitude to this space will be similarly endless.

I was given the opportunity to present my MA dissertation work – which I continued and built upon during my doctoral research – at two important platforms: a conference organised by the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in 2021, and the Annual Spring Meeting of Division 39 – the Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology – of the American Psychological Association in 2022. Both these early experiences were instrumental in shaping my aspirations in the academic world, and in encouraging me to pursue my engagement with this area of research further, and I'm tremendously grateful for both.

*

Companionship in academia comes not only from one's teachers and peers, but in surprisingly solid ways, from the writers upon whom one relies. The stirrings evoked in my being by the words of others – writers of psychoanalysis at large, such as Michael Eigen, Thomas Ogden, D. W. Winnicott, and of the canon of Indian psychoanalysis, such as Sudhir Kakar, Salman Akhtar, Amrita Narayanan – have carried me in as real a way as anyone with whom I've had the pleasure and opportunity to have two-way interactions.

Companionship and support, of course, also comes from one's actual companions – my family and my friends – particularly my mother, to whom I owe more of myself than I can ever put into words; my spouse, who has been my most constant witness over the tumult of the last few

years; my dog, Dobby, sharing in whose rhythms of everyday life has held me stable through times of immense change.

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[1] Registered as a Trust

Preface: On the researcher's subjectivity and it's transformations

As an Indian woman researching the sense of 'home' in the journeys of distinctly 'other' Indian women, I quickly grew aware of how bound up this work was with my most intimate self. To begin with an elaboration of my understanding of this relatedness and its influence is a choice driven by one of the underpinnings of feminist research (discussed in detail in the section on epistemology and methodology) – to situate the researcher within the work, and thereby circumscribe the known within the (un)knowable of another people.

I grew up sheltered by various kinds of privilege from the pain, abuse and neglect that marks the girl child experience for a vast majority of Indian women. Yet, it was always in my vicinity – in my social world and cultural landscape, and in subtle ways, in my home. One of my earliest memories is of sitting in the courtyard of my childhood home in Delhi, perhaps 4 or 5 years old, getting my hair oiled by the domestic worker who shared the work of mothering me through my early years. I think I was waiting for my mother to come home from work – every day, I'd wait by the gate for her return, and go running to meet her and end what, for me, was always a painful separation. On this particular day, I vividly remember her, the domestic worker whom I'll call Kanchan *didi* here, turning to me and saying – '*Tum mummy ki kitni deewani ho, kya karogi jab shaadi karke jaana padega*?' ('You are so crazy about mummy, what will you do when you have to marry and leave?')

That I remember her words and face so clearly, and they still evoke a bodily dread 30 years later, makes me believe this impacted me greatly. It is a memory that, I believe, remained in my body and occasionally spoke through my experiences of terror and anguish surrounding separations – but only reawakened to my conscious self through my interactions with research participants while studying this theme for my MA dissertation. As I listened to them, and waded through what appeared to me as a repeatedly re-lived '*vidaai'* (Hindu marital farewell

ceremony[2]) in their lives – through a series of disenfranchisements, bereavements and foreclosures embedded into their subjective contours of girl-childhood – it returned to me in its full vividness and affective force. It was the part of my being which reverberated with theirs – despite our significant differences in lived, that is, located, experiences (for, as this research explores, all being is a being-in-relation). It was the homelessness in me, or perhaps the precarity of my homeness, which I found upon returning from my journeying through theirs.

In a similar manner, in working towards this thesis, what has come alive in me (through a process of finding in another) – and will hopefully come alive for the reader who stays till its end – is my response to Kanchan *didi*. After some tearful protesting, I found a solution that promised to hold me in good stead: 'I'll just marry Sandy (my dog)'.

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While there were ways in which I identified with my research participants (then and now) – ways that perhaps unconsciously propelled my research interest into this sphere to begin with – there were also, as mentioned, significant differences in our realities and life-worlds. Engaging with these differences led to engaging with a number of ethical dilemmas around how an English-educated, caste and class privileged, Indian woman with psychoanalysis as her frame for understanding subjectivity can receive (and correspondingly, represent) the lives of women suffering caste and class oppression, far more intense and inescapable gender-based violence – and those having a distinct, and distinctly linguistic-culturally in-formed, lens on the nature of subjectivity, reality, and life itself. Methodological choices were guided by these dilemmas (this will also be detailed in the section on methodology). In the reception of selves produced out of distinct cultural origins and inhabiting distinct psychosocial realities, along with their representation to an audience (and in a disciplinary language) that is even further

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[2] in which the girl symbolically, and physically, leaves her natal family for her husband's

removed, I grew interested in conversational possibilities and the limits of imperfect translations – between Western psychoanalysis and Indian subjectivity, and their intermingling with the socio-political world. In this, I found myself following in a rich tradition begun by Girindrasekhar Bose over a hundred years ago when psychoanalysis formally took root in Indian soil, and carried forward by generations of psychoanalytic thinkers of the Indian inner 'terroir'[3] – arising from our finding ourselves engaging with, even straddling, limits as a natural consequence of working psychoanalytically here.

This has been a deeply personal journey – and if my subject position necessarily circumscribed what I could see most easily in what was shared with me, that which was shared also continually unveiled more within me in a transformational process made possible by a two-way influencing. The conversational precedent set by the canon of Indian psychoanalytic writing – which has, since Bose, tried to see psychoanalysis through India and not only India through psychoanalysis (to aboriginalise psychoanalysis and not only psychoanalyse the aboriginal as Anup Dhar[4], another prominent analytic thinker, would put it) – perhaps made possible its adaptation to the microcosm of the research interviews, which I therefore simultaneously shaped and was shaped by. For these subjective shifts – in my own relationships with my womanhood, with suffering and healing, with belonging, and with Indian-ness – I credit the methodological frames which enabled a building of bridges, allowing for repeated acts of coming together across difference, meeting in shared spaces, and reaching the points of contact from where interchange could take place. This is an opening to which I will return at the close.

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[3] In the foreword to the book 'Psychoanalysis from the Indian Terroir', Erica Burman (2018) describes the term terroir as encompassing "the combination of climate, soil and texture that allows for cultivation" (pg. vii) which "topicalizes the question of setting and outcome". I retain this emphasis in my borrowing of this term here.
[4] See Dhar (2018a)

Introduction

> *"I have not ceased to struggle; I am like the captive bird*
>
> *Who in the cage still gathers straws with which to build his nest."*
>
> - Mirza Ghalib, translated by Ralph Russell (2017)

One of the most challenging questions one repeatedly encounters, and as a result thinks through, during doctoral study is: 'what is your research about?' I found that the words I used to respond shifted so often, based on who was asking, that their evolutions helped to (somewhat painstakingly) begin to come closer to the meaningful essence of what my research was doing, and why.

At its core, I believe it is a longitudinal look into the inner struggle of a group of women in India as they attempt to subjectively inhabit, find space for dwelling in, a patriarchal structure that deploys what Sheehi & Sheehi (2022) refer to as the 'politics of asphyxiation', the caging and colonising of minds and bodies, to suffocate this task. Through this, it aims to call attention to multilayered gendered subjectivities invisibilised by objectifying forces and discourses; offer a perspective on the psychopolitical nature of 'home'; and unearth, through psychoanalytic and cultural perspectives, something of the inter-psychic places and processes that help keep the struggle, the 'gathering of straws' (from Ghalib's couplet above) as something to hold, and the seeking of home, alive – particularly in the context of, and surrounding, this work.

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Home: Contextualising Curiosities

In August 2024, it is a difficult time to write about issues of home and belonging.

As LaMothe (2020) has astutely observed, the concept of 'dwelling' (as both place and process) always has a political dimension, and varied forms of political violence and oppression result in (and possibly also emanate from) disruptions of dwelling. Crises pertaining to these themes rage across the globe – Israel's decimation of Gaza, race riots in the United Kingdom, the surges and strongholds of extremist right-wing governments in India and world over, are but a handful of examples symptomatic of the violent perversions to which the concept of 'home' is susceptible in the social imagination. Each of these is predicated upon its own nostalgic vision, driving the political mission of resurrecting a lost past by remapping the attachments between bodies and places, reinscribing who belongs where and with whom, who can be considered one's own and who must be disavowed. That such a clinging to a crystallised political idea of home (located in the always, at least partly, fantasied past) is often unleashed by evoking the threat of home-loss at the hands of the un-belonging 'other', demonstrates the dangers embedded into such a loss. For this research, it drives the search for alternative channels for surviving home-loss and homelessness, from the realm of the psyche-spirit of survivors: displaced women in India.

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In August 2024, it is a difficult time to write about issues of home and belonging in the lives of Indian women.

The country is reeling – the rape and murder of a doctor at her place of work in the city of Kolkata, a 31 year old woman, has spurred outrage across the nation, setting off a wave of protests by both doctors and women (see Bose, 2024 and Armstrong, 2024) and bringing to the forefront of public consciousness, and media reporting (see Tiwary, 2024), the extent to which

Indian women are violently unhoused. The institutional response to this incident has been, in some ways, as bone-chilling as the crime itself – with credible allegations made of active efforts to conceal and misrepresent by the hospital authorities and, as is often the case with sexual assault here, a placing of responsibility – the burden of safety – on the one violated. For instance, a prominent medical college and hospital in a neighbouring state was quick to release (and following backlash, withdraw) an advisory for its women doctors and students – asking them to stay in their rooms after dark, avoid situations in which they are alone, and conduct themselves in a manner that doesn't attract attention in public (see Choudhury, 2024). The message of this was clear, and intimately familiar to the gendered experience of womanhood in the country: 'you do not belong as an independent entity in public life'[5].

While the horrors of this brutalisation have struck a chord in a manner that has disrupted some of the ongoing-ness of everyday life, they have done so by being emblematic of, rather than standing out amidst, the continual sexual and gender-based violence embedded into Indian women's everyday experience, and normalised in the Indian polity[6]. As per data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 4,45,000 crimes against women were reported in 2022, translating to roughly 51 police complaints every hour, and a significant increase over previous years (see Verma, 2024). The forms these crimes take range from sexual harassment and molestation, to rapes and murders, to abductions and trafficking, to other forms of violent assault such as by the use of acid attacks[7]. That a large chunk of such criminal incidents go unreported – due to social stigmatisation, victim-blaming, and the harassment and abuse women risk suffering at the hands of law enforcement agents, amongst other factors –

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[5] The remarkable book, 'Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets' by Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan & Shilpa Ranade (2011) explores this unbelonging in the form of women's exclusion from public space in Indian cities

[6] The country currently has a total of 151 sitting members of parliament and the legislative assembly with declared cases of crimes against women, with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party leading the list (Dasgupta, 2024)

[7] While men are also subjected to these world-over, the overwhelming majority of victims are women, necessitating its recognition as a form of gender-based violence (see Elizarova, 2024)

makes reported figures likely to be grossly underestimating the actual scale of violence unleashed and endured.

It is not only the prohibition on embodied experiencing of public spaces that obstructs the possibility for subjective belonging for women in India – the domestic sphere, to which they are often confined, can also be a rather unhomely site. The violence inside homes is even less likely to be reported, both because of the socio-legal sanctioning of such violence (for instance, marital rape is not an offense in the Indian criminal justice system) and familial pressure to keep it quiet for the protection of family and community 'honour'. The horrors of domestic violence – largely in the form of 'cruelty by husband or his relatives' as it is phrased in the Indian Penal Code, but also in other forms of familial and intimate partner violence involving financial, verbal, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse – have also proved resistant to legal change[8], and shown worsening trends, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns (see Pandey, 2022, Chowbey, 2023 and Maji, Bansod & Singh, 2022).

In addition to the overt acts of violence faced by Indian women in both public and domestic places, they are unhoused by the slow violence[9] of sustained neglect and discrimination through the lifecycle. The following table, taken from a report (2004) prepared by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) for UNFPA India, maps both these forms of violence to the life-stages in which they most often occur:

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[8] Most evident in the practice of dowry – and the abuse, harassment and deaths it causes – which continues largely unabated despite being outlawed in 1961 (see Biswas, 2021)

[9] Drawing on a term coined by Rob Nixon (2013) for violence of a kind whose workings don't explosively destroy, but quietly, gradually and imperceptibly, slice away

Prenatal

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- Pre - birth elimination of females
- Physical battery during pregnancy

Infancy

↓

- Female infanticide
- Differential access to care, nutrition, healthcare, education

Childhood

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- Child marriage
- Child sexual abuse
- Child Prostitution
- Differential access to care, nutrition, health care, education

Adolescence*

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- Molestation/eve teasing
- Rape
- Incest
- Sexual harassment in the work place
- Forced prostitution
- Trafficking
- Violence associated with pre-marital pregnancy, abortion
- Differential access to care, nutrition, health care, education
- Kidnapping and abduction

Youth and Adulthood

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- Domestic violence
- Marital rape
- Dowry related abuse and murder
- Coerced pregnancy
- Homicide
- Sexual harassment in the work place
- Molestation, sexual abuse, rape
- Differential access to care, nutrition, health care, education
- Desertion

Old Age

- Abuse of the elderly (forms affecting women more than men)
- Abuse of widows
- Threat of sexual violence
- Lack of access to care, nutrition and medical facilities

This succinctly and vividly illustrates a range of subjective violations which threaten the lives of women in India – from before they're born to when they grow old. To speak of desire, pleasure, freedom, home and belonging in this landscape is rarely possible, bound as it is by a discourse frequently unable to expand beyond the issues of danger and safety. It is also, however, essential – the necessity of speaking of pleasure and danger together, while speaking of women's experiences in a manner that includes their subjectivity and subjective agency alongside the repressions and confinements these endure, has been widely recognised (see, for example, Vance, 1984).

Delhi, the national capital and place where this research took place, is particularly infamous for its dangers. Having been referred to as the 'crime capital' of the country (see Ghosh, 2020), its known for its hostility to women – and a survey conducted by ICRW, as part of a project titled 'Safe Cities' in partnership with UN Women, found that 95% of women in the city reported feeling unsafe (Gaynair, 2013). Based on the personal experience of living here for over three decades, I find this statistic both shocking and unsurprising. It comes alongside the realisation that I cannot think of a single woman known to me who has not been on the receiving end of this violence in some way or form, myself included – and who is therefore not viscerally familiar with what it does to one's personal possibilities for safe and pleasurable embodiment, that is, the possibility of being at home in the body, when that body is repeatedly and in varied ways objectified, denied mobility, and simultaneously erased and invaded through the lifecycle.

Whether I knew it (in a thinkable form) at the time or not, I believe this private and paradigmatic anguish was a propeller for my core research questions: how do women in India develop and sustain a *sense* of home in the world? And how do they do this in the face of both politico-symbolic and spatial-material placeless-ness?

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The Present Work and Research Questions

This work, drawing on 31 interviews conducted over 9 months and guided by the frames of psychoanalysis, feminist research, and phenomenology, is an exploration of the *sense* of home in the lives of 8 rural-urban women migrants residing in the urban village settlements of the National Capital Region of Delhi, India – gathered in the form of life histories which trace its movements, devastations and (re)buildings, before and through geographical migration(s). In this sense, it is a compilation of 'psychopolitical journeys' – for *home* is simultaneously political and psychical-spiritual, alongside being material-spatial, with each of these dimensions co-infusing one another. That is, every form of feeling or *being* at home takes place in relation to a structure which acts as the *provision* of home – ranging across the body, house, family, village, city, nation, culture, ethnic and racial group etc. – a structure that circumscribes and determines ways of being in physical places, and which is in itself politically determined and therefore, differentially made available for possibilities of dwelling. Recognising these multiple dimensions and their complex interplay necessitates an intersectional lens for its understanding in the present work.

While the previous subsection provided a brief overview of the forms of unhousing suffered by women in India – in their embodied experiences of public and domestic spaces, as a result of both overt and covert violence – neither this violence, nor the public response to it, is equally allocated across different groups of women. At the same time as the Kolkata rape and murder took place, another story emerged of the rape and murder of a Dalit minor girl from the city of Muzaffarpur, Bihar (Ray, 2024) – garnering less attention, and evoking less outrage. This imbalance is not new – violence against women from oppressed castes and tribes in India is both unrelenting (for instance, NCRB data shows 10 incidents of rape against Dalit women daily) and systemically overlooked (see an article from early 2024 by the Citizens for Justice and Peace, a human rights movement in India, on violence against Dalit women across the

country), just as it is with women from ethnic and religious minorities. The cases which do manage to come into the public eye, however – such as the gang-rape and murder of a Dalit teenager by dominant caste men in the district of Hathras (see Suresh, 2024), the parading naked of two women belonging to the Kuki-Zo tribal community in Manipur by a mob of dominant Meitei men (see Saikia, 2023), and the kidnapping, gang-rape and murder of an 8 year-old Muslim child by seven Hindu men (including one juvenile, see an article on Asifa Bano published by BBC in 2018) in the city of Kathua – bear testament to the gruesome precarities to which those who are intersectionally marginalised are subjected, as much as they do to the reality that the oppression of groups is, more often than not, enacted on the bodies of women (see Asthana, 2022, Sarkar, 2024, and Mullick, 2024 for accounts of what Mullick calls a 'gender gap in suffering').

These varied and intermingling forms of caste, class, ethnic, religious *and* gendered violations and un-belonging coalesce with a material loss of 'home' as physical place: in the lives of rural to urban migrant women in the country (see, for example, Thapan, Singh & Sreekumar, 2014).

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Migration in India, especially through rural-urban movement, is a complex phenomenon: it often takes a circular form, consisting of flows of people back and forth between village and city, which necessitates the creation and sustenance of enduring relational ties with both places (see Haan, 1997, Kunduri, 2018, and a report prepared by the Society for Labour and Development in 2019). It is also massive in scale – for example, Indian Railways recorded an average of 9 million people moving between states annually in the period 2011-2016 (see Rajan, 2022) – as well as multi-determined, driven both by the possibilities of a better quality of life offered in cities, and by the devastating levels of economic, social, and environmental precarity found in rural parts of the country. By the last part of this in particular – the climate

vulnerability of rural places and occupations – it is also hastening, and expected to continue to do so (see Jha, 2023, Tripathi, 2024).

The abandonment of India's migrant workers in the civic imagination – widely acknowledged to be the backbone of urban development and economy, but hugely underserved by way of infrastructural, social and occupational protections (especially in the case of interstate migrants, such as the participants of this research) – was most starkly visible during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns (see, for example, Rajan, 2022). Yet, even across the stories of fatigue, starvation, humiliation and death faced by migrant workers in the country as they tried to make their way back to their villages, often on foot with their belongings and children on their backs, a figure who remained relatively hidden from view, despite being amongst the worst-hit (see Arora & Majumder, 2021, Anuja, 2022, Guha-Khasnobis & Chandna, 2021, Murmu & Singh, 2021), was one who has also been historically overlooked in the male-dominated narrative of labour migration in the country: the woman migrant worker (see Sapra, 2020).

In both recent and longer-term history, the male migrant has been discursively over-emphasised at the cost of erasing the story of women's independent movement, thereby serving the project of situating women's mobility firmly in the control of patriarchal structures (see Sen, 2004) – despite it being a far more complex reality (Sharma & Kunduri, 2016, Ghosh & Raina, 2024). For decades, women's geographical movements – including, but not limited to, migration – have been seen exclusively through the lens of marriage. While this has not been so without reason, and marriage continues to be the biggest driver for the migration of women (see Jha & Kawoosa, 2019), such a restrictive classification overlooks the reality that even when marriage is the primary reason for migrating, many women tend to enter the workforce after the move (see Kapoor & Negi, 2022, Saraswati, Sharma & Sarna, 2015, Das & Murmu, 2012, Mahapatro, 2010) – and therefore, risks ignoring the ways in which women navigate urban space post-migration, as well as excluding them from legal and policy frameworks pertaining

to migrant workers[10]. A constant increase in the proportion of female migrants in the country, particularly through the increasing feminisation of economic migration, adds to the urgency of bringing women's experiences of this form of geographical displacement to the fore. The specific challenges and vulnerabilities they struggle against (see Sharma & Jose, 2020) – such as those pertaining to informal, exploitative, and/or abusive work environments; unsafe and unsanitary living conditions in slum areas, poverty-driven substance abuse in the community; intimidating and exploitative landlords; interpersonal isolation in unsafe cities and the absence of social security – have remained largely invisibilised in the public gaze, alongside their subjective ways of continuing to wage this struggle through the use of inner resources, and the world around them.

It is the latter in the context of the former – that is, the (inter)subjective journeys of place-making located in lived contexts of home-loss and homelessness – that this research seeks to re-present, within the overarching fabric of intersectional gendered violence and deprivation that displaced women in India suffer, and often survive.

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This is a work on social suffering – suffering that is situated in the socio-political world, which structures, as well as is interpreted through, psychic life. By this, it lies at the edge of disciplinary boundaries: although utilising psychoanalysis as its anchor and primary conceptual frame as a theory of subjectivity (and intersubjective being and becoming through loss and recovery), it also draws from – and attempts to synthesise – insights from other areas, such as social and cultural anthropology, studies of migration and forced displacement, literature,

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[10] The ILO Roadmap 2020, seeking to develop a policy framework related to internal migrant workers in India, lists out the specific challenges faced by internal migrants in general, as well as women in particular

spiritual and religious philosophy, film & media, political journalism, and the ordinary language of everyday life.

Psychoanalysis, a language that makes speakable the unknown, unconscious, nonverbal or preverbal dimensions of relational inter-being is of particular value to understanding the sense of home, and the suffering of homelessness, which can often be too diffused and pervasive to articulate, and hinges on a particular quality of self-other relationship. The understanding which it makes available is deepened through insights from the linguistic, imaginative and political worlds which the participants of this research inhabited[11], and through the cultural contours of their inner lives. The tension between the cultural and universal, the ways in which we are different and the same around the world, is thus kept alive through this writing – which sees the worldviews shaping the suffering and healing of the self in the Indian context as reflecting, deviating from, and further unveiling those of mainstream psychoanalysis. One of the core ways in which this has been done, in keeping with the tradition of emancipatory research in contexts of political violence and oppression (see Vahali, 2021), has been through the judicious use of analytic interpretations – and a deliberate choice to remain close to the descriptive language of personal experience and meaning-making. By making space for both these vocabularies, these two poles – the Indian cultural alongside the universalism of psychoanalysis – are held together as co-contributors: through the examination of what the sense of home is, how it is facilitated in relationship with a place called home, where and how it can be found and created, how its absence or loss can impact one's internal life, and how that impact may be borne – creatively suffered, and survived.

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[11] Williams (2007) has emphasised the immense potential of psychoanalytic understandings of social phenomena, along with the contributions these make to the continuing relevance of, and widening interest in, the field of psychoanalysis

It is also, therefore, a work on survival. My use of the notion of 'survival' draws on the work of Fassin (2010) to focus on a bio-political – or perhaps rather, psychopolitical – out*living* of necropolitical[12] death, beyond a solely biological continuity of existence rooted in conceptions of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998). In this, it looks at both inner aliveness (for example, through psychoanalytic concepts such as Winnicott's 'True Self', 1960), and at lived experiences of political aliveness driving social change – both in the presence of death and the deadening in psychopolitical structures. This form of survival is of interest, and has also often been neglected: in psychoanalytic work on the phenomenon of displacement, as well as in the public gaze on women, who are also often survivors of violence, in and from rural India. This is despite many women in the country having become agents of crucial socio-legal transformations following years of struggles in the face of immobilising structures – see, for example, the story of Bhanwari Devi, a woman from the state of Rajasthan who was gang-raped for preventing the child marriage of a 9 month-old in her village, and whose struggle ushered in a "new, gritty brand of rural feminism" (Yadav, 2023). It is of interest not only because of the radical transformations survivors of such violence bring or have brought about in the country – through their individual or collective[13] struggles – but for seeking out and representing the quiet and personal ways in which significant change is brought about by women in the ordinary spheres of their intimate and familial lives – when they are able to survive them.

It is in this spirit that I use the term 'resilience' with some caution – referring not to an individual's ability to 'adapt' to unjust conditions, but the relationally-generated ability to withstand them, and through this, push back in small and significant ways. In this, its use is

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[12] A term for the systematic governing of populations through exposures and attachments to death – coined by Achille Mbembe (2019)

[13] A collectivisation which in itself is fought for and hard-won in circumstances that seek to create vulnerability through isolation, as this research will show. As an example, a change-making collective that has garnered significant attention in the country is the Gulabi Gang – a rural women's collective from the state of Uttar Pradesh that uses both violent and non-violent interventions for the protection and empowerment of women

closer to what Sheehi & Sheehi (2024) describe of the Palestinian cultural value of '*Sumud'* – steadfastness or stalwartness: in line with which I see resilience as the quality of staying rooted in the face of uprooting forces, whereby a resilience through survival itself becomes a subversive act of resistance.

The ones who contributed their stories of survival here also wove in the stories of others they knew who could not, physically or psychically, survive – a sobering reminder of the limits of what the human spirit can withstand. Care has been taken then to not exalt survival excessively, to keep space for the devastating impacts of extreme suffering, while locating it in socio-political experience – wary of the risk in psychological research of presenting "a trauma without a traumatizer" (Sheehi & Sheehi, 2024).

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Alongside the subjectivities of Indian women in the social gaze – and their struggles *and* survival in the face of displacement – in the disciplinary eyes of both psychoanalytic and forced displacement literature, the systematic study of the sense of 'home' has been historically overlooked (see, for example, Taylor, 2013). This work hopes to illuminate inroads to filling this gap, utilising the pathways laid out by others in the last few decades of intensifying interest[14], by exploring the interpersonal-political, cultural, material and psychical dimensions of 'home' in the lives of women who confronted its loss in each of these realms, and yet remained – and remained, to varying degrees, in pursuit of belonging.

The research questions guiding this work emerge simultaneously from these absences, and the sensitivities surrounding them: the invisibilisation of Indian women's subjectivities, and subjective struggles against the psychopolitical violence of gender *and* displacement, and the

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[14] A new book in the 'IPA in the Community' series brings together psychoanalytic contributions to the study of 'Trauma, Flight and Migration' (2023) – highlighting the growing interest in taking psychoanalytic thought beyond the clinic, and in particular, into contexts of displacement

dearth of sustained and systematic reflections on the psychopolitical interactions underlying that basic human seeking – the search for *home*.

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What is the *sense* of home? How does it exist across different dimensions and means of relatedness? How do these varied dimensions – drawing from cultural, political and psychological structures and experiences – intermingle? What gendered structures drive the homelessness of women? How are these experienced across the varied homes, and interpersonal frameworks, they inhabit through their lives? How does the event of migration, a geographical displacement lived in the specific conditions surrounding rural to urban migration in India, serve to consolidate – as well as offer openings from – this structural homelessness? What internal resources are mobilised for the task for survival, and from where do they find support in the socio-cultural and interpersonal fields? And can this psychic survival be politically subversive, enabling transformations within and across generations? Can one *be* at home when they are made structurally homeless – that is, can the psychical realm find and create an experiential sense of belonging in a manner that counteracts, and therefore helps withstand and oppose the onslaught of political disenfranchisement?

These are some of the questions with which this work engages – the layout of how it goes about addressing them is detailed in the following section, which contains a thesis outline.

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Thesis Outline

The first part of this work is the theoretical background, which is divided into two sections – the first seeking to flesh out the meanings surrounding the *sense* of home as a relational, and therefore psychosocial, category, and the second seeking to relate this to the psychosocial context of women in India.

To this end, the first, Part a., contains a conceptual review of psychoanalytic literature around the theme of 'home' – in order to clarify the inner meaning and experience of home as a subjective sense, its relevance to the making and placing of the self in the world, and its developmental progression in infantile life over shifting structures that (if all goes well) support the development of a psychological *capacity* to be at home, to endure the suffering of separation and (re)create in the face of loss, to leave and to return. Taking this developmental journey as interminable, and infantile experiences and their underlying inter-psychic processes as continuing into adult life, unearths a vocabulary for understanding the sense of home as a psychosocial experience: always produced in the interplay of the psyche and the varied (material and symbolic) structures enveloping it, always in conversation across these structures and the space-time dimensions through which they are lived, and always incomplete – a process, more than a fixed place or state of being.

The second portion, Part b., builds on the analytic insight that the sense of home is a psychic-spiritual experience, though also influenced by the politics of belonging, which pertains deeply to the 'self' – in the sense of identity, as well as the broader notion of 'soul'. It therefore reviews literature on these themes emerging from the canon of Indian psychoanalytic writing – the cultural contours of selfhood as revealed through mythology and spirituality from, but also transgressing (see Honey Oberoi Vahali's lecture titled 'From Wild Grasslands to Nurtured Gardens', posted by Psychoanalysis India, 2014) religion and religious philosophy – in order

to relate them to conceptualisations of the inner experiencing of home. It searches through this literary tradition particularly for insights into the self and subjectivity of Indian women – the ways in which politico-cultural un-belonging translates into the psychic dimension as a self-loss, a gendered *lack* located in the Indian cultural context against which women, including the women constituting this work, struggle.

Through this, it lays the conceptual and contextual groundwork to enter the second part, the empirical portion of this research.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The empirical part of this thesis is divided into two sections: which can broadly be understood to be the methodology and 'findings'.

The first section clarifies the ontological stance and epistemological principles – drawing from the domains and worldviews of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and feminist research – that guided methodological choices for carrying out fieldwork. It also details the ethical considerations this involved – and the manner in which these, along with the methodological pillars relied upon, informed various aspects of the 'doing' of research: the methods employed for seeking participation, collecting and analysing data, and re-presenting it in the following portion of 'findings'.

The 'findings' – in the form of narrations of life and self – weave a patchwork of thematically organised lived experiences, in order to represent multiplicities within commonalities. First, they journey through the shared homelessness of the gendered condition which my research participants recognised in themselves and their lives, and the multiple places called 'home' through which they lived its loss and foreclosure. Each of these, in their stories, was marked by inabilities to *be* or stay, or leave, or return – the foundational processes grounding the experience of *home*. Despite these fractures in the relational provision – experienced in

relationships with places and people – the people interviewed seemed to retain a remarkably mature *capacity* to be at home, and the second part of the findings illustrates this through their tellings of inner aliveness and mobility, their 'will to live' through psychic refusals of unaliveness (Sheehi & Sheehi, 2024) and the psychic sustenance of a desire to reclaim, and their creative ability to link and enter into intimate bonds of kinship in different places.

The next and third part of the thesis will then try to make sense of these findings through the application of analytic and cultural insight, while also reflecting on what they contribute to the understandings initially offered through psychoanalysis and culture. That is, it explores how the capacity to be at home could possibly have survived amidst homelessness, and what that may say of how we can come to (inter-)be at home.

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In line with this, the third portion of this work – the discussion of findings – is also approached through two sections: while the first looks at the findings through the understanding set out in the theoretical background, the second looks back at the theoretical background to seek new dimensions opened up in it through the findings.

The first section so returns to narrations in order to offer a politico-culturally psycho-structural analysis of homelessness in the lives of Indian women. It theorises this as a simultaneous maternal inheritance to the girl child, as well as an inheritance of being culturally maternalised – fixated in constructions and spaces of the maternal, with the grips of this strengthened in the context of paternal loss, absence and foreclosure. It then searches within this immobilising structure for the places and processes through which the capacity to be at home can be seen as supported: finding its primary facilitation in the same sphere through which it is psychopolitically confined – the mother-daughter relationship – and continuing or sustaining through the bonds of women in later life, as well as through the respite and recognition found

in interspecies kinship and a wider relatedness with the more-than-human world. It proposes that the use of these inter-psychic channels for self-making, as well as their availability for use, is made possible through resources more distinctly visible in the Indian, particularly rural Indian, culture-gender-psyche framework, and that the manner in which they are used can be both politically subversive[15], and socially transformative. To pay heed to the material-spatial dimension of home, alongside the psychic-cultural and political, it then explores the role of rural-urban migration – in the lived context of interstate women migrants in Delhi's urban village settlements – in reiterating and reinventing both the suffering of homelessness, and the possibility of its survival, by its bringing forth of both adversity, and adversity-activated development (Papadopoulos, 2021).

The second part of the discussion of findings reflects on the first part – it's gendered, cultural, psychic, and socio-political particularities – to formulate learnings for wider application: on the meanings of home and it's materiality, on the multiplicity and dynamism of relational coming into being (at and through home), and on finding 'oddkin' (Haraway, 2016), unexpected intimacies, in the wider world. It does this both to search for ways in which human beings may survive experienced and threatened homelessness, beyond the violent perversions it brings into the social fabric, and to open paths to conceptualising a new ecology of psychoanalytic subject formation – one which I see as essential to the crises of our times.

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This work concludes with a reflection on the import of such a (re)conceptualisation to the discipline of psychoanalysis and the world in which it lives. Its relevance, limits and applications are thought through and laid out in this part: in relation to psychoanalysis and it's

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[15] That aliveness, beyond biological survival, can be a subversive claim to life by women found expression in a recent interview of the acclaimed Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, with a US-based non-profit, Storytellers' Studio – in which she described her laughter as 'militant'

social and cultural borders, in relation to the multidisciplinary field of migration and forced displacement, and in relation to the homelessness of the post-human world – and the reorientations which it demands.

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A brief afterword to the research as a whole reflects on its methodological-ethical sensibilities – their role in the creation of intimacies across significant differences of 'place', in the weaving of continuities/ contiguities through the ruptures in socio-structural locations occupied by researcher and researched – and the manner in which such a coming together held by a methodological 'frame' served to define what could (and couldn't) emerge from it. Through this, it also tentatively lays out the contributions it hopes it could make to the lives most directly involved in it: my participants, and mine.

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PART 1 | Theoretical Background: On the *subjective sense* of home

James Baldwin, in his 1956 novel 'Giovanni's Room', wrote that "[p]erhaps home is not a place, but simply an irrevocable condition." Over the last few years, I've found myself pondering these words often – for much that is known through the reflections of novelists, poets and philosophers can often be read as a source of profound psychological insight (see Trilling, 1959 for a discussion on the reciprocal influence between Freud and literature).

Is it most appropriate to think of 'home' as a *condition*? What could it mean to think of it as *irrevocable*? This chapter is a meditation on these questions – an attempt to pin down something of the intersubjective essence of the *sense of home*, with and through its multifaceted meaning dimensions.

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This research seeks to examine, in a critical and culturally informed way, the lived and unlived[16], conscious and unconscious, experience of 'home' in the lives of women migrants living in urban villages in the National Capital Region of Delhi, India. In the previous introductory chapter, I have outlined in some detail the curiosities driving this seeking, and the context from which they arise, and to which they speak. This chapter will now attempt to build a theoretical frame for understanding this sense, that is, the state of being which is encapsulated in 'being-at-home', and to arrive at a language through which its ever-evolving complexities can be subjected to systematic scrutiny – to lay the ground for being able to apply, and through the application further develop, such an understanding.

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[16] Drawing from a term used by Thomas Ogden (2014) to refer to events which take place in infantile life when one does not yet possess the apparatus for the symbolisation of experience proper, yet which remain an active dimension of the experiencing subject. Here, the 'unlived' refers more broadly to experiences which cannot be put to language, but speak through relational ways of being.

With this goal in mind, the first part (part *a.*) of this section contains a conceptual review of psychoanalytic literature around the theme of 'home', in order to synthesise a fairly comprehensive understanding of:

i. How 'being at home' can be understood as a *sense* – including and beyond the more conscious experience associated with *feeling* at home (which, I have come to believe, may ebb and flow even while one remains securely tethered to a certain broader sense of it) – as well as the place that this sense, as a particular non-conscious and relational quality of being, occupies in psychic life.

ii. The *experiential* characteristics of this more overarching state of being(-with) as a subjective sense of the self-at-home (which doesn't directly lend itself too easily to investigation, introspection, or articulation) – in order to be able to gauge it from its experiential and narrative accounts, using the analytic tools of phenomenology and psychoanalysis.

iii. The nature of the *relationship* between 'inner' and 'outer' reality that brings into existence, and allows for the continual reproduction and elaboration of, this subjective sense – in order to be able to understand the qualities required of both, and of the intersubjective process which joins them – setting the stage for a critical, psychosocial perspective to take to the analysis of each context of homeness[17] explored in this research.

The second part (part *b.*) of the chapter then foregrounds some reflections on the culturally-mediated, and culturally-gendered, dimensions of 'home', belonging and un-belonging, and selfhood in India, as a way to set the context for both: understanding the sense of home within the sociocultural dynamics of this particular work, and engaging fruitfully with the

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[17] Borrowing from Papadopoulos (2021) on the importance of recognising degrees of homeness on a continuum, rather than relying on a simplistic binary understanding of 'at home' vs. 'not at home'

conversation between psychoanalytic and cultural psychological frames, which inhabiting this terrain asks of the reader (and of course, writer!)

There is an important distinction which must be made upfront here – between 'home' as the place where one usually lives (theorised by Sara Ahmed (1999) as the 'lived experience of locality'), which may be the aspect of home most amenable to direct enquiry, and 'home' as a subjective phenomenon grounded in a particular state of being, a being which is made possible when at-homeness is present as a *sense*. The latter is the theoretical focus here – although it includes, without being limited to, a reflection on its relationship with the former. It is the complex link between these two dimensions of home – as an external relational provision (found in and beyond, as well as before, geographical 'place'[18]) and as internal state; as the places one lives, and often leaves, and as their imprints upon subjectivity – which this research seeks to study.

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[18] Conceptualising 'place' not only spatio-geographically but inter-psychically makes its usage here more fluid and encompassing

a. Psychoanalytic perspectives on being at/and home

Psychoanalytic perspectives, I believe, are uniquely suited to this research for their ability to provide a vocabulary for that which is not usually articulable (experiences which precede language – where psychoanalytic systems usually choose to delve). This is a term I will narrow down as this section proceeds, yet use relatively broadly at this stage to refer to the diverse range of viewpoints which are perhaps tenuously unified through their interest in attending to unconscious dimensions of subjectivity. I take the decision not to adhere *as yet* to the discursive limits of any particular school of thought because, while it has been noted in the introductory chapter that there exists very limited psychoanalytic literature on the subject of home (a quite perplexing reality given how many early analysts had themselves experienced home-loss through conditions created by the second world war – see Akhtar, 1999a, Jacoby, 1983), an increased interest over recent decades[19] has emerged from a range of psychoanalytic vocabularies, and opened the possibility for a meaningful amalgamation.

The first formulation which can be drawn from such a consolidation pertains to our first question – how can one understand at-homeness as a *sense*, and what place does this sense occupy in psychic life?

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[19] See, for instance, two special issues brought out by the International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology (Dobson & Iddan, 2015a and 2015b) titled 'Where Do We Feel at Home? Perspectives on Belonging and Not Belonging' – and the book 'Trauma, Flight & Migration' referred to in the introduction

i. Locating the sense of home in a border experience providing the foundation for selfhood

The idea of home as a deep-rooted preoccupation of the self in relationship with life

The sense of *home* as an internal state holds a subjective significance which could perhaps be more accurately categorised as meta-psychological than psychological. This is foregrounded through the disciplinary multiplicity that imbues much analytic work on the subject.

Interesting perspectives on the ontological themes of home and homelessness have been offered through Greek mythology, Judeo-Christian theology, and varied strands of Western philosophy and classical literature (see, for example, LaMothe, 2020, Kennedy, 2014, Seiden, 2009, Papadopoulos, 2002b). An avenue I found particularly interesting pertains to Heidegger's existential phenomenology (see Heidegger, 1962), which has been referred to as exemplifying the practice of "philosophical topology" (Malpas, 2012, pg. 1), a sustained mentation on the meaning of place. Heidegger's conceptualisation of Being as always a 'being-in' and 'being-with' the world (consisting of the points of contact which produce the singularity between being there and being here which is the nature of the concept of *Dasein*, see McManus, 2017), along with his notion of *Heimat* (loosely translated as home or homeland), can be read to offer a striking and quite appropriate depth to the existential significance of 'place', and within that, the place of home. While this is a direction which has been pointed toward in existing psychoanalytic writing on the subject of home, it is one which cannot possibly be explored in any real detail within the necessary bounds of this work. For our purposes here, it may suffice to say that, for Heidegger, home and homelessness are both *existential* conditions – and although his views about which of the two is more primal shifted over the course of his writing (see Lumsden, 2015), he recognised both that homelessness "is a basic given of the human condition", and that being-at-home or 'dwelling' is the "*basic character* of Being"

(Heidegger, 1971, quoted in Kennedy, 2014, pg. 15). I personally bracket[20] the question of which may be conceived of as more foundational, to only acknowledge that both have been seen to exist in the nature of Being, and perhaps, provide the conditions of possibility for each other (a point to which I will return in section *iii.* on infantile development of the sense of home through the interaction of internal and external worlds).

Amongst psychoanalytic writers, the human preoccupation with home has been evidenced not only by examining the pervasiveness of the idea across different realms of life and living – as in the central organising narratives of the Western world such as Homer's Odyssey, and the nostalgic theme of a 'paradise lost' in the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve – but also through it's linguistic-semantic and etymological range of associations. To seek to capture the totality of the meaning dimensions which emerge from these linkages would be an undertaking bound to failures of omission – such is the expanse over which it stretches.

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At its core, 'home' appears to make reference to a quality of relatedness between self and world – spanning multiple dimensions and numerous contexts of embodiment. Papadopoulos (2002b), drawing from The Odyssey and unpacking the etymological meaning framework around the Greek word it uses for home ('gaia') and the one which he sees as the closest Greek translation (ecos/ oikos), vividly demonstrates how the terms themselves have both *concrete* and *ephemeral* dimensions, *tangible* and *intangible*, *sensory* and *symbolic*, with a thread of relatedness running across both. He writes of home as a "locus where the physical and metaphorical meanings of containment are closely interlinked to a degree that they become inseparable dimensions of the same entity" (pg. 19). He has also coined the term 'relational space-time' (2021) to describe the multiple realms which intersect in each image of home –

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[20] 'Bracketing' is a part of the phenomenological attitude which sets aside the judgment on the truth versus untruth of a given phenomenon to focus on its experience

and notes that these three modalities come together across various levels, which he broadly classifies into the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and socio-political. As a result, the idea of home is attached to multiple configurations – the self, body, family, culture, landscape, nation, and a number of other contexts of relatedness (see O'Mahony, 2012).

The largesse of the home motif demonstrates it to be something towards which much of human life is oriented or gravitates, possessing a quality attributed to (and sought across) a range of modes and channels of relating – and we must now move towards locating this quality in its relational role with the self, in order to begin understanding it as a *sense*, or something which can be subjectively *sensed*.

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Home in a border both open and closed: existential-psychic significance of merger and emergence

Unpacking the gravitational pull of 'home' allows one to also begin to convincingly discern its place in relation to the self – and both these dimensions find expression in the following description offered by Giamatti (1998, quoted in Seiden, 2009, pg. 193):

"Home is an English word virtually impossible to translate into other tongues. No translation catches the associations, the mixture of memory and longing, the sense of security and autonomy and accessibility, the aroma of inclusiveness, of freedom from wariness, that cling to the word home….Home is a concept, not a place; it is a state of mind where self-definition starts; it is origins—the mix of time and place and smell and weather wherein one first realizes one is an original, perhaps like others, especially those one loves, but discrete, distinct, not to be copied. Home is where one first learned to be separate and it remains in the mind as the place where reunion, if it were ever to occur, would happen."

The concept of home as evocatively described above, with the breadth of emotional states it evokes, appears to possess *the magnetic power of beginnings and endings, of emerging and merging* – it is simultaneously associated with the point of origin from which one arose, and the destination and reunion one seeks (Papadopoulos, 2002b, Kennedy, 2014). The idea of home, with the psychic investments it seems to carry, thus enables a *profoundly compelling simultaneous definition of and continuity beyond the self*, bringing together "a polarity of seemingly opposite experiences, i.e. those pertaining both to beginning and end" (Papadopoulos, 1987, quoted in Papadopoulos, 2002b).

The *sense* of home can so be located at the *meeting point* of this polarity as a site for both merger and emergence. It is for this reason that I find it most appropriate to think of the sense of home as lying in a *particular kind of functioning of a boundary* – one which acts as a point

of *contact* and *interchange*, where perhaps polarities are bridged while they co-create each other. I've previously pointed to the importance of the crossing of this boundary, or of the potential for crossing it, as essential for the experience of homeliness (Srivastava, 2022), but influenced perhaps by the idealisations of my own non-pathological homelessness (the idea of which will be discussed in the next subsection), I failed in this previous work to point out the need for it to simultaneously serve to define – the important interplay between oneness and twoness which it enables.

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The felt sense of such a meeting point – a border experienced as both open and closed – can be thought of as an essential part of selfhood, at both the psychic and existential levels. This is illustrated in the work of Mosheiov & Iddan (2015) and their offering of an aptly aesthetic analysis of the symbol for home in Hebrew ('Bayit'), which visually demonstrates the key opposition between definition and continuity inherent to the idea of home. This opposition may be seen as embedded in the very nature of the psyche (with its opposite impulses towards communication and being 'incommunicado'[21], relatedness and separateness – see Poland, 2018), or even the body which provides both enclosure and porosity. Mosheiov & Iddan see it as reflecting perhaps even "the deep nature of existence: open-closed-open" (pg. 230), as they demonstrate how, across English, German, and Latin, the word references a dual form – "a house and a home, which stand for this oscillation, with the former relating to the physical aspect, and the latter to the emotional spiritual one" (pg. 230) – an aspect which protects and separates, and one which enables continuity through connectedness. It may also be interesting to note that Heidegger saw language as the "house of Being" (quoted in Steiner, 1979, pg. 124) – the point of contact which defines and traverses the border between the subjectivities of self

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[21] A term used by Winnicott (1965) to refer to the permanently hidden and non-communicating core of personhood

and other – where perhaps we can see fundamental states of home and homelessness residing (Stolorow, 2006, makes the link between language and the presence of a 'relational home' more explicit – which will be discussed in subsection iii.).

In the nature and function of this kind of border experience, which serves to simultaneously enclose and open, lies the facilitative relational role of a sense of home.

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Papadopoulos (2002b) sees 'home' as offering a "proto-sense" (pg. 19) for the construal and negotiation of boundaries, through access to a secure space of spatiotemporal and relational continuity within which this boundary-work can repeatedly take place in ever-expanding contexts. In terms of psychic development, this simultaneous envelopment and movement, the experience of a boundary as a point of contact that enables both containment and continuity, has been found to be essential to the formation, sustenance, and increasingly elaborate evolution of *identity* (see Papadopoulos, 2021 and Kennedy, 2014).

However, while identity can sometimes be understood in relatively narrower ways, both thinkers have a more inclusive view of it when they relate it to 'home' – leading me to prefer the term of 'selfhood'. Papadopoulos has described home and its relationship with identity through the concept of 'onto-ecological settledness' – that is, a certain experience of relatedness between the totality of one's being and the totality of one's environment. He conceptualises both these totalities as forming the tangible and intangible parts of one's identity, with the tangible resting upon the 'mosaic substrate' of the more intangible – in a form which makes the 'onto' and the 'ecological' essentially connected, woven together in the broad sense of relatedness with the world in which one lives, which dwells within the self. Kennedy echoed this sentiment in describing the sense of home as "the ground of our being" (pg. 15). He puts forth the idea of a 'psychic home', which combines a vast number of functions that are

essential to the powerfully emotive notion of the 'soul' – a term he describes as "that which links with others" (pg. 7), which is essential to aliveness, and which he elaborates upon to argue for its continuing relevance to thinking about interiority.

Papadopoulos (2002b) has noted that home is "one of the central realities that humans share with animals" (pg. 10), evident from the phenomenon of territoriality – which may also reinforce the view of home as something of elemental significance to living beings beyond the 'human', something which enables the sustained sense of aliveness of the living 'soul'.

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To summarise the learnings from this portion, the idea of home appears to make reference to an immensely significant relational quality, situated at the point of contact of polarities – a quality encountered in the sense of a border which allows for both merger and emergence. At-homeness as a state of being of the self in relation to such a border acts as an enabling condition for the self's ongoing internal boundary work, necessary for both psychic definition and expansion/ continuity, which is essential to the ever-evolving experience of identity and selfhood, and perhaps even to the sense of aliveness.

This provides a somewhat abstracted conception of the meaning(s) and significance of the presence of 'home', as a quality of relatedness with the surrounding world, for human subjectivity and the self. Psychoanalytic contributions also help us delve into how this quality of relatedness exists as a *felt sense* in the experiencing subject.

The experiential dimensions of home are overwhelmingly associated with *feelings* of belonging, safety, security, attachment, warmth, nourishment, rest and refuge, familiarity and comfort, and it evokes a chronic sense of loss and nostalgic longing. Yet, as Papadopoulos (2021) has pointed out, in conceptualising home through the Jungian lens as an archetype, 'home' can also include feelings at the opposite end of the spectrum (for all archetypes are

essentially bipolar – see Roesler, 2021, for a deeper understanding of the archetype concept) – that is, feelings associated with danger and engulfment. The nature of the borders at the particular intersections at which one's 'home' is located, the kind of scaffolding provided (or not provided) by them, perhaps modulates the feelings they enable. Our interest here is in *describing* the *sense* of home as a subjective state of being, involving but lying beyond *feeling* – one which derives from the quality of relatedness illustrated as homely (that is, in line with the border experience of at-homeness) above.

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ii. Describing the experience of home as a sense of wholeness derived from being-with

Being at home as being with a boundless supporting unknown

The felt experience of 'being at home' doesn't lend itself easily to description. As an onto-ecological concept, it can perhaps feel too vast to pin down; it's essentially intangible portions too diffused to define. Despite the vast emotional terrain traversed by the idea of home, its presence as a lived sense in 'everyday ordinariness'[22] can be rather quiet, similar in flavour perhaps to what Eigen (2007) has called a 'boundless supporting unknown'.

Time and again, the invisibility of the *sense* of home, it's tendency to disappear into the supporting backdrop of our lives, has been alluded to – for instance, D'Rozario (2001) has brought attention to the manner in which 'home' emerges to the forefront of consciousness only in the experience of its loss, stating that "[w]e do not know what is supporting and holding us until we no longer possess it" (pg. 215) – this 'ground of our being' and 'mosaic substrate' of our selves. She suggests that the act of leaving home in search for another may be seen as a journey undertaken seeking an "experience of *wholeness* that at one time existed" (pg. 216, italics added) – a formulation which resonates remarkably with descriptions of a 'gap' that are spread across accounts of homelessness, perhaps where one can discern the experience of home more acutely through the experience of its absence. These descriptions exist in the experience of a lack in or injury to the *sense* of home – whether this arises due to socio-political situations such as dislocation, or situations encountered in the psychoanalytic clinic, with some of its most extreme deprivations perhaps expressed in severely autistic states (see Durban, 2017).

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[22] A Heideggerian term referring to ordinary day to day life as a significant site where meaning resides

The loss of home as a gaping hole

Papadopoulos (2002b, 2021), through his extensive work with refugee populations, has put forth the term 'nostalgic disorientation' to describe the confusing, disorienting effect brought on by the multidimensionality of loss embedded in the loss of 'home'. He highlights similarities between this concept and others which are similarly marked by the opening up of a gap in the self through which one is threatened with dispersal, dissolution, spilling – concepts such as "ontological insecurity", "existential anxiety", "existential angst" or "dread". This sense of existential disorientation leads to "a particular kind of frozenness" (Papadopoulos, 2002b, pg. 18), in which many, if not most, tend to "single out specific complaints as the sole source of their unhappiness" (ibid, pg. 16), sticking to them in ways which seem particularly emotionally charged. He goes on to write – "[i]t is as if the absence of home creates a gap in refugees which makes them feel uncontained and then they look around to fill the gap, to make up for that loss, to re-create the protective and containing membrane of home. Indeed, home provides such a protective and holding enwrapment" (ibid, pg. 16). Such a frozenness, through a dangerous making-brittle of identity borders, has also been described as existing in the 'border psychology' of large groups by Volkan (2017) – in addition to the psychic dangers it carries at the personal level.

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Hollander (1998), while writing of the impossibility of healthy mourning in certain violently charged circumstances surrounding home-loss, also mentions a 'frozen grief' which dominates, and "whose characteristics are, as Bowlby suggests in speaking of disordered mourning, like a festering wound that refuses to heal (Bowlby 1980, p. 22)" (pg. 206). She writes that this kind of mourning, "results in a continuing and nostalgic search for the lost objects, a devaluation of current objects, and a general inhibition of interest in all aspects of life in the present." Further

psychoanalytic literature also points towards the difficulties in mourning encountered under certain psychopolitical conditions of home-loss – such as Volkan's (2017) concept of 'perennial mourning', in which a certain frozenness paradoxically makes mourning both impossible and endless, and Akhtar's (1999b) work on the experience of nostalgia, as it differs in conditions of immigration versus exile.

There is, to my knowledge, very limited clinical literature which speaks directly of or through the concept of home – yet in this too, one finds the resonance of home-loss as self-loss, a hole in the self that marks the condition of homelessness. A noteworthy contribution to this area has been made by Durban (2017), who offers the clinical case illustrations of a young boy who had been diagnosed with autism, and his Lebanese father who had been physically and emotionally dislocated and dealt with feelings of being 'not at home' in a pervasive sense. Through analysing both their respective conditions utilising a Kleinian frame, he makes a distinction between the experience of *homelessness*, marked by paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxieties which accompany the loss of home, and its more extreme form in what he calls *nowhereness*, which involves more archaic "anxieties-of-being" (pg. 181) that come from the destruction of its very possibility. These can threaten one's very "existence as a bounded, differentiated entity in body, time, space and object" (ibid.) and are demonstrated in the case material as an *experience of loss of skin and the continuity of the mouth-breast* (which resonates with the forms of anxiety seen in the experience of 'nostalgic disorientation', albeit the degree may vary greatly). They involve feelings of "falling forever, going to pieces, having no membrane or skin, being full of holes, losing orientation, having no relationship to the body, burning, freezing, liquefying and dissolving" (ibid.). Durban sees two defensive constellations as emerging from this experience: what tends to ensue is either a crumbling, or a hardening.

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A key point made by him which illustrates a relationship between clinical and non-clinical forms of home-loss or homelessness is perhaps in the argument that experiences of home, homelessness, and nowhereness do not stand against each other in opposition but mark different areas along a spectrum – and although nowhereness may be most pronounced, and consequently evident, in its most extreme manifestations, it exists to a degree in everyone. As a result, it carries perhaps the potential to emerge more strongly or compellingly at any point under certain conditions – and in a manner that echoes the formulations of Papadopoulos and Hollander, Durban notes that there is an immense symbolic, internal and relational, loss which can be bound up with the loss of an external home, which "severely damages *the capacity to tolerate and endure psychic pain*, leading to an inability to mourn and to a stubborn avoidance of knowing resulting in mindlessness" (pg. 186, italics mine). This relationship between experiences of loss in adulthood and infancy foreshadows the relevance to this particular work of understanding the developmental process underlying the sense of home, which will be the focus of the next subection (*iii.*).

It is from descriptions of home loss as the experience of a 'gap' that one can begin to think of the state of being at home as delivering (and deriving from) a sense of *dyadic wholeness* – one which 'at one time existed' in subjectivity in the words of D'Rozario, and perhaps to various degrees, continues to through all the places/ people/ practices with which we access a sense of home.

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Home as a condition of dyadic wholeness through being-with

Being at home can be seen as an experience of being whole in and through an other, described by Durban as he writes:

"Our first home is our body, with its skin boundaries. Yet, it is a body within a body: that of the mother. This primordial situation, where we can only contain ourselves in our body through being safely contained by the mother's body which we identify as part of ourselves, *forms the basis for every future feeling of having a home which is us whilst simultaneously containing us/being contained*. Furthermore, it lays the ground for feeling at home in the world of relationships" – 2017, pg. 183, italics added.

This sculpts an imagination of a nested, dyadic wholeness, *a sense of wholeness derived from being-with*, as grounding every sense of being-at-home, which necessarily requires the embodied and symbolic inhabitation of an other (broadly construed). This other perhaps functions as a boundary safeguarding the movement involved in the creation, discovery, and evolution of one's boundaries (which is the developmental function of the sense of home) - through what Henri Rey (quoted in Allnutt, 2016) has aptly described as a 'marsupial' space of envelopment from which one can enter, psychically and physically, the outside world.

It is crucial to this wholeness that, at some level, this other be simultaneously experienced as the self. Kottler (2015), through the lens of self psychology, likens the feeling of home to a 'twinship' experience – drawing from Kohut's description of an experience which offers "confirmation of the feeling that one is a human being among other human beings" (Kohut, 1984, cited in Kottler, 2015, pg. 379). 'Finding oneself in another' is one of the hallmarks of this experience – and a similar sentiment has been expressed by Mosheiov & Iddan (2015) who have written of home as providing a "vital selfobject experience" (pg. 229) by means of the way in which it meets our need to be "favourably mirrored". Interestingly, Seiden (2009) has

drawn attention to a footnote in Kohut's last book (1984, pg. 203) wherein he "remarks almost in passing on the alter-ego selfobject function of one's "homeland"" (pg. 198). There appears to be a striking resonance between these views and the evocative description offered by Wright (2009), as she writes, "[a] place may become home because of ownership, belonging to oneself, or home may be where one feels oneself to belong to a family, people or a place on earth. *Unless it echoes with one's own being*, home may offer a place of retreat from conflict, toil and struggle but not that elusive sense of being all right with oneself and in the right place. One may be at home but not feel at home" (pg. 476, italics mine).

In this sense, returning to the start of the chapter, I believe Baldwin may have been quite right in describing 'home' as a *condition*, a state of being, or perhaps more accurately, a state of inter-being. But what might it mean to think of it as an *irrevocable* condition?

To answer this, we may turn to the 'primordial situation' of home encountered in-utero in Durban's formulation, and its influence upon at-homeness as a subjective sense which can be located in-the-world.

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A note on the sense of home and nostalgic longing

Durban writes of dwelling in the mother's body as forming 'the basis for every future feeling of having a home' – including, I believe, grounding the nostalgic longing for home. The maternal contours of home have been pointed toward in psychoanalytic writing multiple times over the last century – as Seiden (2009) points out, "Sterba (1934) thought homesickness involved a longing for the mother's breast; Fenichel (1945) treated nostalgia as a matter of longing for the preoedipal mother; Fodor (1950) went back further still attributing nostalgia to a longing for the undisturbed prenatal state" (pg. 197-198). Indeed, these have been noted even outside of psychoanalysis, and Durban (2017) draws upon the philosopher Bachelard (1948, quoted in Vidler 1992) to highlight the unconscious maternal significance (or significations) of home, and the manner in which images of both life and death call back the mother's interior, pointing out that "… images of rest, of refuge, of rootedness … the house, the stomach, the cave, for example, carry the same overall theme of the return to the mother. In this realm the unconscious commands, the unconscious directs" (pg. 185).

While prenatal and neonatal experiences with the mother may indeed 'lay the ground' for future states of at-homeness, the complexity and layers of home and the numerous relational avenues through which it is sought, make it both potentially dangerous and quite erroneous to attribute its entirety to this fantasy/phantasy[23] of an 'original home' in which one felt wholly whole, completely encapsulated and so, completely open, at the same time – while recognising the undeniable emotional pull of this image.

A truer picture can perhaps be presented in terms of a paradox – we are always returning home, and we can never return home.

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[23] A Kleinian term which refers to unconscious fantasies

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Seiden (2009) has captured this paradox of the return home as made possible only through re-turning to a new homely sense of relatedness with the world, in his description of the story of home as a journey – one which involves "an original home supporting an original, authentic sense of identity; a necessary and inevitable leaving of one's home (and therefore loss of it) in the service of a new self and new authenticity; an accommodation in which the new must honour the old and incorporate elements of it. And finally—because the return is necessarily incomplete—a variety of shifting affective self states. These will involve variously and in different degrees of intensity a sense of longing, an idealising nostalgia, sometimes a sweet sense of orientation and value, and often a chronic sense of loss" (pg. 199).

He finds this final affective component – a chronic sense of loss, which appears like a non-pathological mourning embedded into the idea of home – most interesting. He calls it "a lifelong longing at some level of consciousness in all of us" (pg. 200) – us who grow up through enduring separations from space, time, and relationships which are essential to growth, learning to re-create a relatedness with these and opening up different modes of attachment in the process, through an endless effort at homecoming. Yet, since these recreations are also always changed, it leaves room for us to acknowledge the finality of loss in the pathos of being. It seems as though Freud too privately accepted this, as demonstrated in the words of a letter he wrote to his friend, Binswanger, after hearing about the loss of his son: "We find a place for what we lose. Although we know that after such a loss the acute stage of mourning will subside, we also know that we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it never the less remains something else" (Freud, 1961, p. 386). Papadopoulos (2021), through his extensive work in different parts of the world, has also emphasised how there is an idealised image of home present in everyone,

just as Bruce Clark (2020) has written of a lost home of childhood which is present in the emotional experience of every adult person.

The paradox perhaps implies that in every sense of home, there lies also its own absence (by which at-homeness is always to a degree, and never complete) – a void which reminds one that to be wholly whole is impossible, and the presence of an inevitable sense of loss must be acknowledged as woven into the fabric of homely wholeness. This leads me to find it quite fitting to think of the sense of home as an 'irrevocable' condition, always accompanied by the inevitable pulls of loss and longing which are a part of personhood.

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To summarise this section, we can say that the *sense* of home, most discernible through its absence, lies in the experience of dyadic wholeness which arises from a particular form, or condition, of being-with an other-self. This form of being-with as a way to become whole appears to be modelled on or unconsciously anchored into the in-utero situation, which can never be fully achieved (or reclaimed) in extrauterine life – and a chronic sense of loss and longing is a non-pathological component of the irrevocable condition of home, which is perhaps never one of being *completely* at home.

The manner in which this-utero experience, the 'primordial situation' of homely enwrapment, influences the journeys of our lives is a story still in the process of being written (see for example Maiello, 2012). Neonatal and infantile experiences, on the other hand, have been much more extensively studied, and so, it is not only possible to map out the earliest developmental progression of homely border experiences which produce the possibility of the sense of home (to its essentially imperfect degrees) in oneself and in the wider world – but to perhaps do so in multiple ways, only one of which can be explored here.

With that, we can turn to our final questions – how is the sense of home developed, elaborated, expanded in the aftermath of its inevitable, primordial loss? What is the nature of the interplay between inner and outer worlds which facilitates such a development, allowing one to move towards a fuller and more alive selfhood-in-the-world? And finally, how can an understanding of this infantile journey provide a useful theoretical frame for making explicit the psychosocial interplay, acting on and through the *sense* of home, which unfolds in the various places one subsequently lives?

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iii. Tracing the inner-outer interplay producing being-at-home

The interpersonal elaboration of the sense of home through cycles of leaving and returning

That the sense of home depends upon a (perhaps interminable[24]) developmental journey was indicated over two decades ago. Papadopoulos wrote of home as a "psychological category which combines the basic psychological processes which facilitate early human development" (2002a, pg. 5) – a category which is also perhaps made experientially possible, inter-psychically accessible, through the workings of these processes. While he noted at the time that there was no substantial examination of 'home' present in psychological, including psychoanalytic, literature, some noteworthy and relatively recent contributions which have addressed its development in a more direct manner will be reviewed and integrated in this portion, while filling in the gaps by reaching further back into psychoanalytic developmental theory and the more indirect hues of home scattered amidst it.

The understanding of the sense of home as tied to the developmental achievement of a subjective capacity - what Allnutt (2016) has called the "capacity to feel at home" (pg. 19), and I prefer to think of as a capacity to *be* at home – can be thought of as one which is *interpersonally learned.* It seems to unfold in a manner perhaps akin to how Bion conceptualised infantile 'learning from experience', that is, as a process dependent upon the responses of a maternal container which meets "the baby's pre-conceptions with appropriate realisations… repeated on innumerable occasions, and over a long period of time" (Elmhirst, 1981, pg. 88).

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[24] Insofar as we are constantly confronted with change in the points at which we anchor at-homeness – even if all else stays still, then through the movements of time

This positions the capacity for a sense of home as born out of the rhythmic nature of *interactions between inner and outer worlds*, which also create the recognition of, and possibility for interaction across, inner and outer worlds.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Illustrating this, Durban (2017) has brought to light how the sense of home, despite often being so non-consciously natural to us, is in fact a significant developmental achievement – requiring what he refers to as the 'preconditions for a sense of belonging' (pg. 183), which include "boundaries (a containing-enveloping structure), an interior space (a multidimensional internal world in which meaningful, authentic object relationships and identifications exist alongside memories, phantasies and feelings), and a recognition of an outside, of external reality." In line with our formulation in subsection *i.*, he sees this structure as one of fundamental importance to the development and sustenance of identity, emerging from rhythms of sameness and difference, such that the interplay "between 'at-one-ment' and separation, lies at the core of selfhood, of a self-in-a-home" (pg. 183).

A significant attempt to trace the path of the development of homeness has come from Allnutt (2016) – who illustrates parts of her psychoanalytic treatment journey with a two-year old child in foster care to arrive at her assertion that the 'capacity to feel at 'home'' is a developmental achievement, and describes it as marked by a sense of orientation which depends upon the shape and nature of linkage between inner and outer worlds (what I've referred to as the border experience of 'home'), and which produces the converse capacity to be away without 'losing one's sense of coherence'.

Yet, being away is in itself essential to the development and increasing elaboration of this capacity, as we know from the impossibility of return without re-turning anew described in the

previous section, and as is reinforced through psychoanalytic accounts of the developmental progression which voyages through multiple homes.

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The multiplicity and evolution to the homely experience of infantile life is succinctly captured in the words of Mares (2010), who writes that "[w]e first exist in imagination, then have a home in our mother's bodies and, if we are lucky, we are then able to move to finding a home within our parent's minds and eventually within ourselves as well as in the world" (pg. 221). Each subsequent home is found through an inevitable losing of home to return to it elsewhere, in a process I envision as a spiral rather than a closed circle, for each subsequent home is somewhat changed (resonating with the significance of home as origin and destination put forth in section *i*.).

Durban (2017) also lays out how, leaving and re-creating homeness, the baby moves through a range of containers – "the womb, the body-skin, the breast as reversed womb, the mother's mind" (pg. 184) – all the while establishing profound connections with them. This too demonstrates the perhaps somewhat paradoxical dynamics of movement and rootedness: leaving home is essential to being home, just as being home is essential to being able to leave it (bringing back to mind the statement on 'home' and 'homelessness' providing the conditions of possibility for each other, mentioned in section *i*.). In speaking of home and the longing for home, Seiden (2009) has also pointed toward the need to get away from home in the service of development – including presumably the development of the capacity to be at home – a process which he sees as "well studied and long remarked on and an honored narrative in its own right" (pg. 195), thought of in the psychoanalytic clinic in terms of 'separation-individuation'.

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Through these formulations, the developmental progression of the sense of home as a subjective capacity can be seen as the outcome of a journey of loss and recovery, through which the self learns to access at-homeness through increasingly elaborate modes of relating, when it is met with the ministrations of a homely other at these shifting sites. This comes evocatively to life in Milner's (1950) description of: "the possibility that being at home in the world is something that we have to achieve.… that we do only achieve it by a willingness of someone in our original environment of persons, in the actual home of our infancy, to fit in with our dreams" (pg. 138, quoted in Mares, 2010, pg. 216) – that is, perhaps, dreams carrying the preconceptions of home which need realisation.

This journey of repeatedly returning home elsewhere is essential to develop the prerequisites for the subjective sense of home as a quality of relatedness between self and world: a recognition of an inside, an outside, and the physical and symbolic borders as points of contact and interchange through which the two can be connected, and separated. It is this development – taking place through the synchronisations and interruptions of inner-outer relatedness across multiple homes which exist across different modes of relating – which this section seeks to understand. Leaning largely on what can be called an Object Relations perspective to trace the relational workings supporting this achievement, it hopes to arrive at an informed hypothesis of the underlying processes and relational qualities which work towards the elaboration of at-homeness, and those which inhibit it.

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Dreaming the development of at-homeness through an Object Relations perspective

In this subsection, I will attempt to stitch together the distinct yet overlapping formulations of Allnutt and Durban, with and through a subset of the paths uncovered by other thinkers, in a manner which is informed by the conceptualisation of the nature, significance, and experience of the sense of home put forth earlier in this chapter. It must be noted upfront that the attempt to craft a meaningful and cohesive imagination of how the capacity for subjective being at home develops over the first year of life is perhaps a task which will inevitably lead to disappointment, as each integration (see Craib, 1994) does by being unable to contain the absolute wholeness for which one longs. Innumerable perspectives on infancy and child development could be placed alongside the understanding articulated in this subsection in richly meaningful ways, however since each individual writer must 'pick and choose' the theories through which they think, the account which I will present here only utilises a part of what might be broadly considered an 'object relations' lens, limited by a handful of thinkers whose usefulness, and fitment into a unified imagination, I will briefly comment upon as and when I bring them into the frame.

The experience of home as essentially made possible through a surface – through the sense of a boundary as an area of experiencing upon which one can feel the sense of both self and other, alongside descriptions of a 'gap' which abound in accounts of homelessness or home-loss – seems to provide compelling reason to begin drawing the foundations of home in neonatal life from Ogden's (1989) 'autistic contiguous position', which formulates the experiential matrix where more archaic 'anxieties of being' than the paranoid-schizoid or depressive may operate. His assertion that this surface can only be experienced (brought into existence for the experiencing self) through contact with the surface provided by an 'other' is also something I keep in mind while drawing this formulation.

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<u>The autistic-contiguous position: home through the skin and the foundations for a psychic boundary</u>

Meltzer (1975), through his work with autistic states, paved the path to Ogden's autistic-contiguous position (alongside others like Bick, Tustin – each of whom were influenced by Bion's idea of the container, see Spensley, 1995) by asserting that there existed processes in autistic states which had their roots in experience anterior to that of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position.

Ogden's conceptualisation of this position – as a stage of infant development and underlying mode of being in later life – resounds strikingly as a developmental process for the most basic foundations of what we know about the 'preconditions' of home. He, like Meltzer, places this position as developmentally prior to the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid position, and traces to it "the beginnings of what will become a sense of place" (1989, pg. 33) which he elaborates as the "beginning of the experience of a place where one feels, thinks, and lives" (pg. 53). Through offering an account of the definition of a surface upon which experience can be created and understood, he allows us to trace the beginnings of the capacity to be at home in something of the infantile experience of this stage. He refers to the autistic-contiguous mode, under normal circumstances, as providing "the bounded sensory "floor" (Grotstein, 1987) of experience" (pg. 45) – an image which instantly calls to mind the conceptions of home as the 'mosaic substrate of identity' and the 'ground of our being' laid out in section *i.*.

The autistic-contiguous position is a sensory-dominated co-creation devoid of both subject and object. It involves the infant's bodily feelings of continuity, enclosure, and edged-ness, that is, a skin boundary which both separates and connects, serving functions both autistic and contiguous, albeit this is a boundary which is not experienced as a meeting point of two distinct

spaces (inside and outside, self and other), but merely the creation of a double-faced surface. This mode delivers "contiguities that are the ingredients out of which the beginnings of rudimentary self-experience arise" (pg. 32).

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The 'normal elaboration' of this mode, according to Ogden, depends on both mother and infant to "generate forms of sensory experience that "heal" or "make bearable"" (pg. 51) the separateness which is a core part of early infancy following the loss of the womb. Indeed, Tustin (1981) also attributed the development of a rudimentary sense of 'rootedness' to an experienced cooperation between the nipple and the mouth, which provides the most elemental foundations for identity. I believe this cooperation can be understood through Winnicott's (1965) concept of the 'holding environment' provided by a mother in the state of 'primary maternal preoccupation' – which enables her body, particularly perhaps the breast, to be experienced as the secondary border imagined in the nested wholeness of home, into which the infant can spill and from which the infant can draw in, and which allows an area of continuity for the effective internal formation of the newly discovered skin border. For Winnicott, this holding enables the infant to experience a 'going on being' – a sense of continuity of existence as yet devoid of subject or object – and Ogden, in his theorisation, sees sensory experience in the autistic-contiguous mode as also possessing a rhythmicity which "is becoming continuity of being" (1989, pg. 53).

I believe including Winnicott in this formulation, which is more fundamentally tied to a Kleinian frame of reference (see Abram & Hinshelwood, 2018, for a fascinating and creatively structured conversation between the core ideas of the two thinkers), is justified by the recognition of the importance of the 'environmental factor' in home, which is arguably most closely attended to in the work of Winnicott. Perhaps, the introduction of Ogden's position also

helps resolve, or offer space for the coexistence of, some of the differences in the thinking of Klein and Winnicott – however, exploring this dimension in detail lies outside our scope in this section.

Fitting with the descriptions of nostalgic disorientation and 'anxieties of being' in section *ii.*, Ogden highlights that a breakdown in the continuity of sensory dominated experience, may give rise to feelings of disintegration, the "nameless dread" (Bion, 1959) which accompanies a loss in the containment of experience, and could result in a particular type of defense seeking to re-establish a bounded, continuous surface, similar to what Bick (1968) has called "second skin formation", or what Meltzer (1975) has referred to as "adhesive identification". As Ogden (1989) writes, "autistic-contiguous anxiety involves the experience of impending disintegration of one's sensory surface or one's "rhythm of safety"(Tustin, 1986), resulting in the feeling of leaking, dissolving, disappearing, or falling into shapeless unbounded space" (pg. 68).

Perhaps we can so say that in the earliest weeks of extrauterine life, the loss of the womb is made tolerable by sensations of the skin, by which one is able to form the beginnings of a sense of bodily (and psychic, insofar as the ego is 'first and foremost a bodily ego' – Freud, 1923) bounded-ness and openness to experience – enabled within the scaffolding provided by a holding environment.

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Psychic holding cannot be tied to physical holding forever, and gradual doses of separation help facilitate the reduction of this reliance. In the process, however, particularly if separations are felt to be unbearably threatening, one is moved towards (or can be moved towards) a paranoid-schizoid response to loss[25]. It must be noted that the loss itself is, like the loss of the

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[25] Klein sees the paranoid-schizoid position as universal and deriving from the infant's destructive impulses, whereas Winnicott sees it as avoidable through a good-enough holding environment. This chapter doesn't seek to

womb, quite unavoidable in the service of growth - for as Meltzer pointed out, continuation of a two-dimensional relatedness can also preclude the development of identification processes which require the psychic birth of an exterior and interior. He also sees these processes as essential to language development, and so, they may then be placed at the root of all symbolic experience of relatedness and self-other continuity.

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The paranoid schizoid position: home through containment, and deepening psychic dimensions

The paranoid-schizoid position is one in which inevitable (or excessive) experiences of mis-attunement, separations or over-stimulations, in relation to the mother in the outside world lead to a split experience of her in interiority - into distinct categories of 'good' (nurturing and protecting) and 'bad' (abandoning, depriving, threatening, overwhelming, and annihilating). Ogden (1989) points out, as Eigen (1985) did, that there exists a tendency in psychoanalytic thought to "valorize the depressive mode and villainaize the paranoid-schizoid mode" (pg. 29), in a way that perhaps prohibits access to seeing how both of these are essential to each other, indeed, to the development and redevelopment of experience itself. He writes that "[t]he paranoid-schizoid mode provides the necessary splitting of linkages and opening up of the closures… thus re-establishing the possibility of fresh linkages and fresh thoughts" (pg. 30). In this way, the splitting of linkages which is characteristic of paranoid-schizoid functioning, along the developmental journey, paves the path to a symbolic formation of a self-border, through which self and other as distinct spaces can be created and connected. The outer border, a holding structure or 'home', for movement through this stage to be achieved can be thought of as lying in the maternal 'container' described by Bion. This container refers to the psychic interiority of the mother which receives, contains, transforms, and returns projections into the

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assert a position on which view is 'right', but relies on the assumption that such an experience does, at least in potential, exist.

interiority of the self; projections which are essentially communicative, and so can be seen as seeking, or unconsciously co-creating, a surface area as a point of contact and interchange.

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Brenman (2006) has made mention of the maternal function of providing "a *home* for the projective identification[26] of the infant" (pg. 91, italics added) – what may be seen as the most primitive form of communication. Similarly, Cregeen (2017) has also given a description of the 'psychic home' (pg. 159) which children need to find in their adoptive parents to repair the damage in their internal parent objects. In his account too, home is seen as an intersubjective experience of Bion's containment – a site to hold and digest projections, such that the child may be able to admit them back in, transformed. For Wright (2009), one can only experience the sense of home in taking in and identifying with what is outside of oneself, alien or strange, and in the process transforming it into one's own. Consequently, if something which is taken into the inner world doesn't undergo this transformation and remains an alien or alienating part of the self, "the world of external experience reflects back, untransformed, the alien and strange" (pg. 483) – reasserting the digestive function of the container.

In this manner, the paranoid-schizoid position itself, through access to effective containment of psychic movements through the surface of contact (which begins to be a communicative, symbolic area rather than a physical one), may help enable the creation and recognition of inner and outer places.

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The depressive position: home through the good internal object, and the conditions for symbolic relatedness

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[26] A defense mechanism by which what is experienced as 'bad' or threatening is ejected from the self and pushed into another, who can experience it as their own.

While the beginnings of a sense of place as a surface for experience are laid in the autistic-contiguous position, and the paranoid schizoid process lays the ground for the beginnings of interiority and exteriority as safe dwelling-places (connected through un-symbolisable psychic movements between the two), the 'preconditions' for a 'capacity to be at home' can perhaps only be considered formed following the onset and navigation of the depressive position.

Ogden (1989) sees in the depressive position "elements of subjectivity, historicity, and symbolization proper" (pg. 35), all of which contribute to this capacity. The depressive position is brought on with the infant's realisation that the maternal part-object experienced at one time as bad and at another as good, is in fact the same whole object with a continuity through space and time. This brings on the experience of guilt for hostility which was only to be directed at the bad, but which is feared or felt to have unknowingly also damaged the good (for the two are now the same). The 'survival' of the object in the face of this hostile destructiveness, in Winnicottian terms, helps establish its outside-ness, its independent existence, which makes it 'usable' as a site for relatedness with the outside world. Simultaneously, the guilt also sets in motion a reparative effort, through the creative work of mourning by which symbol-formation produces the good internal object, and the 'gravitational pull' it exerts to consolidate an internal experience of home, a place for dwelling.

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Allnutt draws on Jeanette Winterson's (2011, quoted in Allnutt, 2016) summarisation of the conception of home as one's 'centre of gravity' put forth by Romanian philosopher Eliade, and connects it with Winnicott's description of particular forms of anxiety which "move the gravity of one's consciousness from the kernel to the shell" (1952, quoted in Allnutt, 2016, pg. 20). This appears to describe the loss of a 'kernel' gravitational pull which Winnicott sees as exerted

by the good internal object[27], a loss which can produce the two-dimensional, surface relationships described by Meltzer (1975, drawing on Esther Bick's concept of defensive 'second skin formation' – see Bick, 1968), or even perhaps the defensive forms of 'sticking', frozenness or hardening which have been described in response to experiences of a 'gap' in the previous section. The good internal object seems essential to the capacity for home in interiority, and a corresponding possibility for being-in-the-world, in her cyclical conceptualisation – an internal sense of security, which derives from the way the external world has been imbibed, plays a central role in how one can trace or sculpt out their place in it.

The development of internal space for this imbibing, in her account as well as others like Meltzer, appears to come about through taking in and identifying with the space within another (body, and then mind) in which one 'finds' oneself. The internal space in which the good object resides to make one feel secure is essential to access both the feeling of home, and the alive mobility it enables. As she writes, "[t]he capacity to maintain the gravitational pull to the heart of one's home and at the same time live in both shared and separate spaces in relation to others requires that a person has moved from a position of being held from the outside to having a greater sense of the capacity to hold themselves together from within" (pg. 27).

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In this formulation, perhaps the surviving and usable object may be seen as providing the secondary border within which internal space can be contoured. Yet, it must also be mentioned how 'transitional experience', and its particular way of carving out a symbolic point of contact between 'me' and 'not-me' (in service of easing separation), also contributes to this process. To do so, perhaps it's important to note that in the original presentation on transitional

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[27] The internal representation of a homely object-relationship

phenomena given by Winnicott (1951, quoted in Abram & Hinshelwood, 2018), he saw it as a facilitating process for establishing the depressive position.

Mares (2010) has elaborated upon the work of both Winnicott and Bowlby to demonstrate the relational conditions through which a sense of home may be accessed in early experience – respectively the conditions accompanying transitional experience and play, and the presence of a secure base to which one can return and from which one can explore. In so doing, she highlights how the capacity for creativity, linked so strongly to an ability of Winnicott's true self to 'live in the world' (Winnicott, 1960), develops in a successfully facilitated transitional space – a border experience in which polarities of self and other converge to allow for the coexistence of paradoxes, alongside and enabled through acts of effective recognition and transformation (or, mirroring and containment) of the infant's inner states by the caregiver, which create in the infant the sense of their own interiority and the capacity to 'mentalise' another's. That is, these conditions – the creation of transitional space for play as a path to separation and connectedness, supported by prior and ongoing experiences of mirroring and containment – are fundamental to enabling a sense of home which can shelter and allow for the expression, an intersubjective worldly dwelling, of the creativity of the true self.

That's not to say that these functions must be carried out in an entirely unencumbered way, since Winnicott himself valued more than anything the 'good-enoughness' of 'ordinary devotion', for as Mares (2010) writes, "[i]n a family, as in all relationships, mistakes need to be able to be made and survived, so that new things can be understood together. This repair can be understood as a kind of return home, to be back connected, communicating" (pg. 228). In saying this, she illustrates how valuable cycles of rupture and return can be for developing and strengthening the 'capacity to be at home' – in, and beyond, infancy. She emphasises the ongoing significance of these processes, of the retained capacity for play and the quality of relatedness between self and world (connected and communicating, separated and

interpenetrating) which is reflected in and advanced by this capacity, in "being able to be at home in the world and in ourselves" (ibid.) in later life.

To be connected and communicating as a return home brings back to mind Heidegger's association of language as the 'house of Being' (made in section *i*.) – language which is made possible through the capacity for symbolisation which grows in depressive functioning through guilt and the reparative work of mourning. A communicating interiority, enabled through a gravitational presence of something good from the outside which has been made to reside within, echoes across other formulations utilising the concept of 'home'.

<p align="center">*</p>

Stolorow (2006), making reference to a form of unconsciousness he refers to as 'ontological' – that is, marked by an absence in or loss of one's sense of being – proposes that the sense of being is existentially dependent upon one's intersubjective contexts, and the degree to which they support/sustain, or inhibit/damage, *the symbolising transformation of emotional experience into language*. The capacity to be, which seems then to indicate a being which is emotionally alive in-the-world, itself develops relationally through communication, through finding what he quite aptly terms a "relational home" (pg. 236) – in line with what Laub (2013) describes as "a space where an inner truth can be safeguarded and protected, as well as shared with others who are receptive to it" (pg. 575). Home, in this view, is that inter-subjective structure which makes speech, or rather, communication ("the linguisticality of our experience", Stolorow, 2006, pg. 239) as interchange possible – supporting acts of symbolisation by which the external world is represented inwardly and expressed out, in a creative crossing of inner-outer borders. He outlines the manner in which the developmental progression of emotional experience (from affect differentiation to desomatisation and verbalisation) takes place through a relational medium, marking out horizons of experience and

awareness of experience in a fluid and dynamic way, as "product both of one's unique intersubjective history and of what is or is not allowed to be felt and known within the intersubjective fields that constitute one's current living" (pg. 238). Drawing as well upon Heideggerian being-in-the-world, he asserts the manner in which the sense of being is embedded into intersubjective contexts, and insofar as the sense of relational being is "fundamentally constitutive of" (pg. 240) Being, a loss in this sense of a relationship may be seen as a loss of Being itself.

The difficulties with 'making contact' – which could perhaps refer to a wide variety of processes by which communication as a representation-of-relatedness (a link or a channel) takes place – are also evidenced as a fundamental challenge with homeless states in the case of two-year-old Joseph illustrated by Allnutt (2016). Wright (2009) too has written of the sense of feeling not at home, and the yearning for wholeness or completeness which accompanies it, as stemming from "an inability to symbolize core inner feeling" (pg. 483).

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The importance of access to a relational home to make communication possible – through the intersubjective transformation of emotional experience into shared or shareable speech or symbols which helps make it bearable – has also found meaningful resonance from work with involuntary dislocation. Laub (2013) has drawn upon his experience with holocaust testimonies to assert that "[p]eople who lived through a common or similar emotional experience could share an emotional home" (pg. 576). Striking a similar tone, Papadopoulos (1999) has written of how shared narratives, within which different individuals can locate their own experiences and "reciprocally… co-construct reality" (pg. 330), can produce a 'transitional space' which belongs both (and neither) to the individual and (nor) the collective, enabling them to cohabit meanings under a symbolic structure which shelters and facilitates relatedness, and

correspondingly, a 'storied community' through which to access a relationally-generated resilience[28]. He remarks on how this storied community and the space for relatedness and interdependence it provides can become something like Bowlby's 'secure base' – one where "individuals exchange the provision of a secure base for each other" (pg. 328).

Having fleshed out in some detail the developmental progression of the sense of home in early life, and the relational processes which steer such a progression, it may be worthwhile to comment briefly upon the broad-based relevance of this understanding for this research context, before orienting it more fully towards its specificities.

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[28] The paper analyses the shifts in conceptualisations of resilience from that of a discretely individual or 'inner' quality towards those which see in it the dimensions that are collectively generated and upheld through systemic interactions, making it deeply interrelated with an ecological context. This is worth noting even though a summarisation of these movements is not in the scope of this paper.

Infantile developmental experiences and processes in adult life

Ogden conceives of the three positions through which I have traced the development of home – the autistic-contiguous, the paranoid-schizoid, and the depressive – as not only points along a developmental journey, but as interacting *modes* between which experience is generated. In this imagination, infantile processes (and the anxieties and defences driving these processes) remain an active part of adult life and continue to underlie experiences located in adulthood. The similarities between the experiences of home-loss in clinical and social contexts illustrated in the previous section reinforce the validity of such an understanding.

That ways of being-with learned in preverbal life continue to form the foundations of being-with in later life have also been illustrated in ideas of the non-repressed, relational unconscious (see Harris, 2004) – located by neuropsychoanalysis in implicit or procedural memory.

Lyons-Ruth (1999), responding to the need to rethink the place of psychoanalytic developmental theory in the light of more fluid, intersubjective, and constructivist understandings of the clinical situation, has drawn upon longitudinal attachment research and neuroscientific/ neuropsychoanalytic work around implicit or procedural memory to demonstrate the continuing importance of understanding relational history as an alive site into which subsequent relational meaning-making is grounded. She does so in order to propose that much of one's relational experience is represented in an organising structure which is unconscious but implicitly in-forms enactments; that this form of unconsciousness is different from the classical repressed unconscious in that it derives from pre-verbal and pre-symbolic states of being or being-with which remain "unthought" (see Bollas, 1987) but are not necessarily repressed and guarded; and that this organising structure *expands and solidifies* through the lifespan, through participation in "more coherent and collaborative forms of

intersubjective interaction" (pg. 578) – which acts as an agent of change in both development and psychoanalysis.

Expressing a similar understanding, Mancia (2007) notes that "[t]here is now a substantial body of literature in which the neonate's first relational experiences are seen as foundations of the emotional, affective and cognitive organisation of the individual's personality and character (Stern, 1985;Mancia, 2000b)" (pg. 63). The nature of these non-repressed yet unconscious, relational-affective traces, their role in developing the unconscious nucleus of the self, and their *progression into and intermingling with* the experiences of adulthood has been elaborated in quite astounding detail by him, utilising as well the concept of preverbal 'implicit memory'.

In addition to the continuing relevance of infantile *processes* as ways or modes of inter-being which provide the unconscious foundations for later modes of relatedness, this implies the active presence of infantile and childhood *experiences* in the later experiences of home-loss which take place in the dislocations of adult life – something which has also been represented in the rich body of analytic work on the subject.

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Dori Laub's powerfully evocative autobiographical account in the paper 'Leaving Home and the Flight from Trauma' (2013) demonstrates the manner in which a "sense of inner exile" (pg. 570) deriving from excruciating separation felt in childhood – in his case as a Holocaust survivor, an experience of being sent to a Nazi concentration camp when he was five years old, to return two years later to a no-longer-recognisable 'home' – can linger through later attempts at establishing a sense of home, precluding belonging. He describes this as a sense of "being suspended in an in-between" (pg. 572), from which he was able to move forward only through the process of his training in psychoanalysis, after his third analyst "emotionally tuned in to the world [he] lived in" (pg. 572) – that is, made contact. On a similar note, Ana's case in Wright

(2009) illustrates the manner in which the real-world difficulties which accompany finding oneself onto-ecologically unsettled make one vulnerable to re-experiencing earlier anxieties and carry the risk of returning to earlier ways of coping. Hollander (1998) has also written of the close recapitulation of infantile experiences of attachment and separation which is evident in the phenomenon of exile (or perhaps involuntary dislocation understood in a more broadened sense) – one which may "remobilize experiences with attachment and loss from early life, along with the unconscious meanings ascribed to these aspects of interpersonal connection" (pg. 203). Akhtar (1995) has referred to the immigration experience as a 'third individuation', continuous with experiences from previous processes surrounding individuation. Grinberg & Grinberg (1989) have expressed this continuity as well, writing that "[w]e believe that what characterizes a person's reaction to the traumatic experience of migration is the feeling of helplessness, which is modelled on the birth trauma (Rank, 1961), and the loss of the protective mother. It also corresponds to the experience of the loss of the containing object (Bion, 1970) which in extreme situations, carries the threat of ego disintegration and dissolution and a blurring of boundaries. The risk is felt all the more intensely if the subject has suffered major deprivation and separation in infancy" (pg. 13).

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While this collection of formulations tunes us in to the layer of meaning in involuntary dislocation which derives from one's particular infantile experiences, these will not in themselves be in the scope of this work, which is unsuited to such reconstructions. Instead, here we will focus on applying an understanding of the interpersonal 'model' of at-homeness – which develops from infantile processes and continues through adult life, while always being increasingly elaborated – to understand the interpersonally created sense of home in the lives of the participants of this research longitudinally, across the various places they've lived.

Before doing so, this model must itself be placed in relationship to a cultural and gendered orientation to borders and boundaries, expressed in ideas of home and selfhood which arise from the Indian 'terroir', and their alignment with Eastern philosophical bearings.

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b. Cultural and gendered perspectives on home and the self

The previous section described the significance, experience, and underlying relational dynamics of the subjective sense of home – as a model for psychosocial 'settledness' which is best understood in degrees and across multiple contexts, and which provides the conditions of possibility for a living and breathing[29] selfhood. It illustrated an understanding of how the capacity to make use of the outside world to achieve this state of being, repeatedly through rhythms of loss and recovery, is interpersonally elaborated through the developmental process of infancy. This is perhaps an elaboration interminable, expanding and solidifying through the lifespan, for we are always losing and recreating home through the passage of time and other experiences of change – and we always need a home in the world to facilitate our sense of home. With catastrophic failures of this home in the world in adult life as in infancy, one's sense of home may be disturbed in a number of ways both ordinary and pathological – indeed, it is this inner disturbance, most often taking the form of 'ordinary human suffering'[30], which lies at the emotional core of human displacement.

Before applying this understanding, which relies on the language and worldview of psychoanalysis, to inner experiences of and through the systemic homelessness lived by women displaced into the urban villages of India, it is important to consolidate, however briefly, a perspective on:

i. The cultural contours of inner experience and selfhood, and the importance of attending to these in psychoanalytic encounters with the non-western Other.

ii. The culturally embedded self-making goals and processes (bound up with the nature and means to 'home' as described in part a.) which have been found by psychoanalytic writing

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[29] Inhaling and exhaling – securely porous in relation to, and able to participate in transformational interchange with, the world around it

[30] A term used by Papadopoulos (2021)

from India – which perhaps introduce a psychic vocabulary capable of seeking and speaking de-colonially.

iii. The homelessness, in inner experience as in the outside world, against which Indian women are tasked with struggling – a struggle which we will be called upon to witness and, with care[31], attempt to understand, in its interplay with rural to urban displacement.

It is with these three areas that this section engages, in order to enter the empirical work which follows with a critical, cultural psychoanalytic sensibility.

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[31] 'Care' here intends to refer to a Heideggerian attitude of involvement and concern

i. The 'culture breast' in the psyche, and in psychoanalysis

An evolving perspective on culture

Clifford Geertz, one of the most influential cultural anthropologists of the twentieth century, put forth an understanding of culture as "an ordered system of meaning and symbols… in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings and make their judgments" (1962, pg. 724). Culture, by this definition, may be seen as forming the semiotic core of subjectivity – however, it has remained relatively under-acknowledged in the foundations of psychoanalytic theory (for a critique on ethnocentrism in psychoanalysis, see Mann, 2002, Rivera, 2017).

The importance of culture in individual development has never gone unnoticed, although the manner in which its role can been conceived has evolved drastically. For instance, at the onset of psychoanalysis, Freud (1930) postulated an inherent discontent brought on by the individual's confrontation with the social demands of their culture. Kakar (2012) refers to this attitudinal position as "Freud's main theme, the 'burden of culture'" (pg. 11) – and observes that, by contrast, the post-Freudian era has seen a gradual shift away from such a relational opposition between culture and psyche to observations of complementarity, that is, a movement from that which the psyche reacts against towards that which it takes in, by which it is structured. While a full examination of the engagement of psychoanalysis with culture is outside the scope of this work (see Kakar, 2009 for such a perspective across different 'schools' of thought, linked with the epistemic horizons of their times), perhaps here it would be useful to only integrate from these broad positions, the Freudian and the post-Freudian, the psychic presence of both: cultural resistance and cultural embedded-ness. While the former has been in some way woven into the structure of psychoanalytic theory from the start, the latter became a more significant developmental focus afterwards – influenced perhaps, at least in part, by

cultural exchange and the dislocation of psychoanalysis to other parts of the world (which will be elaborated upon in the next subsection).

Over the last several decades of exploration, it has grown to be commonly acknowledged that culture plays a significant role in psychic formation (see, for example, Frie 2012, 2014, 2015). Evoking this recognition, the heading of this section draws from the title of a book authored by Noreen Giffney (2021), 'The Culture-Breast in Psychoanalysis: Cultural Experiences and the Clinic', in which she describes the analogous relationship between *culture* and the immensely significant *breast* in the developmental journey of infancy – both performing the roles of being a container, a home, which is drawn into the self and which forms a crucial dimension of 'learning from experience'[32] in the relational process of coming into being. In doing so, she elucidates the function of culture, and cultural objects in particular, in the maturational journey toward selfhood.

The growing understanding of the pervasiveness of cultural embedded-ness threatens to destabilise the universalism of psychoanalytic developmental theory. For instance, with the development of concepts such as the "ethnic unconscious" (Herron, 1995) and the "cultural unconscious" (Adams, 2002), one begins to appreciate the ways in which culture challenges, or at least calls for a reinterpretation of, even the universality of the unconscious. Different cultures bring with them different child rearing practices, family/social organisations, worldviews and belief systems, and histories to be inherited – all of which profoundly influence maturational processes and produce distinctive psychic terrains. That these terrains exist somewhat 'outside' the cultural territory of psychoanalysis draws attention to its limitations – as Kramer (1998) concludes, at the end of her chapter on different child rearing patterns prevalent in non-Western societies:

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[32] Using Bion's phrase, in order to re-enliven the formulations reviewed in section a. and situate culture at their core

"There are many similarities and differences in child-rearing practices around the world. What remains impressive, therefore, is that except under conditions of severe deprivation or physical or sexual abuse, most children around the world do reasonably well. This raises new challenges for psychoanalytic developmental theory. Its stable postulates and its potential cultural biases begin to draw our attention." (pg 12-13)

Perhaps these historically-concealed yet increasingly-evident cultural biases in psychoanalysis bring with them the ethical imperative to foreground culture while working analytically in a place like India, particularly with people who don't fall into the Westernised middle and upper-middle classes (as in the case with the participants of this research). Ewing (2022), reviewing El-Shakry's work on Sufism and psychoanalysis, calls attention to the important way in which he "disrupts the assumption that psychoanalysis in its Freudian form is a universal civilizing force to be exported to the rest of the world as a nonpolitical, medical project, instead recognizing psychoanalysis as an ethical project that at its heart has political implications for the postcolonial subject" (pg. 278). The question is: how can the subjectivity of this subject be encountered through the ethnocentric vocabulary of psychoanalysis in a way which is ethical, nonviolent, and perhaps even decolonising?

A wide range of scholarship produced from the non-western world more broadly, and India in particular, can perhaps introduce dimensions of the sensitivity from which one can take up this 'ethical project'.

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De-colonial destabilisations with the emergence of a cultural, accultured psychoanalysis

One may find it interesting to note the role played by the non-western world in driving the cultural destabilisation of psychoanalysis – propelled by a range of immersions in its spiritual-philosophical products (such as Buddhism, see Epstein, 1990, 1995), and by the generations of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic scholars who found themselves 'caught between cultures' when they reached out to culturally specific subjectivities equipped with psychoanalytic meaning frameworks (see Kakar, 2012). From this in-between space, the point of intercultural contact, they seem to have been uniquely able to question simultaneously the influence of culturally specific patterns on the subjectivities they sought to understand, and reflexively, those operating in psychoanalysis itself: a 'culturally specific' discourse which, as Mukherjee (2021) puts it, is "traceable to not the beginning of time but the end of the nineteenth century" (pg. 11).

Perhaps it is through varied occupations of this borderland, and the bifacial perspectives it allows, that the historico-colonial approach of psychoanalysis to culture found its most subversive shift – the catalyst for the most radical of departures[33]. As Kakar (2009) writes – historically, the "paramount concern of psychoanalysis seems to have been in protecting and gathering evidence in support of its key concepts" (pg. 45). Seeking to establish itself as a 'science' of subjectivity in post-Enlightenment Europe, it sought to claim epistemic authority over what Freud famously referred to as the 'psychic unity of mankind', and it was with this agenda of 'gaining ground' that psychoanalysis first met its non-Western Other. Perhaps Freud's response to the foray of psychoanalysis into India reflects the colonial undercurrents of this approach: for as he expressed pleasure with what he considered "the progress of psychoanalysis and the proud *conquests* it has made in foreign countries" (see Bose-Freud

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[33] It's interesting to note how transformations in psychoanalysis have resulted from its transculturation even within the western world, through its immigration from Europe to the United States (see Rendon, 1989)

Correspondence, 1964, italics added), he also resisted allowing formulations arising from foreign inner landscapes to significantly affect his ideas or influence his thinking. In contrast, Kakar and other writers of psychoanalysis, often speaking from non-western cultural vantage points from which the cultural workings of psychoanalysis may be clarified, entertain "the possibility that these other cultures, with their different world-views, family structures and relationships, could contribute to its models and concepts" (Kakar, 2009, pg. 45). In the process, they make space to shift the 'architectonics' (Dhar & Siddiqui, 2013) of the discipline and perhaps, bring de-colonial encounters into possibility (see Nagai, 2007, for a demonstration of the potential for enrichment of both Western and Eastern perspectives when a two-way conversation is allowed to develop between the two).

Psychoanalytic writing from India has been the carrier of such counter-cultural currents since the discipline first took root in Indian soil over a hundred years ago (see Vaidyanathan & Kripal, 1999) - and Girindrasekhar Bose, the father of psychoanalysis in India (as well as, perhaps, of *Indian* psychoanalysis), drew heavily on Indian cultural products in the search for psychoanalytic meaning in Indian subjectivities in particular, and in subjectivity in general. This tradition has been a distinctive feature of much psychoanalytic writing from India afterwards, and it provides an ethical and epistemological orientation to this work. In the contributions of Bose, Dhar (2018b) unearths a "post-Orientalist episteme" (pg. T203) – one which perhaps goes beyond the Indian psychoanalytic spirit, emanating as well from other parts of the world to which psychoanalysis was exported (such as Japan, see Roland, 1994). Salam et al. (2022) have situated India's contact with psychoanalysis in its historical, colonial context, and offered a valuable summary of some significant contributions made to the discipline from the region. While reviewing these exhaustively is too elaborate a task to be undertaken here, the next subsection will attempt to stitch together a broad cultural understanding of Indian

subjectivities in their distinctiveness from those described by psychoanalysis, in the hope of opening avenues to meet them in their symbolic universe in the following chapters.

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ii. Culture-selfhood in India

Which India?

To speak of an Indian cultural context for selfhood brings flabbergasting challenges as one attempts to paint a somewhat unified/ cohesive picture of the mindboggling multiplicity in the country. As of 2023, it has become the most populous country in the world, speaking through 22 constitutionally recognised languages, and by some reports, as many as 19,500 dialects. The religious-philosophical underpinnings of Indian society are similarly vast and varied – as Gavankar (2015) writes, although Hinduism is the dominant influence upon the core of the nation's identity, it is itself divided into multiple traditions and subject to multiple historico-cultural currents and local variations. He briefly illustrates some of these as "for instance *Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Smartism*, other schools of thought like *Vedanta, Samkhya, Advaita*, and also its age-old oral, tribal and folk traditions. Ancient scriptures have had a continuous and pervasive influence for thousands of years on the traditions and mores of civilizations" (pg. 161). Beyond Hinduism as well, the religious composition of India is diverse – including sizeable populations of followers of Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, to name a few.

While housing a wide array of cultural influences within the country's psycho-geographical borders – coexisting, clashing and co-infusing over millennia – necessarily makes every attempt to describe an 'Indian' cultural selfhood a manifestly limited endeavour, a further challenge of arriving at even such a limited description emerges from the absence of a linguistic channel through which it can converse with Western psychologies.

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Finding a language for Indian selves in mysticism and mythology

Sudhir Kakar (1982), arguably the most prolific Indian psychoanalyst of our times and the founder of Indian 'cultural psychology', has attested to the fact that the Hindu Self in India – which he sees as anchored into the 'subtle body', also known as 'astral' body, from the Doctrine of the Three Bodies in Vedanta philosophy – "is not primarily a *psychological* category… though it does include something of the Western psyche" (pg. 10, italics mine). Illustrating the gulf between the hermeneutics of subjectivity in psychoanalysis and in India, he points to the difficulties encountered in facilitating with Indian patients the form of introspection which underlies psychoanalytic process – one which seems typified in the Socratic injunction to '*know thyself*'. He places this in opposition with the Hindu injunction to 'know thyself', *atmanamvidhi*, stating that the latter "is related to a Self other than the one referred to by Socrates. It is a self uncontaminated by time and space and thus without the life-historical dimension which is the focus of psychoanalysis" – that is, "the self of Indian philosophy rather than the self of a uniquely personal psychology" (pg. 14). As he points towards the existential divide which separates Freudian psychoanalysis from "the practical, psychophilosophical schools of self-development and self-integration in India" (ibid., pg. 132), he also notes that the latter are "generally grouped together under the common label "mysticism"".

It is interesting to note that the mystical orientation of Indian selfhood, and the philosophical positions from which it grows, has overwhelmingly been explored through the symbols of religious mythology, for religion and philosophy are particularly intertwined in India (see Gavankar, 2015). The place in India of religious philosophy, customs and myths in providing a "basis for identification" (Balodhi, 1996, pg. 119) and giving meaning to self, suffering and healing has been recognised beyond psychoanalysis (for example, in psychiatry, see Whitman, 2007). In psychoanalysis, the "cultural narratives" (Kakar, 2009, pg. 77) which we call myths have been recognised as carrying immense psychic import since Freud's famous theorisation

of the Oedipus complex – however their constructive and integrative function in the Indian psyche may make them more central to individual stories of subjectivity in the region (see Kakar, 2009, 2012, 2024). These "not only convey communal versions of the repressed wishes and fantasies of early childhood… they also reflect the nature of an individual's interpersonal bonds within his culture" (Kakar, 2012, pg. 5) – and perhaps, it is through the nature of the bonds reflected in mystical leanings gleaned from myth, that we can begin to hypothesise a culturally distinct form of relatedness underlying the sense of *home*, a different origin and destination of the self.

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Origin and destination in mystical orientations

Agrawal (2022) tells the Hindu mythological tale of the '*Saagar-Manthan*' – the churning of the ocean of milk by Lord *Indra* and other Hindu *Devas* (Gods) in order to unearth a pot of '*Amrit*', the nectar of immortality, by which they were seeking to undo the effects of a curse placed on them. Recounting the details of the story – the necessity for the Gods to continue churning despite the emergence of hidden horrors from the ocean, for instance – Agrawal finds in it a useful analogy for the psychoanalytic process, while also noting that there are important distinctions between the two. Perhaps one such distinction may lie in the end goal of churning – the pot of *Amrit* – which can be seen as symbolising the desired destination for a distinctly cultural model of the self: immortality, through non-selfhood, and perhaps simultaneously, an all-embracing selfhood, an idea which will be briefly elucidated here.

The mystical flavour of the homely longings of the cultural self in India is perhaps most clearly discerned from the image of death in the Indian psyche, and the immense psychic pull it has exerted through the ages. Megasthanes, c. 300 BC, commenting on the 'essential nature' of the Indian personality, had observed a preoccupation with death, saying that "[t]hey regard this life as, so to speak, the time when the child within the womb becomes mature, and death as a birth into a real and happy life for the votaries of philosophy" (quoted in Kakar, 2012, pg. 7).

The 'birth' at death, for which all life is a maturational process, seems to point towards a liberating (and longed for) dissolution of borders – a 'real'-ness attributed to the real-isation of Oneness. Akhtar (2015), providing a fascinating sketch of the Eastern influences embedded into Freud's concept of the death instinct, observes that reading it through these opens up a new interpretation: "that there is, in humans, a vague, drive-like, internal pull towards the loss of the boundaries, if not the existence, of the psychic self" (pg. 877). While this pull may be easily discerned in the mystical view of the self, it exists perhaps more pervasively, alluded to

by a number of merger fantasies (which, as we know from part a., is an active dimension of the fantasy of 'home') and the numerous other psychical means by which the human desire for subjective oneness manifests. That the Self in India is seen as being a fragment of a divine Other (to which it is therefore identical, with which it is One) – the *atman* carrying and emerging from *Brahman* – provides reason to believe that it is with this Other that it seeks to merge (for home is both origin and destination, as discussed in part a.). This Other-Self perhaps marks the psychically evocative site for the return for which one yearns, the magnetism of homecoming.

It is perhaps through this *merger into a greater, often unknown and unknowable, Other-Self* – carried in the image of death and the divine – that the self attains the sense of *wholeness* associated with the experience of being-at-home (described in part a.). This ideal, prominent in Indian conceptions of Being, is lyrically expressed in the words of Mirza Ghalib – "*Ishrat-e-qatra hai dariya mein fana ho jaana* (literally: "It is pure ecstasy for a raindrop to fall upon a river and lose itself altogether)"" (quoted in Akhtar, 2015, pg. 879). In India, this desire may also be seen as underlying the psychic routes taken in pursuit of actualising the Self through identifying with a boundless Other – evident in what Kakar (2003) refers to as the 'idealising transference', the emphasis on the limitless 'good object' in Indian mothering (Kakar, 2012), and the idealisations in-forming the culturally healing 'guru'-disciple relationship (see Gavankar 2015, Kakar, 1991). It may also be seen as infusing the culturally immense psychic import of the sense of *connected inter-being*, maintained through deep ties with group identity, which has been seen as a significant part of Indian selfhood – see, for example, Kanwal (2015), who makes reference to the Indian ego as one which "is bounded, not so much by the individual body, as by a group corporeality" (pg. 862).

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It is important to express, as Kakar (1991) does, that the mystical experience cannot be entirely psychologised, and so, the dimension of understanding expressed here is only one, to complement other perspectives on the vast and complex phenomena of mysticism – the dimension which is of focus in this research. That is, it has sought to present the mystical psychological possibilities seemingly cathected by cultural orientations in India, and the capacities for Oneness to which they grant their members access – rather than offer a deep commentary on mysticism[34] itself.

It is also important to note the manner in which the psychoanalytic gaze has historically fallen upon such a willingness to dissolve boundaries in what appears to be passive surrender for the sake of connection, as is often found to be privileged in collectivistic societies. Kakar (2012) brings to light how interpreting this as a 'weakness' has been the intellectual heritage of holding to a Eurocentric ideal of ego maturity, possibly since Freud in 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' (1921) likened the 'herd instinct' observable in any group to "a regression of mental activity to an earlier stage such as we are not surprised to find among savages or children" (pg. 116). Retaining in his work the categories of the savage and the primitive, he analysed the relationship of followers to group leader (a possible manifestation of selves to the greater Other), as important for creating enduring group ties, but as Celia Brickman (quoted in Mukherjee, 2021, pg. 6) observed in his interpretation, these relationships seem to "impoverish rather than strengthen psychic structure".

It is perhaps true that experiences of infancy (the 'oceanic feeling' of infantile symbiosis which Freud, drawing from the words of Romain Rolland, associated with the mystical religious experience – see Freud, 1930), particularly an Indian infancy which involves a protracted

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[34] There are indeed different 'types' of mysticism as well, even within the Hindu tradition – eg. Upanishidic mysticism aims to connect with one's deepest essence which is identical to all other living and non-living beings, whereas Yogic mysticism strives for an immortality beyond time, space, and matter (see Kakar, 1991). The bounded nature of this work doesn't allow for a detailed foray into these complexities, yet it must be noted that they exist.

period of dependency without separation, and an extended emphasis on primary-process modes of being (see Kakar, 2012) are reflected in the nature of this mystically-oriented Self. It also seems perhaps reasonable to say that childhood in collectivistic social structures such as that of India (see Kanwal, 2015) follows a developmental path which strengthens some facets of psychic structure, ways of being, more than others. However, to attribute the nature of self-dissolution to only what can be seen through the lens of regression to a developmental past is not only possibly infantilising of an entire people, but also reductive – non-cognisant of its complex spiritual conception as a developmental goal, which perhaps itself influences the cultural approach to infancy and childhood, and can carry its own form of ego strength. As Kakar (2012) writes, in India, "the ideal of psychological wholeness or 'maturity'" – an ideal the previous section linked with the sense of home – "is quite compatible with an ego which is relatively passive and less differentiated" (pg. 7), and the primary-process governing it can be seen as immensely enriching to the inner world. Stanley Kurtz (1992) illustrates the developmental path of this less-differentiated ego – although not in an unproblematic way (for a critique, see Roland, 2005) – through the figure of the Mother Goddess(es) in India, and describes it as a "separation-*integration*" rather than "separation-*individuation*" (pg. 93, italics mine).

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It must be reasserted here that the dimensionality described in this subsection is not to say that it is a purely Eastern/mystical reality - quite the contrary, the position of this thesis as detailed in section i. remains that if there's something universal in psychoanalysis, there must be something universal in mysticism as well. It is similarly not to say that it describes the entire psychical reality of Indians, for as Akhtar (2015) points out that this collective self coexists with more individuated sectors of personality, Kakar (1995) shares how individual the unconscious of his traditional Indian patients was found to be, despite and alongside the cultural

emphasis on the transpersonal, and Kanwal (2015) emphasises the place of privacy and individualism in Indian selfhood. These internal contradictions and paradoxes are perhaps part of the complexity of cultures which make the task of arriving at clear-cut formulations necessarily impossible. In addition, one must bear in mind that, as Freud knew, psychic resistance to culture is also an inviolable inner reality – though perhaps this too coexists with the inseparability of the culture-self, for as Kakar (1982) amply illustrates, most often this resistance itself takes on culturally sanctioned forms.

We began this section with an acknowledgement of the unavoidable limitations to any understanding of 'India' – and having proceeded through it, it's evident that what has been spoken about is really a subsection of Hindu India, to a large extent a male, dominant-caste, Hindu India. There are, of course, psychoanalytic and/or culturally-insightful resources on both other religions (for example, Parker & Siddiqui, 2019) and groups within Hinduism (for example, Shepherd, 2019) which could add substantially to this skeletal understanding and help to make it more representative – however, the task of mining these for their reflections of Indian selves-in-the-world, though immensely valuable, would be too complex to take up without the time for deep and devoted study that it would require. Here, the emphasis is on arriving at a broad-stroked sense of differentiation between the sense of home and the self in psychoanalysis and in 'India', in order to bear this in mind while seeking to understand home and the self psychoanalytically in India. It is intended as a reorientation, more than a deep analysis of the Indian psycho-cultural landscape of identity.

It is hoped that this work, through the narratives which follow, as well as their critical analyses, can open more vistas into relatively invisibilised cultural-psychic landscapes within and beyond this dominant orientation in Indian selfhood: by working, as it does, with some from minority religions, some from marginalised castes, and all who bear the oppression of being *women*, engaged in the struggle to survive several forms of homelessness. Before entering the

stories of these selves, it may be useful to briefly ground oneself in the context of what has already been theorised on women's subjectivity in India – the challenging intrapsychic and socio-cultural circumstances under which they are tasked with building the capacity to be at home in the world, to bear worldly dwelling.

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iii. Gendered subjectivity and the homelessness of Indian women

Cultural hostility and social evil

Perhaps the previous section, in responding to the colonialist bias in historical approaches of psychoanalysis towards cultures which did not easily fit its norms, reads like something of an exaltation of 'Indian' culture and the psychic avenues to which it grants access. Yet, as Kakar (1978, quoted in Narayanan, 2014) puts it, "[b]efore losing ourselves in any self-congratulatory panegyrics, we must also note the gravest drawback of the Indian tradition – its rejection of girls. Rejection, or at best ambivalence towards girls has always worked and continues to do so in a subtle and insidious manner" (pg. 245). Narayanan (2014) stresses how such a panegyric can be a "form of group cohesiveness and identity" (pg. 215) for women despite their exclusion from it – and in being so, can become a 'misogynistic invisibilization of misogyny'. Yet, this exclusionary misogyny exists and brings with it the constant threat of being rendered existentially homeless, through the ministrations of culturally-enforced un-belonging – the absence of a receptive space for subjectivity to (e)merge.

The cultural hostility towards Indian women, the objectification and subjective erasures to which it subjects them, has an ancient history woven into religion. Narayanan (2014) reviews the pioneering cultural, psychoanalytic, and feminist inter-weavings in the work of Kakar to bring this to light, asserting that "[o]utside of relational status, a woman is an object in a man's dream and the subject who is dreaming is not an ordinary man, he is an omniscient lawmaker, ancient misogynist and all potent institutional parent: Manu" (pg. 217). Manu is credited with the *Manusmriti*, a legal text amongst the many *Dharmasastras* of Hinduism – an astoundingly denigrating work towards women (as well as other groups, most pronounced amongst whom are Dalits) which culturally inscribes social attitudes towards them.

The social impact of the rejection of women so deeply embedded in the Indian cultural tradition is well documented – as the introduction to this work showed. Agarwal & Paiva (2014) demonstrate this using a handful of chilling statistics from 2013 which were disseminated as a part of a nationwide campaign on the Indian girl child by a mainstream news channel in India, NDTV. Utilising data from this campaign, they share that "one in two Indian female children were malnourished; that 53% of women in India were illiterate; that India was the most unsafe country in the world for women (pg 152)". High girl child mortality (with female children almost twice as likely to die before reaching the age of five), and neglect in healthcare and nutrition in India are also driven by culturally sustained and reproduced discrimination. It is also an important factor in the challenge of child marriage as a continuing gendered practice in the country - data from the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-V 2019-21, carried out by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India) shows a 23.2% incidence of female child marriage in 2019-2021. Despite the substantial policy push because of which this is a 30% reduction since the first survey conducted in 1992, in absolute numbers, it means that somewhere around a staggering 52 million girls continued to get married before the age of 18. In the worst-performing states of this survey (Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Andhra Pradesh), 1.5 out of every 4 girls in the age bracket surveyed were married while underage. The still-present social practice of dowry is only one of the many instigators of harassment, abuse, and violence in the marital home – a rampant reality which has worsened over the last few years of the Covid-19 pandemic and the extended periods of domestic confinement it brought. According to the NFHS-V, 29.3% of married Indian women between the ages of 18-49 years have faced domestic or sexual violence.

A lifetime of navigating a world where they, as dreaming subjects, are repeatedly unwelcomed across multiple contexts of inhabitation also enacts violence upon the psychic journeys of

womanhood in India – the playing out of maturational processes in a largely debilitating environment, in/from which a sense of self/Self is to be (repeatedly) reached.

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Situating gendered voids in Indian subjectivity

Kakar (2012) notes that the self-esteem of Indian girls "falters during the years of early puberty" (pg. 72), for this is the time when their socialisation into the future roles of daughter-in-law, wife, and mother brings forth a "training in service and self-denial" – the psychosocial installation of a void at the core of gendered subjectivity. In order to ensure access to the narcissistic supplies of familial love and approval, "the girl tends to conform, and even over-conform, to the prescriptions and expectations of those around her". Situating these prescriptions into the religious-cultural landscape of India, he points towards the mythical figure of Sita as a cultural ego ideal– and draws from ancient Hindu texts to illustrate how this ideal pervades the cultural imagery of womanhood as one of "chastity, purity, gentle tenderness and a singular faithfulness which cannot be destroyed or even disturbed by her husband's rejections, slights or thoughtlessness" (pg. 77). Indeed, it is in the pursuit of this ideal that he describes the fate of women's sexual development as one of 'socially enforced progressive renunciation' (pg. 103) – in response to an injunction to erase one's desirous subjectivity (see Narayanan, 2014) and correspondingly attain/retain a sense of value in a devaluing cultural gaze. Haq (2018) has also explored the link, through Sita, between renunciation and 'moral narcissism' amongst Indian women. Basak (2022) finds in the Indian mythological construction of women a path to 'sainthood' through sacrificial selfhood – one which leads to a transformation of altruistic qualities into 'culturally masochistic traits'. However, she also emphasises, and we must bear in mind, that the state of women in India cannot be flattened into this culturally enforced voluntary diminishment – writing that, at times, "her internal resistance to such barbarity is awe-inspiring in reality" (pg. 2) – and making space for bearing witness to this internal resistance is a significant dimension of the ethical project driving this work.

Despite these insights into the sacrificial orientation of Indian womanhood and its cultural tributaries, there remains a dearth of psychoanalytic writing on the 'uncomfortable subject', to draw from the title of Agarwal & Paiva's (2014) paper, of the culturally unwelcome Indian girl child. Responding to this gap, they offer their experience of observing the rejection of the female infant as it plays out in the "daily ordinariness of a middle-class urban family" (pg. 153). Observing the struggles of the female infant to be received in the home around her, they make the poignant observation that it was actually the infant in the mother who was "the least attended to" (pg. 161). The following section from their concluding lines powerfully sheds light on how the subtle erasures of the mother, particularly when she's mother to a girl child, leads to an intergenerational transfer of gendered subjective wounds: for "what the mother brings to the infant in every contact that she makes with her is not only her own fears, anxieties and needs but also those held and felt across generations – the attitude of a society. When an entire culture is unable to allow for the being of the girl, it is a collective abortion of the girl child; a collective responsibility; and a shared wound" (pg. 162). One may so say that it is the cultural rejection of the girl child, carried by her socially neglected mother, which seems to perpetuate gendered erasure.

That the erasure of the girl child draws from the erasure of the mother in a cycle perpetuated by patriarchy is perhaps a more universal reality. Chodorow's (1999) insightful work brought this to light as it theorised a fundamental sense of *lack* in gendered identity formation amongst women, stemming from the social devaluation of the mother and the erasure of her subjectivity. Perhaps similarly, one can attribute the gendered wounds inflicted upon Indian women to cultural constructions of the Mother and motherhood in India - as Narayanan (2014) illustrates, the origins of misogyny can perhaps be traced to the unprocessed loss, and subsequent devaluation, of the mother's world and the dependence experienced in relation to it.

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The trappings of self-sacrifice in Indian motherhood/ womanhood

Chaudhuri (1956) traced the heritage of the Hindu Mother Goddess concept, of particular prominence in ancient Indian cultural traditions, to the shift to primitive food growing, saying that "[p]rimitive food growers regarded the earth, which is the mother of the crops and of every growing thing, as a female principle – the earth mother, and gradually elevated Her into the exalted position of the Mother Goddess" (pg. 126). Against this endlessly giving representation, he analyses the image of Goddess Kali, and the numerous symbols contained therein, to bring to light the wild and powerful dangers embedded into the cultural view of her. Kakar (2012) corroborates the existence of these two polarities underlying patriarchal attitudes towards women in the construction of what he calls the 'maternal-feminine', the primitive fantasy of the woman which is embedded into maternal constructions in the Indian familial and cultural imagination. He writes that "interwoven with the unconscious belief in a safeguarding maternal beneficence is a secret conviction among many Hindu men that the feminine principle is really the opposite – treacherous, lustful, and rampant with an insatiable, contaminating sexuality" (pg. 106). He links this to the high level of socially-enforced dependence of Indian women upon their sons, leading to a number of defences mobilised by the male child in the face of potential envelopment by the mother. Basak (2022) also highlights this split – the paranoid-schizoid construction of the woman as deity and degenerate – and emphasises the core role of motherhood as the path to deification, sainthood, for women, towards which they are conditioned to strive as a way to avoid the dangers of a more violent dehumanisation.

Perhaps, it is this split construction which drives the psycho-cultural confinement of women to the role of the 'good mother', existing only for the relational fulfilment of others, and sacrificial of the self. Yet, more often than not, a self emerges anyway, fortified at least in part by the special forms of affection characterising mother-daughter love (see Kakar, 2012). Kakar brings to light how "in addition to the 'virtues' of self-effacement and self-sacrifice, the feminine role

in India also crystallizes a woman's connections to others" (pg. 72), in some ways confining the recognition of her humanness to relational positions, but perhaps also inadvertently in some ways strengthening her access to relational channels for self-making. The place of female community in enabling this coming-to-life is pointed towards by Kakar – "every female is born into a well-defined community of women within her particular family… the existence of this exclusive sphere of femininity and domesticity gives women a tangible opportunity to be productive and lively, to experience autonomy and to exercise power. It also allows a special kind of inviolate feminine privacy and familiar intimacy" (pg. 71). In the bonds of women, the psychic conditions of possibility for self-making seem to present themselves – and the present work seeks to understand these alongside other potential facilitating channels for relational being, including but not limited to those encountered as a low-income migrant in the city.

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iv. The present work

Kakar (2013) in an opinion article for the newspaper 'Times of India', asks the pertinent question: 'Is the Indian woman a person?' He responds with a qualified yes, and follows with a detailed description of how the woman in India is stripped of personhood outside of relational categories, the sacred roles of daughter/ mother/ sister/ wife. Perhaps his response could have been a more confident 'no', for indeed, as the writers in the section above (including Kakar) have illustrated – there is also a denial of personhood inherent to the relationality of those categories themselves; the roles which require a sacrifice of personhood.

This research, through the narratives which will follow, seeks to understand journeys of self-making in pursuit of the sense of home, as they play out in the dehumanising psycho-cultural conditions of Indian womanhood – and more particularly, in the dehumanising conditions and home-loss which accompany rural to urban forced displacement in the country (discussed in some length in the Introduction). The view being subscribed to here, which places this displacement in its wider lived context of homelessness, is one which sees the loss of home through geographical movement as working through an interplay – not solely a defining moment in itself, but drawing meaning from and acting upon the life which surrounds it (see Papadopoulos, 2021). In addition to this interplay, and through the one between cultural and psychoanalytic meaning frameworks, this research also hopes to argue, as Mukherjee (2021) does, "for technologies of subjectivity such as psychoanalysis to be made international, culturally translatable, and socially accessible", particularly for their meaningful application to the complex study of human displacement, geographical and gendered (and often both), in the non-Western world.

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PART 2 | Empirical Exploration: Home in the lives of Indian women migrants

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a. On knowing: pillars and process

The previous chapter (a review of existing literature) attempted to sketch out, and contextualise, a number of *ontological* dimensions of the central theme upon which this undertaking is anchored – 'home'. In the process, given the intimate connection between ideas of home and the self, it also perhaps implicitly laid the groundwork for the ontology of subjectivity that imbues the empirical portion of this work: a multidimensional subjectivity relationally made and contextually (culturally-politically and spatio-temporally) embedded – sometimes in quite a fraught way, always in process, never wholly whole, and not fully accessible to consciousness, verbal articulation or formal thought. This ontological stance – more in line with the social constructivist position, wherein reality is viewed as contextually situated and interactionally produced in research encounters – drove the choice of *epistemological* and *methodological* paradigms which, combined with the *ethical* considerations particular to this research context, determined the nature and use of *methods* through the research lifecycle.

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i. Working in and through the psychosocial

The approach one takes towards knowing is perhaps always informed simultaneously by what is sought to be known, the context of the seeking, and the motivations behind it. In this case, that may be summarised as 'a project to understand the sense of home amongst inter-sectionally marginalised women who have moved/been moved[35] from rural to urban India, dually driven by a psychosocial curiosity and an ethical-political imperative' – the latter being essential to justify research into lived experiences of suffering (Turton, 1996, Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). In other words, this is in essence the study of a relational experience, "within a life-historical, contextual, and dynamic frame" (Vahali, 2003, pg. 28), undertaken with a specific intent to both understand and respond meaningfully to lived situations laden with precarity[36].

The emphasis on the relational, as elaborated in the previous chapter and in the political context of this work, places it in the realm of the 'psychosocial', located at the intersections and paths of interchange between psychic and social worlds (see Frosh, 2008). This necessitates a number of epistemological and methodological negotiations, for as Rustin (2008) emphasises, there is "no one right way of doing psychosocial studies" (pg 411). A critical, pluralistic outlook forms the theoretical worldview of the psychosocial realm – research activities operating here are typically committed to 'transdisciplinarity' in a manner than seeks to de-colonially disrupt disciplinary authority (see Frosh, 2019) by moving in 'unsettling' ways across disciplinary boundaries. Yet, within this dynamic multiplicity, Frosh also notes the privileged place of psychoanalysis – "because of its well developed conceptual vocabulary that can be put to use to theorise the psychosocial subject" (Frosh, 2019, pg 101, as demonstrated perhaps through the theoretical background) – a position that it retains in this research partly by virtue of being

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[35] Papadopoulos (2021) has elaborated the problems surrounding questions of 'agency' which complicate the distinctive binary of 'voluntary vs. forced migration' – this is perhaps even more acute at the intersectional nexus of gender and social class

[36] Butler (2010) has distinguished socio-politically derived 'precarity' from other forms of individual vulnerability or 'precariousness'

my core disciplinary affiliation as the researcher, and partly because of its own focus, which skews towards the understanding of subjectivity and subjective experience (in relationship to the outer world and it's structures, but perhaps without scrutinising them as rigorously).

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The extent and manner of 'using' psychoanalysis in psychosocial research, as well as its interactions with other knowledge paradigms which inform it, is not without controversy – numerous debates, which cannot be reviewed here but will be briefly contextualised in the next subsection, keep this growing field in a state of creative tension, and perhaps keep the psychosocial researcher as chronically unsettled as their tasks of knowing. As Lapping (2011) explores, psychoanalysis itself – its concepts, formulations and ways of seeing – must undergo transformation when they spill out of the clinic and into the social world[37], and so, it becomes the work of each individual researcher to tussle with such transformations and transdisciplinary transfusions in the particular context of their own work. Personally, I found this a simultaneously mind-boggling and fascinating place to be.

A crucial feature of psychosocial research – not least because of the subjective agency that the researcher must exercise in crafting it – is that of reflexivity, "a potentially subversive procedure in which there is analysis of the conditions of emergence of knowledge as well as the apparent objects of knowledge themselves" (Frosh, 2019, pg. 103). On this attribute, it is strikingly aligned with psychoanalytic, as well as feminist, methodologies – both of which have made significant contributions towards recent methical shifts in social science scholarship (for example, Fine, 2016): those which have continually been moving it towards spaces that

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[37] It's worth noting that the psychosocial also helps reciprocally examine ways in which the social world spills into the clinic, although this is not in focus here

are accountable, anti-oppressive, embodied, and, perhaps most significantly, *insistently human* (Bissell, 2018).

The next subsection will briefly explore key facets of these overarching ways of knowing, and their nuances in relationship to the approach of this research, before moving into the more specific level of its ethical considerations and design.

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ii. Feminist and psychoanalytic-phenomenological ways of knowing

A number of problems in the historically dominant praxis of knowledge (such as a denial of epistemic authority to women, a disadvantaging of feminine ways of knowing and relating, an invisibilisation of gendered power relations and their role in lived phenomena – for a detailed historical context, see Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019) gave rise to feminist epistemologies. Feminist epistemologies – a term used loosely here to encapsulate the overarching features spread across feminist empiricism, standpoint epistemologies, and various social-constructionist forms – have transformed knowledge production activities in the social sciences over the preceding decades (see, for example, Harding, 1993, Reinharz, 1992, Haraway, 1988, Smith, 1987). They have done so by offering worldviews which are distinct from and serve to counter those derived from a patriarchal intellectual tradition, bringing into question "ideas about the basic nature of human beings, the nature of social life, the taken-for-granted world-view of traditional science, what concepts and questions might help to illuminate our shared condition, and how we should go about developing such knowledge" (Acker, Berry, & Esseveld, 1991, pg. 136).

Deriving from these ways of seeing, feminist research sensibilities have developed to involve attentiveness to the complex and overlapping systems of power in which a research enterprise is embedded, not merely in its knowledge products, but in the production process itself – what Harding (1993) has called the "context of discovery", that is, the research encounter in which differently situated subjectivities meet, relate and respond to each other from historically, locally, and personally determined locations, in a process that is intersubjectively emergent. They have also correspondingly expanded the ways in which knowing takes place: beyond the male-dominated intellectual heritage of objectivity, separateness, and distance (Riger, 1992), feminist approaches move one toward connectedness and empathy as ways of knowing, recognising that "[e]very researcher enters the field with one's intuition, sensibilities,

sensitivities, commitments, positionality, a receptive and open attitude, a feeling heart and a thinking mind" (Vahali, 2003, pg. 30). Finally, feminist ways of seeing and knowing are also distinctive in their strivings – and in seeking exploration rather than control, they make room for and attempt to invite in multiple voices and meanings (Stapele, 2014).

By these qualities, feminist research has importantly, and quite radically, challenged the dualisms which have characterised a positivistic mainstream (Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993) and transformed the way in which one views the place of subjectivity in knowledge-seeking, the nature of the subjects who form the relationship of researcher and researched, as well as their relational realms of possibility. In aligning with this tradition, this research took on a qualitative approach emphasising freedom and flexibility, open-endedness, and a wider view – and therefore, more deliberate and deliberative design – of the research 'field'[38]: of which both researcher and researched were a part, intimately identifying with and alienated from one another through the workings of the social systems they carried.

The distinctive contributions of psychoanalysis to human endeavours at understanding humans can be strikingly well-aligned with such an approach – and the mutually-transformative junctures of the two theoretical paradigms, of psychoanalysis and feminism, are continually in the process of being explored[39].

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Psychoanalysis as a system of thought, in and of itself, has always been disruptive, for as Erikson (1964, pg. 12) wrote, "the psychoanalytic method must remain forever a 'controversial tool', a tool for the detection of that aspect… which in a given historical period is being

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[38] A reflection upon which is offered in the form of an afterword to this thesis

[39] A number of thinkers such as Nancy Chodorow, Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Jessica Benjamin, Luce Irigaray and others have utilised the knowledge systems of feminism and psychoanalysis to develop immensely significant understandings of subjectivity, the social world, and the enmeshment of the two

neglected or exploited, repressed or suppressed". The subversive potential of psychoanalysis has been engraved in its barest bones – that is, the discovery of what Freud called the unconscious, which permanently destabilised the way in which Cartesian man understood himself (pronouns deliberate). It has a long and complex history of transgressing the borders of the clinic into the study of historical, political, social, and cultural life (because of which Stamenova & Hinshelwood, 2018, have referred to psychoanalytic research as a "hybrid") – deployed to consider "the unconscious motives of leaders, the dynamics of groups, the pathologies of institutions, the seductions of ideologies or even, most dubiously, the 'character' of entire nations" (Pick & Rose, 2022, pg. xvii).

The applications of psychoanalysis in social research have derived not only from the direct usage of its core concepts towards broadened phenomena (such as the unconscious, or key theories such as those of the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions – see, as an example, Altman, 2021), but also through the unique characteristics of the 'psychoanalytic subject', and the ways in which such a subject can be known. It has been highlighted that there is "no one settled version of 'psychoanalysis' (as theory, mode of inquiry, or form of therapy), any more than there is a consensus upon its appropriate social, cultural or political applications" (Pick & Rose, 2022, pg. xvii) – yet, what has been asserted from it's very beginnings (Freud, 1926) is that it holds something of value to other disciplines, "specifically, a capacity to theorize subjectivity in a way that is provocative and unique" (Frosh, 2010, pg. 36).

Psychoanalysis, by this capacity, has much to offer psychosocial research activities – specifically so in the context of involuntary dislocation and social suffering. It allows, even cherishes, complexity in subjectivity – and recognises that subjects are not transparently accessible but 'idiosyncratically defended', possessing a "confused and contradictory relationship to knowing and telling about themselves" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, pg. 3). It also, in line with the feminist emphasis on reflexivity, emphasises routes to knowing which

travel through the self[40], deepening these through an appreciation of the ways "each person "uses" the other, unacknowledged and unconsciously" (Frosh, 2008, pg. 360). But perhaps most significantly, by offering developmental accounts of subjectivity which operate essentially in a relational framework (and perhaps in its very notion of 'psychic reality', see Frosh, 2008), it carries the potential to meaningfully overcome the inner-outer dualism which plagues attempts to arrive at appropriate psychosocial understandings. In unveiling the 'ordinary human suffering[41]' experienced in primary relations which underlies the formation of 'symptoms', perhaps it also offers a language for the later relational contours of human pain – a mode of expression capable of resisting the medicalised pathologisation that accompanies the individualisation of 'mental' anguish, recognising that seemingly individual interiority is formed through interaction with the external, through imbibing the external, and through reacting to the external.

Despite these merits and potentials, however, the 'wild'[42] applications of psychoanalysis have also been quite widely critiqued (as mentioned in the previous subsection), perhaps because those who deploy them continue to privilege the 'inner' over the 'outer' (Frosh, 2008) – and within that, the developmental 'inner' embedded in formative psychic structures derived from early childhood, more than the subsequent transformation of this space through ongoing social and environmental relations (see Wetherall, 2003). In this process, it often continues to be predicated on a problematic dualism even as it seeks to transcend it, and has been accused of arriving at claims with deterministic tendencies. Perhaps these problems also derive from the "master-slave relationship" (Bar-Haim, Coles, & Tyson, 2022, pg. xxiv) psychoanalysis has tended towards in its conversations with other disciplines, colonising them as a factor of its

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[40] Kakar (1996) expresses this most eloquently as he writes that "the analyst understands the patient only in so far as he or she understands the disturbance the patient evokes in himself or herself" (pg. 15).

[41] Recalling the term used by Papadopoulos (2021) to describe negative consequences of involuntary dislocation, which are too often, harmfully and inaccurately, subsumed by the psychiatric and social discourse on 'trauma'

[42] Phillips (1993) has appropriately, in my view, referred to Freud as the 'prototype of the "wild analyst"' (pg. 2)

own authoritative, patriarchal tendencies[43], emphasising repeatedly what other disciplines may take from psychoanalysis, and not correspondingly (as a feminist sensibility may compel one to do) – what can psychoanalysis learn from others?

Bar-Haim, Coles, & Tyson (2022) have called for a re-engagement with these questions, a possible re-wilding of psychoanalysis through thoughtful interactions with, and even violations of, its borders – emphasising "the extent to which psychoanalysis is vitalised by its contact and engagement with the limits of its own knowledge" (pg. xxvii). Recognising that it's not enough to simply extend psychoanalytic ideas out of the clinical situation, one must seek to rethink these for a "different context of investigation and expression" (Frosh, 2008, pg. 363) – one located in a broadened world, with expanded and multi-directional meaning-making processes, wherein modes of understanding are not equivalent to the analytic relationship and do not, and perhaps cannot, offer the depth of insight which can translate into analytic certainty, and the resulting production of grand, totalising narratives.

With this in mind, I found myself drawn towards borrowing from the phenomenological research paradigm, and the principles of knowing it can add to psychoanalytic knowing – a thinking frame which is not only well-fitted to psychoanalysis in the social sphere (Finlay, 2008, Ricoeur, 1986, Stolorow & Atwood, 1984), but also feminism (Garko, 1999). In this, I drew largely from the key focus of phenomenological research on 'lived experience', its philosophical stance of subjectivity as being-in-the-world (Adams, 1999), residing in – and knowable through – 'everyday ordinariness'. Its view of temporality as circular (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016), by which meanings deriving from the past influence future events in somewhat the same measure as future events retrospectively rewrite the past, was also something I held in mind. In the consummation of these influences, I hoped to retain space

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[43] Despite these historical tendencies, the very nature of psychoanalysis can be decolonial in the way it dismantles authority in the analyst-analyysand relationship – see Nandy, 2004

for the importance of psychoanalytic (especially developmental, see Hollway, 2006) insight, without holding to it too tightly at the exclusion of the wider 'life-world' in which experience, and the experiencing self, is (continually re-)created. The "enlivening and diverse redescriptions" (Philips, 1993, pg. 4) such a 'promiscuous' psychoanalysis can produce are what were of interest to me, taking as their object of study a nuanced, layered, inexhaustible form of life which is "always unexamined – or endlessly examinable" (ibid.).

The interweaving of these three knowledge systems – feminism, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology – was felt to be necessary for research which was carried out at social margins, and which sought to examine a subjective experience (that is, homeness) which is in essence also a relational, 'outer' experience, layered with multidirectional, conscious, non-conscious and unconscious, complexities. It birthed the research process, informing each decision taken along the way – the details of which will be presented in the next subsection. Yet alongside, and in playful relationship with, this deliberate and deliberative crafting of methods and process was my ordinary human sensitivity, relying upon itself and 'what felt right' in respectful intersubjective encounters. In this, I was influenced by and remained conscious of the words of Hollway & Jefferson: "[r]esearch is only a more formalised and systematic way of knowing about people, but in the process it seems to have lost much of the subtlety and complexity that we use, often as a matter of course, in everyday knowing" (2000, pg. 3).

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iii. Building bricks and mortar: echoes in the 'doing' of research

While the previous subsection outlined some of the ideological and philosophical – epistemological and methodological – commitments which shaped this research, alongside my own subjective responsiveness, this portion will translate these into the more tangible sphere of 'doing' research: the methods employed, and the ways in which they were used. While these drew in large part from these more overarching research alignments, they were equally determined by its particular context: the *ethical* dimensions of psychosocial research (which are complex, nuanced and at the forefront of methodological considerations, see Frosh, 2019), and within that, research with social suffering of the kind experienced by displaced women in India.

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Ethical Considerations

The ethical plan for this research, reviewed and approved by the Departmental Ethics Officer of the University of Essex (under applications numbers ETH2122-1170 and ETH2223-0364), was the outcome of engaging deeply with the specifics of the situation in which I was carrying out research. In this plan, which included an extensive docket of procedural guidelines around risk management, data management, and the plan for participant recruitment, informed consent and interviewing, a careful consideration of the research context birthed a series of emergent negotiations of research priorities, with direct consequences for the use of methods. For instance, aware of the risks surrounding intimate disclosures – for women in India who are often socially censored and bound to protect the 'honour' of the family and household by keeping its secrets – considerations of privacy and anonymity were prioritised, and drove the decision to carry out interviews in Hindi so that they could consist of direct expression without reliance on a translator. Similarly, keeping in mind the limited levels of formal literacy amongst participants, issues of consent, accountability and transparency on the part of the researcher were felt to be crucial and in-formed the research design. Finally, with respect for the difference in social positions occupied by researcher and researched, and the dynamics of power between us, the subjective agency of participants felt important to protect (through, for instance, participant-led decisions on the number and duration of interviews), as did keeping a critical attitude to the manner in which I was receiving their communications (through the 'reflexivity' which imbues the psychosocial spirit, including – though not limited to – a considered appreciation of cultures and cultural worldviews).

These ethical priorities intermingled with methodological orientations in the navigation of every step of the research process – presented somewhat sequentially in the next subsection, but with the acknowledgment of the blurry lines between stages, the messy, frequently

overwhelming and regularly enlivening overlaps and iterative, to-and-fro movements I went through in the actual experience of its coming to be.

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The Journey through Research Stages

<u>Finding participants</u>

The core question around which this research was organised – how do women develop and sustain a *sense* of home in the world, in the face of both *politico-symbolic* and *material-spatial* homelessness – determined who it was that I wanted to interview: women who had been dually displaced by both gender and migration. While any group of migrant women, or for that matter, perhaps even married women (given that marriage is the largest contributor to the physical displacement of women in India), could perhaps have been interviewed for this, my particular interest in working with rural-urban migrant workers was driven by a wish to engage with their specific life experiences amidst intersectional forms of precarity, and their contestations with challenges encountered in ever-swelling Indian cities – as detailed in the Introduction. Somewhere in the mix of motivations for this were also my personal experiences of being raised and cared for by women migrant workers (such as Kanchan *didi*, from the anecdote shared in the preface), whose lives I could not see as a child – yet whose activities of intersubjective seeing were crucial in my own relational formation.

Beyond this overarching participant profile sought through what is known as 'purposive' sampling, I searched for only a multiplicity – in age, life-stage, occupation, regional background, religion and caste, and motivations for movement – not in order to be representative of some wider whole, but to remain wary of any claims to representativeness, and attend instead to the unique individuality and life conditions of each person, within the context of some common experiences and a certain situational commonality. With this spirit, which did not intend to any cross-sectional analysis that would have required some forms of balancing the 'sample' through the equal representation of different sub-groups, it was only the plurality which was felt to be important to resist reifications in findings – and a number of

skews were allowed to enter and remain, coming as they did as a natural outcome of the approach taken to building research relationships while entering the 'field'.

The notion of a research 'field' may in itself carry exploitative/ extractive connotations, and so, in trying to veer away from these, I chose to first and foremost begin building authentic relationships within the communities whose lives I wished to understand – those residing in urban villages, which act as catchment settlements for the city's migrant workers. I volunteered for a period of a year with The Community Library Project[44], a non-governmental organisation whose work in these urban settlements upholds a participatory and emancipatory politics I admire, running for their members a research workshop that culminated in their own research projects, and offering support to research activities. While there was one participant with whom I built a relationship as a direct consequence of this association, there were others with whom I developed a familiarity by regularly being in and moving through these spaces, whom I was either able to interview or through whose reference I was able to connect with others. Personal referrals, through people I encountered here and those I already knew, were so the principle mode of seeking participation.

Taking a relational route, travelling through networks of familiarity, to finding participants was informed both by a feminist sensibility, as well as by an understanding of degrees of risk and mistrust present in relation to what I was asking about. This expressed itself in the ways in which most participants responded to my initial introduction – usually with a long period of hesitation which had to be respected, and which demanded of me as the researcher to tolerate extended periods of waiting without following up (stretching up to a few months, after making initial contact and before beginning interviewing). It also expressed itself in the informed consent process[45] – in which most of the privacy I was offering was felt to be unimportant, but

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[44] For information on the organisation, visit https://www.thecommunitylibraryproject.org/
[45] Carried out orally with the help of a participant information sheet and informed consent script

the only times in which I was asked to keep something to myself and not include it in the research findings were those in which it was possible for family members to perceive what they shared as a relational betrayal. Through such observations, the process of collecting 'data' began during the process of seeking participation – and only became more formalised in the actual conduct of interviews.

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Data collection

Reinharz (1992) has emphasised the need for interviewee-guided research, highlighting the attitude of care which often marks woman-to-woman conversing – and holding this in mind, largely unstructured interviews were envisaged as the primary data collection 'tool' of this study. Toolan (1988, 2001) has revealed how such an approach allows an interviewee to "assert their authority to tell, to take up the role of knower" (pg. 33) – a position of power which I hoped could counter, to some extent, the power differential lurking through the research relationship. The minimally structured interview is also in line with psychoanalytic ways of knowing, which occur "between the poles of the predictable and unpredictable, the disciplined and the spontaneous, the methodical and the intuitive" (Ogden, 1989, pg 194). With this in mind, while I carried with me an interview guide drawn up to unfold research questions into interview questions, I placed it (physically and psychically) aside during interviews – consulting it only towards the end to see if any significant area had gone unaddressed in the course of natural conversation, using it in a manner more directional than prescriptive.

Drawing from psychoanalytic thought, I used the sensibility that underlies the 'Free Association Narrative Interview' (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) – introducing a broad theme (eg. the meaning of home, home in early childhood, the experience of dislocation-relocation etc. – based on areas they'd touched upon) for exploration in each interaction, and allowing the

subjectivities of my participants to occupy that theme as they wished, and navigate from there in whichever way they were inclined to do. While I'd anticipated conducting these interviews following the informed consent process – in practice, they began during it. All those with whom I worked began to respond as soon as I introduced my research topic, such that it became the overarching theme for the first interview. A brief exchange below illustrates how this entry point unfolded:

> *Me: So basically, my name is Ekta and as Ms. S mentioned, I'm studying for my PhD at a University called the University of Essex. And I have approached you to invite you to participate in my research because, in this, I want to understand what having one's own home or one's own place, especially for women – the experience of having one's own place, the feeling which is associated with having one's own place –*

> Participant: (*interrupts*) see, let me tell you one thing. If we are to look at reality, then in reality, for a woman – there is no home. For any girl, for as long as she is unmarried, they call it her mother-father's house, after getting married it is the in-law's house, so for a girl, is there anything she can put her name on? Like this is my daughter-in-law's house – that wouldn't work, right?

Four to six interviews were planned over a span of two to three months of weekly or fortnightly engagement with a set of six to nine participants – in order to cover, with meaningful plurality, the range of dimensions I sought to explore. Repeated meetings, with extended gaps, were also envisaged to avoid reaching any form of understanding too quickly or carelessly[46], and to allow for time between sessions to have its own effect[47] in the creative research process. Above all

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[46] Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom (2008, pg. 130) have used the term 'bridling' to encourage an attitude akin to 'negative capability' amongst researchers

[47] Vahali (2003, pg. 32) has pondered over how "whatever is touched in interaction, and consequently, whatever is provoked and evoked in the unconscious of the participant, begins to have its own effect, evoke its associations, form its linkages and create its linkages."

else, this was a decision driven by the understanding that what I was asking about involved remembering and narrativising experiences of intense affectivity, as well as feeling-states which remained outside of 'experience' proper – and in the act of asking about and bearing witness to these testimonies (Laub, 1992a, 1992b), I became involved in the creation and recreation of the lived events which produce the story of a self, which required to be seen through to a point of 'good-enough' completion (see Vahali, 2021). That such a sensibility was essential was evident in how, following the initial period of hesitation, the interviews took on a life of their own, with participants sometimes reaching out themselves in order to schedule subsequent interactions, and indicating on their own when they were done narrating – usually with some version of the phrase, "that's it, now I've told you everything".

As mentioned, the interviews 'took place' in Hindi, the language shared between me and my participants, although not necessarily the one with which either of us was most comfortable. This allowed me to more fiercely protect their privacy, by foregoing reliance on a translator or transcriber, and to communicate directly in a manner more conducive to interpersonal intimacy – however, it also curtailed access to forms of subjective expression, and associated self-states, that perhaps only reside in one's 'mother tongue'. The limited vocabulary employed for communicating feeling-states – which "testifies to the… experience of being devalued by an indifferent social ambiance" (Vahali, 2015, pg. 238) in the city where the language was picked up – was counteracted to a degree by the broadened field of communication to which psychoanalysis grants access.

Physically, the interviews were conducted in places selected by participants – usually those which also belonged to neither of us – either in the homes of others (such as a neighbour, family member or employer), or in public areas nearby, wherever they felt most comfortable. I often carried along a flask of tea – keeping in mind the special place the hot beverage occupies in conversational exchanges in India and elsewhere – and soon realised this also played a

meaningful role in fostering trust and connectedness, deriving perhaps from the symbolic power of eating and drinking together in a caste society. My own role in these interviews was relatively quiet, non-directive but constantly present and responding – less focused on excavating 'truth' than "creating the conditions under which a thoughtful conversation can take place" (Frosh, 2008, pg. 362). An example of this kind of interchange is given below:

Participant: This is what happens. So for a woman, in truth and reality, is there any home? There isn't, right? That is why – one goes to one's in-laws – when a young girl is living as a small child in her mother and father's house, then there is no fear. Then she says this is mine-mine. When she gets married, how a girl's heart breaks, isn't it? When she goes to an alien home, how will she stay?

Me: To live amongst strangers can be so scary…

Participant: To live amongst strangers – how will she do it? For me – when I got married, I remained sick for 1 or 2 years. I fell sick after getting married.

Me: With the sadness and fear, or?

Participant: With fear. I was extremely fearful. I mean, I got married at a very young age; I was married at 12 years. When I was 13, when that was my age, at 13 years, I had my son. But I was so scared – even though I was pregnant – I was pregnant, but I still used to starve. When my son was born, he was 700 grams, my son. A 700 gram baby! That is also God's will, humans have no control over it – what God does, He does. If he wants to save someone, no one can kill them. But, that is the thing, when I got married, I didn't know anything. When I started to fall sick, then my in-laws – if I fell sick, if I'm pregnant and not eating – as long as I'm cooking, my in laws and everyone, I would feed. And I'm the oldest daughter-in-law. After feeding everyone, there would be no vegetables left. This was the personal situation of our house – there

would be no vegetables left. Even though there were no vegetables left, I'd take a fistful

of food and add some salt, eat and have some water, and get up. Sometimes I would eat

– I didn't eat every day. Only when I felt like it, when I was too hungry, I would eat and

drink some water – I'd drink a lot of water, all the time, to not be hungry.

Me: You'd create a feeling of fullness with water?

Participant: Yeah, I'd fill myself with water.

While creating these conditions – those of ordinary receptiveness – I also wanted to provide a quality of presence which could be of use to my research participants in their immediate context. That is, the collecting of 'data' also hoped to give something back – and for this fruitful exchange to take place, I kept in mind the adversity-grid[48] framework developed by Papadopoulos (2021), to make internal space in myself for seeing, and listening and responding to, their multiplicities and the layers of experiences co-infusing in their narrations. It was also partly with this intent that I sought to include the tool of expressive art in the interview process.

The relationship between art and healing is an ancient one, and the (albeit limited) use of an arts-informed approach in this work stems simultaneously from a therapeutic intent, a wish to better address my research questions, and, to a lesser degree – given the role visual arts have played in my own life – perhaps also the subjective desire to bring together (borrowing from the words of Leavy, 2015) my 'scholar-self' with my 'artist-self'.

The process of making art can, in itself, be richly beneficial to the maker: inhabiting the realm of what Winnicott (1971) calls 'transitional experience'. This has been described as a "mode of fantasy that opens the way back to reality" (Searle & Streng, 2001, pg. 4), by offering a temporary unintegration through the disappearance of ordinary consciousness wherein one

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[48] A framework which allows one to see, and correspondingly show, the range of consequences experiences of adversity have upon a person – often impacting them both positively and negatively, along with maintaining an area of resilience which the event couldn't override

continues to be held in the 'holding' of attention, from which one can pass to arrive at a newer, perhaps fuller, reintegration (see Milner, 2010, 1950, 1955). Knafo (2012) has offered a dense account of the relational processes an artist in the situation of solitude is engaged in, and how works of art so created can offer containing or self-object properties – and so, perhaps it can be particularly useful in engaging with the subjectivities of women, and the narcissistic wounds often effected in these through gendered development.

The political implications of using art in research – a choice which makes research more exploratory, collaborative, empowering, and ethically engaged – have been explored by a number of writers (see, for example, Finley, 2008, Leavy, 2015, McIntyre, 2004, Bissell, 2018). Its usefulness to the specific life contexts of involuntary dislocation – which are filled with multiplicity, and deal predominantly with the memory, imagination, and day-to-day experience of sensuous, affective, embodied, and culturally-mediated realities – have also been elaborated upon (see Lenette, 2019, Nunn, 2017). In enquiring into the affectively laden yet difficult to articulate territory of 'home', in lives where home has been lost and recreated (possibly multiple times), it seemed well-poised to not only facilitate meaningful remembrances out of associations embedded in images (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, pg. 127), but to engage tentatively with unconscious phantasy life through an active, agentic process of recovery (a form of reparation through symbol formation which can be seen as characteristic of the work of mourning, see Segal, 1952).

I carried pens, pencils, crayons and sheets of paper with me to the interviews, and when we were a few interactions in and a basic level of comfort had been reached, introduced them to my participants – as an optional activity to engage in. I asked them to reflect for a few minutes about whatever came to mind when they thought of their home and, if they would be comfortable and feel like it, bring it onto the paper: whether by drawing, or simply placing colours as symbols for what they had imagined, or giving me verbal descriptions to draw out,

as they liked. Nearly all were encountering such materials for the first time since their school days, decades in the past – and while some were uncomfortable or intimidated by them and didn't take them up, some found themselves reminiscing in new ways in their company, spontaneously bringing in memories from what they had felt like and how they'd experienced the world when they were that young, and sometimes bringing in memories of the physical surround of their childhood homes through richly evocative descriptions, and simple but telling illustrations (see image).

A participant's drawing of her home in the village

The collection of data was not only through relational observations, spoken words, and occasionally, the use of art – following the psychoanalytic method, it consisted of a variety of forms of 'listening' (see Akhtar, 2013): to gaps, silences, contradictions, unities and continuities (see Kakar, 1990), voice intonations and the musical dimension of speech (see Mancia, 2007), the body, the presence and play of social and cultural discourses, and my own felt experiences, reveries (see Holmes, 2018), and transferential[49] reactions.

In this way and many others, I was actively involved in the creative process of this research, reflexively[50] shaping it with a sense of spontaneity while remaining tethered to its overarching frame – and as a result, perhaps no hard line between data 'collection' and 'analysis' can be drawn.

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[49] Frosh (2008) has highlighted the need to rethink cherished psychoanalytic ideas like transference and countertransference for the non-clinical encounter of research, which is driven by the desire of the researcher rather than that of the researched. In light of this, my usage of the term here is relatively broad – referring to the evocations in my being by which I felt my way into some intersubjective (rather than infantile attachment-oriented, see Parker, 2010) dynamics unfolding in the research relationship

[50] For more on using one's 'self' in research, see Finley & Gough, 2003 or Etherington, 2004

Data analysis

In a sense, the analysis of data began as soon as it came to me, in the manner in which I heard, experienced, and registered it – the frames of reference in relation to which I received it. I maintained a diary to capture my associations and the immediate reverberations of each meeting in my own being, in which I also included some observations of life, particularly pertaining to women's mobility and sociality, gathered from my time spent in urban village spaces. As a formal process of analysis, however, recognising that the 'data' gathered was largely in the form of life histories and stories, to which the Indian introspective spirit is predominantly inclined (see Kakar, 1982, pg. 13), a psychoanalytically-informed *narrative* analysis, guided by techniques borrowed from Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was undertaken. This meeting of forms was particularly driven by the dual commitments to stay experience-near, and also offer an understanding of *structures* of experience, "the distinctive configurations of self and object that shape and organize a person's subjective world" (see Stolorow & Atwood, 1984, pg. 98). Both these levels of analysis were necessary, I believe, as they pertained to the conscious and unconscious[51] dimensions/ experiences of home.

In order to do this, I worked with the data using two kinds of temporal ordering[52] – the 'order of the told' in the interview situation, and the more chronological and smoothened 'order of the telling' (used for the representation of 'findings'). 'The order of the told' was what I transcribed, capturing the pauses and hesitations which were an authentic part of dialogue (in line with the recommendations of Smith et. al, 2022) – listening and re-listening to audio recordings to get them down, and then reading and re-reading the transcripts. A specific focus on language, the meanings behind and embedded into the specific words used, was an

[51] Not the repressed unconscious, but the implicit, procedural, relational unconscious spoken of in the theoretical background
[52] Expanded upon in Mishler's model of narrative analysis – see Kim, 2016

intractable part of transcribing, as it included the difficult work of translation. In this, I relied upon seeking clarifications from participants to unearth multiple articulations of the same feelings and sensations as a way to come closer to their personal meanings, focusing attention on the narrative and affective contexts in which the words were spoken, and exploring the literal, etymological meanings they carried, alongside their varied uses.

As I visited and revisited each of the transcripts, I layered on 'exploratory comments', including my own 'fore-conceptions' (Finlay, 2008, pg. 27) or hermeneutic position (see Conroy, 2003), leading eventually to 'conceptual comments' (See Smith et. al, 2022, or Walker, 2018) which – taken together – led to the emergence of themes. Agreeing with Dhar (2020) as she speaks of the suitability of thematic analysis and representation in research conducted with a worldview that is "far from the birthplace of most psychological and methodologies theories" (pg. 9), I worked with a bucketing of comments into broad, overarching themes and, combining these with further theoretical explorations and reflections, found something of a story beginning to emerge.

For theoretical explorations to flesh out and further contextualise the emergent understandings from the process of analysis, and to engage transdisciplinarily as 'psychosocial' research demands, I drew inspiration from the notion of '*bricolage'*. 'Bricolage' in research, a term coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, signals an approach in which researchers "dare to take materials from their immediate environment, "whatever they can lay their hands on," even if these are vastly different, to assemble them and create a new innovative whole" (Ben-Asher, 2022). To this end, in addition to psychoanalysis, I turned to a multiplicity of sources of insight: including academic articles from allied fields, journalism, films & media, poetry, cultural studies, religion & mythology, literature, and others. These are reflected in the theorisations that constitute the chapter on 'Discussion of Findings' – however, prior to that, the process of writing the findings themselves also involved the making of methodical choice.

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<u>Re-presentations in words</u>

Academic writing has been accused of being dry, barren of the messy complexity which characterises real life, and devoid of the humanness of both the narrating researcher as well as the lives they seek to portray in narrative form (see Pollock & Bono, 2013, Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008). With this in mind, I chose to write with a non-dualistic (Fischer, 2016) and 'scenic' (Hollway, 2011) sensibility – more traditionally characteristic of the writing of poetry and literature, yet in line with a phenomenological attitude, as well as one which is deeply psychoanalytic – best conveyed in the words of Ogden (1997), as he writes that "[i]n attempting to capture something of the experience of being alive in words, the words themselves must be alive" (pg. 4).

The following section then, on the 'findings', contains a patchwork of varied experiences thematically organised and chronologically ordered, and written in a manner that seeks to preserve the "vitality of participants' voices" (Hollway, 2011, pg. 92), re-present their complexity and multiplicity, and remain close to – and attempt to bring into the context of representation – the subjective experience of the research encounter.

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b. In search of home: on that which was found

In line with the writing approach laid out in the previous part, this one marks a somewhat sharp departure from the theoretical towards the empirical – from the conceptual to the experiential – before returning to the level of the conceptual in the theorisations which will be presented across subsequent chapters. It begins with a brief introduction to participants of this study, and then moves into foregrounding the linguistic challenges encountered in the task of translating with them the experiential *sense* of home – offering an exploration of expressions of that sense in Hindi, as they were co-evolved in research. It then presents the longitudinal experience of homeness through varied lived contexts – in the form of an anthology of stories woven together. Finally, it re-collects and reflects upon the process of researching and the research relationships formed, and the quiet communications of relational subjectivity which may be seen as emanating from there.

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i. The makers of this work

To develop this work, I conducted a set of 31 interviews, with 8 women over 9 months of fieldwork, all of whom had moved from different parts of rural India to the city of Delhi, and lived in urban village settlements in the city's wealthy suburb of Gurgaon. As a criterion of selection, I searched for people who had left for reasons which could be considered more involuntary than voluntary per se – including economic necessity, political turmoil, or environmental disaster. While, in my search, many selected one of these reasons as their primary motivation for movement, I realised over the course of interviewing that there seemed to actually be overlapping drivers in each of their lives, and the situation of rural poverty in the country meant that the economic factor was implicated across all of these. For instance, Abida[53], who left in the aftermath of the 1998 flood in the Malda district of Bengal, was motivated as much or more by the absence of possible livelihoods in the devastated village economy, as by the flood (and subsequent annual struggles with flooding) itself. Similarly, a gendered factor was present across all – in their reasons for leaving, as well as their reasons for coming to Delhi in particular. For example, Diya moved to Gurgaon propelled by immense monetary scarcity – but the move derived its involuntariness in large part because her husband told her to come, and she had to leave in a hurry at his command. Veena, on the other hand, also moved to combat the starvation she and her family were struggling with in the village, but the larger impetus of this came because women weren't allowed to work or leave the house in her caste community – and she couldn't go to work in another city closer by for fear of being seen, and consequently reported upon, by someone known to them.

Aside from this criterion of involuntariness – to study the experience of losing home, and the internal *response* to that loss when it is one that the psyche is, to some degree, forced to confront

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[53] In line with the ethical protocol of this research, all names have been changed during the anonymisation of data at the transcription stage

– I only looked for one other essential factor: that they have been living in the city for at least a period of one year, to have gone through something of a process of settling-in which they could recount – to understand the enablers and hurdles encountered along the way. With these commonalities in place, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, I allowed for an uneven mix of ages, professions, and regional and religious backgrounds to in-form the work – to retain space for meaningful differences and bring to life a landscape of multiplicity as an ethical-political choice for working with a group already denied human fullness in the social gaze, by virtue of oppressive marginalisation. This was a choice to allow the unknown and unknowable to remain irrefutably present – to resist the urge to take on the position of 'knower' of a people too diverse to be fit into categorical boxes, yet to glean from within that diversity something still potentially say-able about their journeys. This multiplicity was itself very limited – built upon only the particular stories of the 8 women with whom I spent time, and routing the inquiry into the social through the individual embedded within it, without losing sight of their unique individuality.

Of these 8, equally split between Hindu and Muslim women, most came from the state of West Bengal, and a couple from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh respectively. Similarly, while most were employed in domestic work, a couple were in more formal employment with organisations. Prior to this, however, nearly all of them had journeyed through multiple professions[54] – ranging from agriculture to home-based garment work & handicrafts to childcare to factory production to construction labour to domestic work. The age group spanned from roughly 30 to 50 years (most were not aware of their exact age, but offered approximations) – and they

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[54] The recently released book by a renowned Indian journalist, Neha Dixit – titled 'The Many Lives of Syeda X' (2024) – also reflects how this immense professional diversity is not perhaps uncommon in the life journeys of financially poor migrant women in Indian cities

each lived in one of three urban village settlements in Gurgaon: Nathupur, Sikanderpur, or Chakkarpur.

As mentioned, all of them were either people whom I encountered through the course of volunteering with The Community Library Project, or were introduced to me through word-of-mouth. Despite going through routes in which there was either a direct or pre-existing familiarity, however basic, or the existence of a common link who could offer a secondary sense of familiarity by way of introduction – most participants were initially somewhat hesitant to open their intimate lives up in front of an outsider. As an outsider occupying a class position of power which could easily become coercive, I had no choice but to respect the hesitation and wait, even when it sometimes took several months. Once begun, however, the interviews took on a life of their own – and the structural and methodological frames which seemed to make this possible will be briefly discussed in the afterword to this thesis.

For interviews lasting from 30 to 90 minutes (barring a couple of exceptions, these were largely in the 60-90 minute range), I met with Diya, Abida and Veena a total of six times each, Safreen five, Mahnoor four and Esha twice. Two others, Saadhna and Laila, I met only once each – both were overburdened with work as sole earners in their families, struggling with their husbands' substance abuse – and so, could not take out more time. With their consent, however, I have included their stories nonetheless – to the small measure to which these could be 'known'. Closer meetings with each of these people, and the sensuous-affective qualities of my interviews with them, will proceed through the sharing of narrations. At this point, however, we will turn first towards the vocabulary for home and homeness emergent from the interviews, before moving into the contexts and experiences to which it was applied.

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ii. Opening out meanings through imperfect translations

The process of arriving at the findings presented here began with transcription – which may in itself be seen as an analytic task, as it involved the work of translation. Language – its complexities, limitations and immense potential as a carrier of meaning – thus came to form the base of analysis.

The interviews were carried out in Hindi – often using a very simple, colloquial and quite limited vocabulary, because (as mentioned in the previous section on methodology) Hindi was a second language for many participants, picked up only after their move to the city of Delhi. This birthed a number of challenges in understanding the use of language in order to select forms through which to convey it in English.

Several of the words used, for instance, had many translatable meanings – and so, I chose to vary their English counterparts based on context: the use of the word in its place in the story, as well as the felt experience of the word in my own subjectivity as its witness. Thus, a term like '*himmat'* became courage, strength, power or resolve, a term like '*dukkha'* became pain, sorrow or suffering, and a term like '*dhyaan'* became mind, attention, meditation, contemplation, or care, based on subtle variations in intonations and contextual embedded-ness.

For some of the words used, I found myself fascinated with both their contextual and literal meanings – for instance, '*matlab rakhna'*, used to convey a sense of involvement, translates literally to 'keeping meaning', while another term used to convey the same sense, '*lena-dena'*, translates literally to 'taking-giving'. While translating and transcribing these, I chose to also retain their original form in brackets, for use as inputs in the more structured analysis of data.

Finally, there was the repeated use of a word, by every participant, which I found to be fundamentally untranslatable – '*Mann'*. While this is most commonly and easily translated to

'mind', it is not the same as the category of 'mind' as it has been understood by mainstream psychology, carrying the legacy of Western philosophy – what it is, however, felt too complex to pinpoint while transcribing, and so, I left it in its original form, in order to see if something of its nature may be gauged through understanding the ways in which it is employed to convey interiority and a route to experiencing.

While these were some of the challenges with translation from Hindi to English, a more primary challenge was encountered in translating from English to Hindi – finding expressions for the 'sense' of home, which was the central focus of this research. The commonly-used Hindi word for home, '*ghar'*, describes a place where one lives or has lived, but not the experiential *sense* of being or feeling at home – for this experiential sense to be understood across different places of living, it was necessary to search for, discover, and, in the process of interviewing, create the expressions through which it could be conveyed and understood. Bearing this in mind, this section offers a glimpse into these expressions, before moving into the re-membering of experiences, and participant reflections on the journey of the self through them.

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Expressions of home and homeness

I began the informed consent process, through which research relationships were entered, with an introduction of my topic of research: the sense of home in the lives of women, particularly women migrants. In this, the first point of contact with each participant was itself marked by a linguistic challenge – how does one explain the *sense* of home without having a Hindi word which easily encapsulates it? While I worked to get it across – explaining it as the felt experience (*ehsaas*) of having one's own home or place in the world, which could be separate from or linked to the home (*ghar*) as the place where one lives or has lived – I also sought words from each of them through the interviews, inferentially at first (in order to allow the narrative to flow without interruption) and then through more direct questions towards the end of our final interactions, by which we could co-evolve a shared vocabulary for homeness.

When I asked them what they would say this sense means, most responded with a seemingly tautological statement – 'one's own home is one's *own* only'. A tautology may be thought of as the speaking of an incontestable truth – and, in the case of the sense of home, it seemed this truth lay in the very fact of own-ness. '*Apnapan'*, a word used to express the sense of belonging and intimate relatedness, translates literally to 'own-ness' – and was the term used most often to describe relationships with both people and places experienced as home. A precursor to '*apnapan'* was '*jaan-pehchaan'*, familiarity, by way of knowing ('*jaan'*) and recognition ('*pehchaan'*). Having one's own and an other's life (which is another meaning of '*jaan'*) mutually known and recognised seemed to form the condition of possibility of '*apnapan'* or own-ness, which in turn made possible the state of being associated with the phrase, '*mann lagta hai'*.

In this phrase, the verb '*lagna'* derives from '*lagaav'* or attachment, and so, '*mann lagta hai'* can be seen as communicating a felt experience of attachment of the *mann*. This state of being

(being-attached or being-with) of the *mann*, communicated through this phrase, was used in the interviews almost as an overarching indicator of internal-external relational well-being – it came up in the context of specific activities, places, people, and as a general sense in relation to the world. Further articulations of 'home' contained possible descriptions of the significance of this self-state (or more accurately, self-other state):

Veena said one's own home is a place 'where one can even speak loudly' – that is, perhaps, a place which can be vocally occupied, uninhibitedly.

Diya said one's own home is a place where one can 'inhale and exhale '*dum*' peacefully' – a word which means 'breath'[55], but which is also synonymous with life. Home can then be seen as a place from which life can be taken in, into which life can be released.

Esha said one's own home is a place 'upon which one has a '*haq*'' – a right, a claim, an entitlement. '*Haq*', the Arabic word for truth, is an expression of reality, and home as the place where one has a *haq*, may then be seen as a place which offers a confirmation of realness of relationship. She also described home as a place which exerts a pull (*kheench*) upon the self – towards which one is drawn, or perhaps, which gives direction to the self's urge to seek.

Colloquially, the home – the place of dwelling – with which this intimate relatedness was most strongly felt was referred to as '*mere yahaan*' – something which I translated contextually to be 'my place', but which translates literally to 'my here'. Perhaps this too contained within it the significance of home – the articulation of 'my here', wherein here-ness is the point at which one anchors their self into space, establishes a locus of orientation, and comes to exist in the world.

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[55] It is interesting to note, and possibly important considering the mix of Hindu and Islamic symbolic worlds in this research, that the Arabic word for breath, 'Nafs', is also used for self, psyche or soul – from this, perhaps one can say (as was touched upon in the theoretical background) that breath constitutes something of the ontological nature of self and home

Through this simple and evocative vocabulary, the story of homeness across different homes was shared – as varied tellings of the generative presence of these qualities, despite their overwhelming absence in and foreclosures through the environmental provision(s) in which they lived. In other words, these were stories of homeness in, and beyond, contexts of homelessness – and both these dimensions will be re-presented in the next section.

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iii. Storying homeness and the inner world

Foregrounding a landscape of homelessness

In working with women displaced from rural parts of India into the city of Delhi, it was perhaps not surprising that a conversational foray into the sense of home often took the context of homelessness as its starting point. This beginning, however, was less about being de-homed through migration, and more about the socio-spatial situation of disenfranchisement that marks womanhood in the country.

It was a sweaty, hot and humid afternoon in July 2022 when I introduced my research topic to Diya, my first participant, a 39 year old who had been in Delhi for 17 years, as we sat in a corner of a narrow street outside her place of work, filled with potholes and puddles which passing cars sent splashing. Surrounded by the horns of vehicles, the whirring of construction work in nearby buildings, and the screams of children playing and fighting in the area, we sat huddled close together to try to create a little pocket of quietude and privacy. In immediate response to hearing of my interest in 'home', Diya pulled the leg of her *salwar* up, folded her knee into the hook of her elbow, and emphatically asserted that 'a woman doesn't have any home' – words which would later be echoed, nearly identically, by several others. She said:

Now, listen. If we are to look at reality, then in reality, for a woman – there is no home. For any girl, for as long as she is unmarried, they call it her mother-father's house, and after getting married, it is the in-law's house. So for a girl, is there anything she can put her name on?

When a girl is born, then everyone's spirits are lowered. They say –"'a girl was born? Not a boy?" Now… there's a different world – people have agitated and everything is changing. Earlier, they would say: "you had a daughter? Your head has lost a fist" – meaning, now your head has been lowered. At our place, they would say, like, if a girl is born as the first child,

then a woman loses a fistful of value. Meaning, she is reduced, her height is reduced – and when a boy is born, then she gains one fist, her height is increased. That's what they used to say… with pride. At our place, when a boy was born, then everyone would beat plates in celebration, and when a girl was born, then: "what?" And everyone who was standing would also sit down. "If a girl is born, it's like a clay pot is born" – they used to say that.

That is why this custom has been created: one's own daughter is made a stranger and an alien daughter is taken as one's own.

Unwelcome in the world and denied a recognition of aliveness at birth, through these words, Diya elaborated the function of the Indian girl child as an object of social exchange between two households, neither of which are hers to hold. This, the event of marriage in both anticipation and actuality, appeared to be a more primary dislocation than the one of rural-to-urban movement – and so, Diya (alongside all the others whom I met) was at least twice displaced after the initial catastrophic rupture of leaving the womb for a world unwilling to receive her.

Acknowledging this, this section is presented as an anthology of stories of both these lived displacements, organised thematically into common threads of experience, yet weaving into each the accounts of several women: to avoid falling into the trap of flattening their complex multiplicities for the sake of coherence. This patchwork approach may also be seen as an attempt at creating a narrative community of belonging through storytelling – a dreaming by me as the researcher, which is inspired by the dreaming of those who gave form to this research, like Diya, who also repeatedly branched off from her own story to the stories of other women she's known and encountered, in what felt to me like a powerfully creative act of narrative place-making. Perhaps, this act was also psychically essential to make bearable the anguish of un-belonging – for it was striking, and will be elaborated upon, that both the displacements

each of the participants went through could also be thought of as 'de-placements' – departures from homes towards locations which, in large part, prohibited new homeness while also complicating attempts at return.

How did the inner worlds respond to this repeated imposition of placelessness? Where did they find (and create) an anchoring for selfhood, for the attachment of the *mann*? Those are the realms of exploration, the openings, at which this section will close.

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On displacements: from childhood homes to marital homes to cities

<u>Degrees of homeness in early childhood</u>

The experience of home in early childhood, as remembered through the lens of all that had followed its loss, contained a life-world beyond the physical boundaries of the house – despite household confinement and restrictions on relational mobility (enforced as an interpersonal isolation, often taking the form of safeguarding) experienced by many at the intersection of poverty and gender.

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Mahnoor, with whom I sat on the floor of the terrace in a house where her relative worked, was relatively young – barely thirty years of age – but her body hunched over with an exhaustion that made me experience her as older, and her skin bore marks of hardship in the form of patches of scar tissue. These covered her legs as she sat plucking and squeezing at them, looking down – seeming somewhat deflated and disinterested when I asked her about her earliest memories of home.

Her recollections emphasised a deadening sense of restricted confinement - due to both, the constraints of gendered poverty which filled her young days with housework and caregiving for her sister's child, and the social prohibitions upon her, as a girl, on going out of the house and interacting with others. She described the landscapes of home in her memory without any of the enlivening visual or experiential words which could have possibly lent an imagination of it to my mind. '*Bachpan*' – a golden period of childhood in the Indian imagination – brought up no idealising nostalgia for her. Instead, she described a daily routine filled with work and suffering, devoid of play and companionship:

Mahnoor: I used to look after her child, and didi would come by 10 – as soon as I'd see that it was 9:30, I'd wear my uniform and all. Then didi would come at 10, and I'd give her

child to her and go to school. I'd come from school at 3 o' clock – after coming, I'd eat, and after eating, I'd go for tuition. After coming from tuition, then there'd be work at home – for us, there has been suffering since our childhood. I'd do some work, wash the dishes and clean the house, then I'd sit down to study in the evening… We didn't get to play so much. We didn't get so much freedom. To go somewhere and play, to the market, to shops, you'd go – no, it wasn't like that….. From our childhood, we've had suffering. (crying) It can't be told – this much sorrow can't be told. From our childhood, there's been suffering.

A dream I had following our interview, in which I was seemingly trapped in a dark and sticky place searching for someone – which I associated with being surrounded by walls of congealed blood without the presence of a body, violence without the violated – led me to ask when I saw her next if she remembered being that child, and seeing the world through her eyes. She responded with a small laugh, and said, "No, that child died so long that it feels like she was never even alive now".

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Mahnoor had learned to suffer in silence – to quieten her pangs of hunger to avoid burdening her mother with them, for she had witnessed and developed a consideration for her mother's pain and suffering from an early age. Mahnoor's father had died when she was just a few months old, and her mother worked in households in the village to try to feed her three daughters.

Mahnoor: We understood our mother's suffering… Mummy didn't tell us, but mummy used to work in other's houses and bring things, so we used to see, right? So as much food as she'd bring, in that only, the three of us – it wasn't enough, our stomachs wouldn't be filled – but even then, it's okay. We wouldn't tell people that we're feeling hungry. It's okay. Mummy

was just one – where would she get it from? So? Mummy would work, that's how she'd bring it and come. So we knew, right?

It was in this wordless understanding of her mother's pain and love that Mahnoor located her first and most lasting experience of intimacy – a relationship through which care, and perhaps life, could be taken and given, breathed.

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As I took the same curiosity, pertaining to the childhood home, to Abida – a 50 year old whom I felt to have a towering presence, by her tall and upright posture, energetic gait and loud voice – this sense of intimate relatedness seemed far more pervasively present across her childhood world. She spoke of it in her bond with the *bhabhi* (sister-in-law) who had raised her, in her attachment to the daily activities which populated her everyday life, and in the nonhuman world which allowed her the experience of abundance in financial poverty. In stark contrast to Mahnoor, Abida's voice grew louder and her body moved animatedly when she remembered her childhood home – and evocatively re-called, through what felt like an emphatic calling back, a beloved place situated in a world of plenty.

Abida: So, we had a mud house. Meaning, mud – all four sides veranda, and in the middle, a courtyard. If it rained or something, we'd drag in keechad (slushy mud) – there were doors on two sides – one on one side, and one towards the ghat (pier). Towards the lake ghat. I was fond of washing utensils with my bhabhi (sister-in-law) – I was fond of working in the kitchen. I was fond of catching fish – of catching fish, I was very fond! Of keeping (paalnaa – raising and caring for) ducks… I was fond of keeping ducks – cows also, I was fond of cows and buffaloes. Of everything, meaning everything. And – in the garden, mangoes – there were a lot of mangoes in our garden, a lot of mangoes. And then, there was wheat, mustard – picking mustard leaves, going into the fields with my papa and bhai (brother)… There were a lot of

fields – 30 bighas (unit of measurement) of fields, my father had. So there was a lot of harvest – many things. At the time of potatoes, we'd get so many potatoes that we wouldn't have space to sleep. We'd keep potatoes below, and placing a chataai (mat) on top, we'd sleep on the potatoes….

Perhaps it was in part the prism of premature loss which coloured the image of her first home in her mind so favourably – as a way of holding on to something precious which was taken away too soon, as it was perhaps always destined to be.

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For Diya, the loss of home was always imminent – it was written into the special kind of love and tenderness which she received as the only girl child in her family. She saw the loss of this love as inevitable – beyond the control of her or her parents, both of whom would be caused pain by it, as an existential fact of the way the world is. Perhaps it was also a loss which had always already happened – as a loss in her relationship with her mother, towards whom she spoke of having been disinterested, driven by the knowledge that she 'loved her brother more'. On the other hand, she spoke with pain and fondness of the special, warm and protective love she received from her father – who would carry her everywhere in his arms, because he knew that she would be taken away from them soon.

Diya: I was so adored (laadli) by my papa – my papa would keep me in his arms most of the time. I used to move around carried in his arms mostly. I used to go anywhere in his arms – papa would put me on his shoulders, and wherever he went, he'd take me along. So tell me, how much was I adored? He wouldn't put me down anywhere, when I was 6-7 years old, even then he'd keep me in his arms. In the winters, imagine that my father would sit with a blanket – I used to feel cold, so I'd go into my papa's lap, and papa would peek at me. There's more warmth you get from a body, so I'd go to sleep in papa's lap only... The kind of love a

child gets from a mother and father at a young age – with a girl, papa knew this that a girl will become another's (paraya) one day. Because, when a son stays one's own, then a girl has to be given away as another's wealth. A girl won't be kept – no one can keep her, no mother and father can keep a girl.

Understanding that it was impossible for a mother or father to keep a girl even if they wished to, she perhaps still communicated the violence of the loss she endured at having been left, and left open and unprotected, through the stories she told of the cruelly inflicted deaths upon animals she loved – through whom she seemed to speak of the deaths of care and intimacy, nurturing fullness, and something sacred.

Diya: At that time, we had a dog in the house. I'd named him Mantu – and so much I loved that dog, I'd make him sleep near me, I'd feed him, he was completely like my child. One day, you know what happened – one day I'd left him open, I'd left him outside. He was usually open only, I'd only sometimes keep him tied because if someone came to our house then he wouldn't let them enter. So that day… I'd left him open. And he was open, so he'd gone to the neighbouring house, and I don't know what they fed him, Ekta ji, but after that only my dog died. He was a black dog…. In my house, there was a goat – Soni was the name, Soni, the goat. She was such a big goat. If I called out Soni, wherever she was, she'd run – she'd jump and run and come. She also – we used to eat Dalmoth (a spicy snack), right – so she also wanted it, spicy food. It was very spicy, and when we put it like this in our hand and fed it, she would eat a lot. Someone killed her also – we'd left her in the morning to graze, and someone hit her in the stomach – she was pregnant, and she got hit in the stomach, and she came running home, at that time I called her so she came, and blood poured out of her mouth, and she just died. With a baby in her belly, she died. I cried a lot, a lot I cried – I cried a lot. On the day of Rakhi Purnima, I'd bought her – she used to stay like Goddess Mahalakshmi, it felt like Mahalakshmi

has come to my house. She used to produce so many children – big and healthy – she'd produce 3-4 children at a time. She filled our house.

It was in the intimate, nurturing and sacred lap of her adoring father that Diya first began to menstruate at the age of twelve – an event which she perhaps didn't know would overturn her life completely. Soon, she was married and sent to another home – a departure through which the sense of mine-ness was lost, giving way to grief and terror.

Diya: When a young girl is living as a small child in her mother and father's house, then there is no fear. Then she says this is mine-mine. When she gets married, how a girl's heart breaks, isn't it?

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The displacement of marriage

Diya remembered feeling too scared to eat when she got married and was thrust into a large household of strangers whom she had to serve. She fell and remained sick – for over a year, she said that she starved – unable to take in the sudden shift in her world. She wept for days, wanting to go back home – and she was not alone.

Laila and I sat together in the driveway of a house where she worked, when her employers were out – her niece and two-year old grand-niece came from upstairs to say hello. While her niece was also curious about my research topic, her grand-niece plodded around the area finding delight in her newly-discovered legs. Laila on the other hand, with wisps of curly white hair framing her face, sat hugging hers to her body – and, as she began telling me about her life after the younger generations had gone, turned to me with tears in her eyes and said:

Laila: I didn't know only – I didn't have any idea of what marriage is, what happens in it, when I got married at the age of 11. I didn't know – I had never even spoken to a man, I used to be afraid of men.

Esha, in her mid-30s, called me to her house, but sat with me in her neighbour's room, sending their family of four to join her husband and kids in their room so we could have privacy to talk. She sat on the bed and scrambled to find me a chair, and with the softest voice which I strained to hear, recalled her first days after marriage as being filled with anguished tears, desperate to return with what she now saw as a naiveté that made her laugh sadly when she told me about it.

Esha: Whenever I would see someone of my maika… I would cry a lot – like children scream and cry, like that, I'd scream and cry, sitting in a corner. And I'd cry because – so that someone feels sorry for me, my mother-in-law or father-in-law – who would see it and say, 'yes, you can leave'.

The loss of home through marriage – for Esha, Laila, Diya and the others – was also a loss of childhood itself, to whatever degree it had been enjoyed. This was accompanied by their removal from the one institution of childhood that offered the possibility of access to a wider world: school.

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Diya fought hard to continue her schooling after getting married – with the help of her papa, she worked out a deal to continue studying at home on her own and going only to write exams. She kept this up while shouldering the responsibilities of cooking and keeping house for a family of 25 – but once she got pregnant at thirteen years old and gave birth to an underweight son for whom she was tasked with caring alone, she could no longer hold on to that last link with her old life.

Diya: At that time, it was my age to play, I used to study… I mean, I got married at a very young age; I was married at 12 years. When I was 13, when that was my age, at 13 years, I had my son. But I was so scared – even though I was pregnant – I was pregnant, but I still used to starve. When my son was born, he was 700 grams, my son. A 700 gram baby! That is also God's will, humans have no control over it – what God does, he does. If he wants to save someone, no one can kill them. But, that is the thing, when I got married, I didn't know anything. When I started to fall sick, then my in-laws – if I fell sick, if I'm pregnant and not eating – as long as I'm cooking, my in laws and everyone, I would feed. And I'm the oldest daughter-in-law. After feeding everyone, there would be no vegetables left. This was the personal situation of our house – there would be no vegetables left. Even though there were no vegetables left, I'd take a fistful of food and add some salt, eat and have some water, and get up. Sometimes I would eat – I didn't eat every day. Only when I felt like it, when I was too hungry, I would eat and drink some water – I'd drink a lot of water…

I would study at home on my own, and then I'd go – I mean – I only went to write exams. I was not able to go to school after getting married, after coming to my in-laws' house, I'd just privately give exams in the school. Papa had told 'sir' (teacher) that my daughter has gotten married, so she will only be able to come to write exams. He said it's no problem, this is a child from here, a student from here. For me, I really felt like studying there. I had a lot of mental proclivity for science. But, I wasn't able to study. Once I had a child and all, then my husband would all the time drink so much alcohol, I was not able to study.

Diya worked diligently to fulfil her duties in the marital home, but continued to experience abuse from her mother-in-law – which she attributed to her dark skin, yet likely stemmed also from a cultural hostility between mothers and daughters-in-law over the loyalty of the son, a dependence upon whom is socially enforced. It was this allegiance that perhaps Diya's mother-

in-law wished to see demonstrated when she'd ask her son to beat Diya – who grinned to show me all the teeth which were broken in the process.

Diya: At my in-laws', I would do so much and so much, and even then my mother-in-law wouldn't be satisfied. In the evening, every single day, I would give my mother-in-law an oil massage. Every day. Even then, my mother-in-law – like there were four daughters-in-law in the house, but she would look at me and just not like me, because my skin was dark. They were all fair. That's why they'd always say to me that 'we've got you married to [Goddess] Ma Kali and brought her home to do the work of the house'. That's the kind of thing they'd say.

If she tried to speak with anyone in the household about her struggles, including her husband, the message was relayed to her in-laws, and more beatings would follow – intensifying her isolation. Mahnoor also experienced abuse at the hands of her in-laws – in her case, in the form of dowry harassment.

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Mahnoor had moved to Delhi at twelve years of age in order to earn the money for her own dowry payment, knowing that her mother would not be able to afford it. After working as a live-in domestic worker for 3-4 years, she earned enough and returned to the village to be married. Despite giving two-three lakh (hundred thousand) rupees as her dowry payment, once she moved to her marital home, her in-laws began asking for more. She was unable to respond to those demands and listened to them silently, while protesting internally.

Mahnoor: When I went, then one day my father-in-law was saying – 'beta, you will still give something more, right? You'll give a bike also, right?' Whatever they had asked for, we'd given – then they started saying 'you'll give a bike'. Then, I was new-new, right, so I didn't respond to him. He'll say, right, that she wags her tongue too much. I was thinking in my mann

– 'for what will we give a bike? We already gave to them. Now, from behind – if I had it, maybe I would've given it, that would be a different thing. From where would I give a bike?' When we were in Delhi, then we'd have to work and send money to mummy also. To eat. So we had to look after our mummy, then from where would we take money from mummy to now give a bike also? I didn't say anything. My father-in-law was saying one day that 'right now, my son will get a bike also'. I was just quiet…

Her marital home was even more constraining than her childhood home had been, and Mahnoor recounted not being able to go anywhere or speak with anyone without her mother-in-law chaperoning. Her husband was violent, and forbade her from speaking with her family – even after she gave birth to a son while she herself was barely seventeen, she had to raise him alone, with her mother and aunt sneaking in to help look after her only when her husband was away.

Mahnoor: When his papa would go to work in the morning, at 5-6 o clock, my mummy would come and bathe me and bathe my son – I was small, right, so at that time I didn't have so much understanding of how to do it…..When I came, he said 'your sister' – my sister stays nearby only – 'you won't talk to your sister, you won't even talk to your mummy, you won't talk to anyone'. I said okay, if I have to stay with him only, then okay, I won't do it. Doing that, for one year, I didn't even speak to my mummy…

After isolating her in this way, Mahnoor's husband had an affair with another woman and left in the middle of one night, leaving Mahnoor and her one-year old son alone. This was a difficult situation in which Abida had also been placed – confronting an abandonment which felt more violating because mothering a son was supposed to bestow upon her a certain degree of power, a right, a *haq*.

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For Mahnoor, the precarity of the *haq*, the entitlement, which she had over the son whom she'd raised alone was evident from the intense fear she carried that her husband would someday come and take him away, and she would be powerless as a woman to stop him.

Mahnoor: Even now, I have the fear. Because our divorce hasn't happened yet. So there is fear because of that… In the middle sometimes, he calls me like that – he called me once and said 'come near Sahara mall – bring your son and come, I'll meet him'. I didn't go out of fear – what if he takes my son and runs away only? Even now, when I go to work, I feel scared – if in the middle, my sister calls from home, I think 'has something happened?' I get scared like that. You never know – he can take him and go. And with those people, we won't even be able to do anything – is there a papa, is there a bhai [brother]; there's no one. They are gents – us ladies-ladies, what will we do?

For Abida, whose husband had married her despite already having one wife specifically for the prospect of her bearing a son, the violation lay in the absence of any claim she had on either her husband or his possessions, despite birthing the son whose inheritance it rightfully was. Years later, she seethed at this violation, determined to seek revenge and stake a claim.

Abida: For a son, he had married me, and after marrying me, he gave me such a big burden – on the streets, with two children, he left me and went. Why did he leave me and go? With whose support could I have survived? Tell me – I was not a man, that I could do masonry work, or start farming, go to an excavation site and lift mud. I was a woman – I also had a life – I also had a life… Why did he ruin my life? I could have married someone else also. I could've married some fakir. At that time, he wanted a son – and now, there's nothing for his son… Will you give me, will you give me your courtyard? Okay – give it if you want to give it. Write it on my son's name, and I won't do anything… As a mother, after bearing so much, if I don't take my son's right (haq), then it's better for me to not be a mother…

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When Abida's husband left her and went, he left her with no place to go – just as Diya found herself unable to go anywhere when her husband went missing for several years. With two tiny children in tow, she was thrown out of her in-laws' house – where she had no claim to space in the absence of her husband – and tried to return to her parents, only to find that it was impossible.

On not being able to return

When Diya returned to her parents' house, after her husband left the family without telling anyone, she realised that she was now unwelcome there, and wouldn't be provided for. That it was her beloved papa who asked her to leave and return to her in-laws made the memory all the more painful.

> *Diya: And as you know, if a girl stays at her parents' house for too many days, she doesn't get respect there either. No one respects her. Then, even her mother and father are ruined – even her mother and father think, 'why is she lying in my house?' A daughter becomes too big a weight to bear. They say that when she's single, she's not too heavy, but a married girl becomes heavy… When I came to my papa's house then everyone was eating and looking at me, and I was just watching in longing. Then my mummy gave me food – when mummy gave me food, then my papa abused my mummy, saying 'why did you give her food? She'll go – she'll go to her in-laws', she isn't to stay here'.*

As a result of this dispossession, Diya came to be one who was neither of here nor there – a denial of place anywhere which could be considered one's own. It was this double-placelessness which was articulated by Esha as she explained how she's always seen as belonging to, being of, elsewhere – wherever she goes.

Esha: A woman, according to me, doesn't have any home only. In the maika (mother's house), they say that your home is the sasuraal (in-laws' house) – 'oh, you'll say this here? Go to your sasuraal – go tell your sasur (father-in-law)'... When you go to your sasuraal, they'll say 'go meet your father'. I don't know where a woman's home is only – I haven't been able to understand this till today. Where is a woman's home? Where do they give you a chance to understand? The one of the maika says it's the sasuraal – the one of the sasuraal says maika – I don't know – of where am I – I haven't understood till today!

This situation of eternally being, or being seen as being, of somewhere else was the point at which Esha drew a parallel between marriage and migration – the latter being the dislocating event at which she, along with the others whom I met, lost another home which was never to be fully regained: the home in the village and village community.

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The displacement of migration

I met with Safreen on the side of the road near where she worked. We sat on a low concrete slab on a quiet afternoon, as she gripped the mug of tea I'd brought along with both hands – it was a still day, but the weather had started to turn and there was a slight nip in the air. Safreen was nearly 40 years old, but her wide eyes and warm exuberance made me experience in her an endearing childlike quality – although the intensity of the struggles she'd borne made me wonder how she'd retained this. Her mother had died when she was a 6 year old child, following which she'd taken on caregiving for her ageing father along with her elder sister. When her sister got married, she dropped out of school to shoulder the burden of housework and care responsibilities – until she was married at the age of 15. Following the death of her first husband in a freak train accident, she had been married to his younger brother to keep her within the same household – but when he too was first paralysed in a road accident and then

succumbed to his injuries, she found herself alone. Utilising government compensation she'd received for the loss of her first husband, she built a home in the village for her and her daughter to live in, but after trying various ways to earn a living to sustain them there (spanning home-based assembly work, handicrafts, and door-to-door selling), the overwhelming challenges of each drove her to move. The move from her village in West Bengal to the city of Delhi was another struggle of an intensity which came as a shock to Safreen.

Safreen had a cousin sister who lived with her husband and worked in Gurgaon, so she decided to come to them – they provided the presence of kinship that acts as a vital support structure for migrants entering and navigating the city. Despite this link with the familiar, however, she found herself aghast when she experienced the cold and grey weather that characterises Delhi's winters, and the unhygienic living conditions of the urban village into which she'd moved.

Safreen: She'd said that it's cold, but how cold, I didn't know. In Kolkata, it never gets so cold. Wear one sweater, and it doesn't matter – you don't need anything else. I came here and saw – arre baap re baap [exclamation] – cold! And so much darkness, so much fog… Looking at it – how was I feeling – re baba, what place is this? And all the garbage collectors here in phase 2 (upscale locality near the urban village) – they pick up all the garbage and take it all to Nathupur only. And all the garbage – all in Nathupur only, there's no other place – from phase 2, from phase 3… Then they take all this garbage, and in all the houses, they screen through the trash – and after screening – there are 500 houses there! And – so much filth, such a strong stench, such a strong stench – all of phase 2's garbage if you dump into one place, how much will it stink, tell me? People vomit – the people who come for the first time, they will definitely vomit. They won't be able to enter without vomiting…

Like Safreen, Esha also re-called being devastated when she saw the physical infrastructure of her new home: "*for us – even the house of cows and buffaloes isn't like this*", she told me, her

voice breaking as she remembered that feeling from years ago and began to weep. From a large and open home in the village, she had entered an overpopulated and over-constructed surround of suffocating enclosure. Esha's experience of Delhi was far removed from the world she'd known her whole life – an experiential distance which had led Abida to remark that "*this is America to us*", a sentiment reinforced through many people's reference to Delhi as '*videsh*' – a foreign land.

Mahnoor laid out some of the differences contributing to this sense of foreignness – language, food, infrastructure, work – all of which made the initial process of settling in challenging.

Mahnoor: The language is different there – here, we have to speak in Hindi, and the people of there speak a different language; the food is different here and the food is different there. The houses of there are also different – they are mud houses, you have to coat them also (a process called leepna)… At first, where I worked – there, I was small, I hadn't felt at home there. As food, we eat rice – they used to give me roti. I didn't like it.

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The city, and the urban village network of power (consisting largely of landlords from local communities and middlemen) was a site of immense danger for women, particularly for women alone, removed from the bonds of their community and patriarchal protection. While for most people, the sense of danger had informed their imagination of Delhi before they moved, Safreen discovered its physical presence after coming here and interacting with people who had been living in the urban village for a long while.

Safreen: And in Nathupur also, where I lived, in the jhuggi (slum dwelling) – people in the jhuggis would also say that 'yes, we've been living here for 15-20 years. Sometimes, in the winter months, a car comes and picks up people and takes them away.' This also, I've seen with my own eyes – in Nathupur, there is one jhuggi… In that, there is one bhaiya [older male].

If that bhaiya sees a pretty girl, then he takes her. After doing bad things [reference to rape], he leaves her. So when the 10th date comes – he comes on the 10th to collect money – rent for the place – so, that day, all the women stay in the house. Even now – even now, it's like that. Everyone – meaning, whoever came from Kolkata, Bengalis – all are afraid… I used to work with a lot of fear, because people had told me that this happens, that people sell you. And I'd also heard this that people take you away and take your kidney out, they take your eyes out. So all this was going through my mind.

In stark contrast to the experience of being 'the daughter of the village', for Safreen, the city brought up a sense of being left alone, open and unprotected. Fear, amplified by the sense of personal vulnerability, was the central emotional experience of contact with the city for most – constricting the possibility of freedom in it.

Diya: So when I'd newly come here, then I used to feel very afraid, when I'd first heard about the situation in Delhi, that they take girls to Delhi and sell them, they used to say all this, right. So earlier, I used to be very afraid. What kind of a situation – I didn't talk to anyone, when I used to go for a bath also then my husband used to have to stand near the door. When I used to go in for a bath then I used to tell my husband that 'you stay outside, then I'll take a bath. Otherwise, I won't bathe.'

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Despite the constraining presence of threat, there was still something liberating about the experience of the city – for Veena, it brought with it the freedom to work, away from the watchful and shaming eyes of the village community. As we sat together on a park bench in the neighbourhood where she worked, Veena – who said that she's 45 but also felt that she looks 20 years older than that, hunch-backed and extremely gaunt and bony, with her saree tied across her sunken stomach – told me about her journey to Delhi in search of this.

Veena: The kind of system which is here, that's the kind of system which is in Lucknow also. Labour is also the same – what is here is what is in Lucknow. But the thing with Lucknow is that it is close to us, so there are relatives around. So that is the thing – a foreign land is better, because no one sees you here. And that is our own so people see – and what do they say? That 'this is his wife'. They say it in the village right – 'his wife works over there, she does housework, sweeps and swabs, this is what she does'. Here, no one sees you…. There are Rajputs and Thakurs (caste groups) – they believe in this, that 'she goes to their house, she does this work, that work' – they believe in such things. But in a foreign land, that's not there. That's why we – this work, we could do in Lucknow too – but in Lucknow it is like this, there are a lot of people around. All relatives – like your sister-in-law, your brother-in-law, your mother-in-law, your mother-in-law's relatives also will see, they will also say it in their house, they'll say it there, and like this, it gets stretched out. Here, what is there? You and me. There are no relatives. The ones who have come here are here, and none of them will say anything… There, we'll just be sitting with our dignity/ honour (izzat), and it's the same thing – whether you're sitting in Lucknow or sitting in the village. When you're not able to earn then what will you eat?

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Despite this relative freedom – perhaps a freedom to find something of one's own in one's work and income – life in the urban village seemed marked by deep aloneness, through being a part of a community characterised by un-involvement (the absence of '*lena-dena*') and which largely, relative to life back 'home', felt devoid of meaningfully intimate connectedness. Saadhna, a lean 45-year-old with a wide smile, told me about this absence of support as we sat outside the walls of the gated apartment complex in which she worked, at the end of one portion of her workday. It was early evening, and she was about to go home for her own household chores and to feed her children, before coming back again at night to cook in a few more houses.

Saadhna: I have to hide my money from my husband – if he spends it all to buy alcohol, then how will I manage? There are expenses for the house, for the children… In front of whom will I spread my hands then? This is not our village, that I'd be able to borrow two thousand from this person and that person. But here – who gives to whom? Everyone has come here to earn… If there is money, there will be strength.

Still, interactions with this community, however lacking in the protections offered by deep interdependence, helped offer respite from the loneliness of everyday life – and for some, became an important source of security, supporting mobility. Saadhna found solace in commuting to work and back with other workers from her neighbourhood, and some degrees of companionship in talking with other women in her locality as they all cooked over their respective stoves in their shared cooking area. For Diya, who also accessed a sense of safety by walking with other women as she went to work and returned, this had been pivotal in helping her settle into life in the city, and grow more confident in being able to navigate its threatening socio-spatial landscape. While Esha had one close friend in the form of her neighbour, with the wider surround, she preferred to engage with caution and keep her distance. This was also the case with Mahnoor, and the careful friendships she formed.

Mahnoor: There are women also. I talk to them. There are men also, and I call them 'bhaiya'. I don't talk to them for very long – people will also take it in the wrong way, right. If a girl is talking to someone, then they'll say – 'there's definitely something going on between them'. Its better than having them say it that you just keep to yourself…. I don't go inside because if I go in to their room and talk to them, then they'll come to my room… That's why. Then if they say something, and I say something, then a fight will happen, and in the fight, that thing will come out – it's better than that that you don't say anything, only say surface level things… I only talk on the surface – I don't say what's in my heart, what's in my stomach.

Perhaps more than within the neighbourhood community, where one still felt watched and monitored, the development of intimacy found fertile ground in the workplace – with employers and other workers – which offered a higher potential for privacy.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Relationships in the workplace[56], particularly with employers, were not uncomplicated by class difference and power hierarchies – and Safreen recalled one of these with immense sorrow and discomfort over the normalised dehumanisation with which she was treated.

Safreen: I accepted everything. But the time I came to Delhi, the time I was told to clean the bathroom (laughs), I started crying. Madam asked, 'what happened? Why are you crying?' I said, 'nothing'. She said 'quiet down' – madam was also very good, she asked, 'are you missing home a lot? Are you missing your daughter?' I said, 'yes, I'm missing my daughter, I'm missing my home – that's why I'm crying'…. In the village, whatever happened, I accepted it – I ran a clothing business, wove clothes on my own, got a machine at home on my own – all that is one's own work. Whatever happened with my husband – I went to the hospital and got him medicines and came. That was for my husband – so I did everything. But after coming here, when I saw all this – this (gesturing to cup) was also separate, it felt strange. That was also okay. Then madam one day gave me two biscuits and tea. In the kitchen, she said, 'this glass is for you', meaning it was a separate glass – the one who came to cook, hers, and the one who came to sweep and swab, hers. 'These two glasses, yours are separate – for both of you. In this glass, take tea' – and two biscuits she'd given to me in a small bowl. 'Sit on the floor and eat it' – (laughing, with tears) I cried even more, I cried even more…. And these people – such big people, so well-informed, they said this to me. I was crying a lot, a lot – again, 'what happened – why are you crying? What happened – are you feeling unwell?'

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[56] Largely, but not limited to, the domestic work context

Madam was asking, 'are you unwell?' I said, 'no no, no reason.' So then, I was thinking about it, and I went home and told them that 'madam said this to me'. So she said, 'Safreen, these are all big-big people – big-big people think of us as workers, and think of us for work only. They don't think that these are also humans – how should you talk to them, that you should think a little. They don't think of that.'

Even with these barriers to being known and recognised as a person, Safreen found herself experiencing intimacy, a familial sense of own-ness in these families – particularly with the women employers through whom she found some degree of empathy, understanding, and a sense of being included into the family scene. Abida echoed this sense of a close relationship with her women employers, to whom she was grateful for various forms of social support. The dependence felt upon employers for navigating aspects of everyday life in the city perhaps heightened the sense of attachment to them – and Veena spoke of this heightened attachment through the immense gratitude and indebtedness she felt towards her employing family for saving her life following a gruesome road accident that cost her all of her hard-earned financial security and independence.

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Some years into moving to the city, Veena had finally begun to live somewhat comfortably when she met with a road accident as she was crossing over a newly-opened highway. She described bleeding on the road for a long while as cars slowed down to see her and drove by, until someone finally came to help her, and asked where her home is. Disoriented, she gestured towards the home of a family with whom she worked. Her employer there took her to the hospital, and argued with the doctors who initially refused to operate on her because she was visibly not one who could afford the treatment costs. Because of this timely intervention by her

employer, Veena's leg was saved, although a long and challenging period of being bedridden did follow.

Veena: Because didi, all this, my body, had become blue. I was lying there for a long time, so all the blood had drained out. And these people are also able to understand, right, that can she put in so much money or will she not be able to – they are able to get an idea of that. Then, that didi had put her weight into it and yelled at the doctors a lot. Then the operation happened. That didi helped me a lot, she helped me a lot, I got a lot of support, didi. I can't tell you, how much (voice breaks) – otherwise, I wouldn't have recovered. That's how it is, didi.

Veena emphasised how deeply that 'didi' (big sister) was etched into her heart, never to be forgotten – an attachment which was perhaps as powerful as it was simultaneously powerless, because it gave her no claim upon her. When I met Veena, she was deeply mourning the loss of that house of employment – and the everyday presence in her life of her co-workers there, with whom she'd formed close relationships – following the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had heightened the pre-existing precarity of her position in the work sphere, as much as it had heightened the pre-existing precarity of her position in the city.

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Being engaged in informal work always meant an absence of job security and access to leave – Veena described the necessity of placing one of one's own contacts as temporary replacements whenever she needed to take leave, in order to ensure that she would still have the job when she got back.

Veena: Now we have a (kachcha) informal job, it's not a permanent job. Now if someone else has gone and now your employer (maalik) isn't giving you leave, then we cancel it also. That's why we don't book tickets. We go there, and if we're able to go then everyone heads off. If someone is unable to go, then they don't go. That is the thing. For us, with job

holidays, you can't be sure that you'll get it… Now here, if I'm going, then I tell another person that I'm leaving for five days, you take my work and I'll take yours when you go – we make arrangements like that.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, however, she had lost most of the jobs at which she worked, and struggled to find new work as a relatively older woman, whose capabilities were judged by her frail physical appearance – a situation which had greatly worsened her hardships as she drew to the end of her earning life.

Veena: Getting work like before has become difficult (crying). Earlier, there were so many people, and now there aren't so many. Like earlier, if you went to one house then another would ask, if you went to the second then another would ask – now, you don't get work like that. And then, good people do get work, but someone aged like me, they don't give it. There is less work, since the lockdown, and they keep young-young people now, and more elderly ones… They don't get it. So our lives have become waste, isn't it?

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Social situated-ness in the city was also always marked by precarity because of the absence of social support structures – that was one of the key reasons Safreen and Diya, for example, had left their children behind when they moved. Others, like Mahnoor, Abida, and Saadhna struggled significantly with raising children while working in the city – leaving them locked in the house alone when they were infants, taking them along as toddlers when they went to work and leaving them to sleep in nearby parks, and struggling to get them in day-care and schools as they grew older.

The precarity that was visibilised through the pandemic, however, was a more fundamental one – bringing uncertainty into the inhabitability of, their ability and right to live in, the city. The pandemic demonstrated how quickly it could turn entirely unliveable with a single event.

Veena narrated her experience of this loss of survivability in the pandemic – how quickly their savings were burned through when sources of income stopped, how brutally they were treated by the city's police forces, how they had to move back to their home in the village leaving everything behind, and how that everything was lost through demolitions during their long and uncertain absence. Decades of material progress were so undone, and the dreams she had once dreamt – for her children, if not herself – were relinquished.

Veena: So at that time, the landlord said it's okay, stay for one or two months. Then it got extended further. It got extended further. Then the landlord said – 'you all, somehow or the other make the arrangements, and you go home. Otherwise what will you all eat? When there is no earning in the family, and you can't even step out, then what will you do staying here?' Then, didi, after one month, we went – we checked everything, how to arrange a car – we started off on foot… Going from here, going from there, we'd get beaten – policemen used to beat you a lot, right. That you can't sit on the roads – many people don't have homes – we used to sleep under the flyover at night. There, they would chase us off, no one could stay… We lost everything! There [where they'd lived] – now, they don't let us enter there. Now there are all new people – what do they know of who we are? They did inform us – that the ones who were staying here, take your belongings. In lockdown, didi, we spent 30,000 Rs and took a vehicle from here. And from so far away – again in the lockdown, there was no work or business running, so what would we come here and do? So, in the lockdown, they broke all of that down, and the things that we had were all put into trash and removed. We had a fridge, a cooler, a bed, we had a box, a cupboard – very expensive-expensive things! Because didi, it has been 26 years for us staying here. In 26 years, what do you not need?

Perhaps it was already clear that the city is not a place where one could stay beyond their earning years – without owning land or property, the possibility of living on as tenants depended on the continuation of income. After the pandemic, however, a heightened awareness

that the loss of income can occur any time, and a visceral knowing of their disenfranchisement in relation to the place, seemed to be informing the anticipation of return – for Abida, as much as for Veena.

Abida: If a lockdown is put, if something happens, sometimes some things happen, the government takes out rules that 'we will not keep outsiders' – we also watch the news. 'Outsiders – people from their own lands, go to your own lands' – we are not allowed to stay in Delhi so much that we can make a house here. It's not that allowed. In our land, we are allowed more.

So they all knew that they would have to return despite most of them wanting to stay, at least in some part: because of having gotten habituated to life in the city, its convenience and possibilities, after so many years of living in it, and because of having children who had only ever known life in the city. Cultural belief systems also tied into this – as Esha explained, the elders in her village considered it immoral for one to sell their ancestor's land to buy land elsewhere. Veena too lowered her voice, in a gesture of shame and secrecy, as she mentioned that they had to mortgage a piece of their land in order to meet expenses after the pandemic.

A cultural *attachment* to what Esha referred to as *janamabhoomi* – land of one's birth – along with one's own community was also in the mix of factors motivating the wish to go back. Important events like weddings, festivals, and other ceremonies were celebrated much more wholeheartedly in the village, and contained no specialness in the city.

Diya: Festivals here – see, Ekta ji, the festivals here are different. Like at our place, Durga Puja is celebrated very well, it doesn't happen here. Where does it happen here? The 5 days which are there – shashthi, saptami, ashtami, navami, dussehra (day 6 to 10 of Navratras) – for 5 days, we have a lot of joy and fulfilment (ananda)… 5 days we don't cook food at home,

we eat outside only. All day, from the morning, we fast, and in the evening, we eat outside…Here, I just sit at home. And come to work. That's all. How will it feel here?

The necessity of return, however, was often spoken next to its impossibility – because the village ecosystem to which one imagined returning now largely only existed in memory, lost through gradual changes in the socio-spatial landscape.

<u>On not being able to return</u>

Esha spoke of the changes in the village community – an individualisation and fragmentation of what was once a sense of interpersonal cohesiveness, leading to increasing competitiveness and opposition.

Esha: Earlier it was very good – earlier, I'd like it. It felt like everyone has an own-ness (apna-pan) in them, they are all one's own. When someone had some work, then they'd do it. Now it doesn't feel like that. That has changed – it doesn't feel good in the village, everyone is looking at each other jealously. If you are less than them, then they'll make fun of you – if you become more than them, then they are bothered by that also… Now the environment there has become a bit bleak – because of that, or because of what…. Everyone has scattered – everyone has gone to cities from the village; they've all left, taking their children. So because of that, or because of what – I don't know. Earlier, I'd feel quite at home…

Veena echoed this loss, linking it with changes in land ownership through the generations.

Veena: I miss that very much. Even at my in-laws, there was a lot of social interaction, because there were 11 women, there were brothers, they all stayed together. Sometimes there would be no vegetables at one person's house, sometimes at another's, someone would just eat a roti, but everyone used to eat together. If there were dishes then we would scrub them together. There were four houses, but when the dishes of the four would be empty, then there was a courtyard like this, so we would sit there only, and put one cot (khaat) there. And with

the cot, we'd wash – one person would keep scrubbing and one would keep washing, and we'd dry them. After drying, everyone could collect their own. Now it's not there, didi! Earlier, there was a lot of mixing together. Now, that's not there, they say 'why will I do it, I'll do my own'. Now there is guardedness, didi, earlier, this wasn't there amongst us, we used to live together, whatever happened… Now, if those five brothers were there, and 50 bighas of land, then everyone got it – everyone got 10-10 bighas. Now that they've got 10-10, then ahead someone has 2 children, someone has 4 children, so it got further reduced. So what will you get? 2-2 bighas? Someone has 2 bighas, someone has 1 bigha…

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This subsection delved into the lived experiences of multiple levels and forms of dislocation lived by the makers of this research – losses of *homes* which also brought with them a number of irreversible losses in *homeness*. The next subsection will focus on their internal, psychical responses to the imposition of these categories of loss – an exploration of how their internal worlds moulded themselves to this lived landscape, and the creativity of home and self-making which can be gauged from these.

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In response to displacements: shaping the self and its dreams of home

'A woman doesn't have any home' – those were the first words I heard when I began the interview process. Tracing the life journeys of my research participants – from childhoods in gendered poverty, to child marriages into homes of violence and abuse, to migration into a city where one is situated into disenfranchisement and precarity – brought those words viscerally to life, sometimes excruciatingly.

That this homelessness also left behind or inscribed a deficit that pertained to the self, who had gone unseen and unconsidered, was expressed by Laila as she said:

> *Ekta, I have always thought for others, I never thought for myself, that what is my life… My joy, my life – what is it? I never understood – neither did my children understand, nor did my husband – no one.*

Yet, she said that she had now begun to think about it – something had shifted, and something had made possible a shift, over the years. The *sense* of home, to varying degrees across each of my participants – and the *capacity* for the sense of own-ness and *apnapan* which underlies it – seemed to me quite remarkably mature, even developing into the research relationship (across differences of class and community, as will be discussed at the end of this chapter). It seemed so through the manners in which they responded, remained alive, to the inner intensities of their lived experiences; the agency they exercised in refusing and retaining or reclaiming attachments; the creativity with which they forged links across ruptures; and their continuations of desiring, and dreaming.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Aliveness in psychic response: on grief and rage, detachment and attachment

A cultural prohibition on blaming one's parents tried to quash Diya's anger – at having been removed from her parent's house, at having been given into a marriage where she was left alone and subjected to horrors, and at having been denied the possibility of return when she had nowhere else to go.

Diya: I pray very much to God, that 'God, I can love my mother and father my whole life, no matter how much injustice has been inflicted upon me – but I can never complain about my mother and father'. Because they have given birth to me. They say it, right – a boy and girl can do many things to their parents, but they cannot blame them. No matter what the parents do, one must never go against them – because it is not the right of the child to say anything to them. No matter how much injustice the parents inflict, no matter how many mistakes they make, it is not the child's right.

Through these words, she gave voice to the very injustice that she wasn't allowed to complain about. A part of the psyche seemed to speak counter-culturally, as she lapsed between saying she couldn't blame her parents to saying that she told her father that it is his fault that her life turned out this way, between saying that she couldn't blame God to lamenting to Him about the grief He has caused her.

Abida, on the other hand, distanced herself from the Abida she had been when her husband left her, and spoke openly and unapologetically with seething rage about her fearlessness and invulnerability to him now. She expressed a severing of all bonds of dependence with those who had disappointed her – in a manner which was echoed in various ways by Safreen, Mahnoor and Diya.

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While Safreen exclaimed emphatically that she 'wouldn't listen to anyone' anymore, Mahnoor expressed a sense of regret over the choices that had been made for her, and wondered if things

could have turned out differently had she had the freedom to choose her own way. She corrected these thoughts, bringing herself back to faith in the wisdom of elders – yet also ignored those same elders as they now tried to convince her to remarry. She was now, through her rejection of their counsel, making her own choices.

Mahnoor: I think sometimes, that I shouldn't have had such a life. It should've been better than this – what if I'd gotten married with my own choice? If I loved someone and married them, maybe this wouldn't have happened. Because they gave me, so this happened. If I did it myself, it would've been good only maybe. Then I think no, they gave me, they must've thought of something and given me – they are elders.

Even now, everyone says – 'you should marry again; your son won't look after you going forward; one day, you'll regret it'. I say that if I'll regret it, then let it be – I'll deal with it… If you stay alone, then they talk – 'this woman lives alone, there's definitely something… off with her'. People talk – behind your back, what do they say? In front of you, they don't say anything. Whatever people want to say, let them say – those people won't feed you. You'll have to work yourself to eat. However well you live – people have mouths to talk. So they'll talk.

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This separation of the self from the social milieu which had dictated it seemed to appear in the form of a withdrawal, and Abida withdrew into her inner world to find within a voice which was hers, and which told her to stand alone.

Abida: One thing which I learned was – to live, when my husband used to do that – I used to work, and I would keep running my mind every hour. That 'how will I live'? If I break, if I leave my children and run away somewhere – my children will then beg on the streets. Baap re baap – I won't do that. Should I marry again? I used to think – should I marry? What will the people of the world say – chhee (yuck)! I shouldn't do such a thing – to roam around with

someone – no. Wrong – absolutely wrong. You'll roam around for two days, and after three days, he'll change your world and run away. No, no, no – not such a thing. What should I do? How should I live – and how should I raise my children? I'd think in my mind. In the day, I'll become a man, and at night, I'll become a woman – okay. Let's see where my world goes. From where – where did it start, and where will it end. I will not give up my pursuit of the world… I let everything go to hell – my husband, relationships, everything…

Within herself, she found a moral goodness which she explained through a story of the Islamic figure of Fatima, and an internal relation to something which she could steadfastly hold – a sacred place in the *mann* where she could experience an unassailable sense of relatedness, which she could perhaps use in the service of building her Self.

Abida: There's a book in the mann of humans also. In the mann, there's a book – it's a very big book. No one can look into that book – but one's own book, one can oneself look into… In the mann only, there is wrong, good, bad – everything. Everything is in the mann only… The book of the mann – He only writes. He only writes it. One has to write it oneself also – the book of the mann… One has to make that book oneself – then, a person moves forward. You have to keep your steadfastness (hausla) also – don't break, don't fall – absolutely do not fall… I have never left my steadfastness (hausla), didi, and I will never leave it also. Till I die, I won't leave it…..Don't break, don't fall. That thing, I have learned – it's in me… I also see a lot of things. In my sleep, in my dreams – I'll practice dhyaan (meditation, attention) – 'there is good in front of me'. I see it in my mann… If I have difficulties, I bear them, I don't share them with anyone. There's no point of sharing them, didi. They don't give – they spread that word. In the whole world – it makes a noise. What's the point of making a noise? There's no point. Stay quiet… But, didi, one thing which is there – on my own courage (himmat) – neither did I borrow from anyone, nor did I give to anyone…

Diya too held on steadfastly to faith, creating a space of unshakeable continuity and rhythmicity through rituals, and seemed to find in it a signifier of the Self, through which to build her own sense of personal significance.

Diya: I have endured a lot, Ekta ji, I've endured a lot – I told you, right, if there was another woman in my place, then she would've died long ago. I am the one who has endured this life and lived. They say it right – the one who prays to God, who is a devotee of God, they are able to fight any circumstances. I have fought. Any situation which has come, I have fought. I have fought a lot.

Yes, in my heart, I have too much faith. I live with faith – I told you right, I fast, I still fast. Every Monday, I keep a fast. If everything in the world collapses and breaks, the skies and the lands, if everything from all around is lost – even then, I won't leave my fast. Every Monday, I keep a fast. So for that, that day what I did was, I fasted, and when I fasted that time, God was with me. I can't tell you about all of that, but I can tell you this much – in my inner soul (atman), in my heart, there is God. In my Self, there is always the residence of God, because I walk along the path of truth. With God, I ask God for this much, that never show me the wrong path. So when I die, I find a place at your feet…

Diya found signs of the divine in her body – in the lines in her palms shaped like a *Trishul* (trident wielded by Lord Shiva), for example – and in her dreams, which she saw as sacred communications which are not to be shared with anyone.

Despite and alongside this seeming withdrawal from the world of '*maya*' (illusion, as the world of material reality is seen in Hindu philosophical perspectives), Diya also formed transcendental attachments within this world – for example, with the birds whom she would ritualistically, diligently feed.

Diya: Their language – those who love them, only they understand. I can understand their language. That they are hungry, and they're asking me for food. Even now, I've come with lunch – and I've come after feeding them and everything. I give them food, I put their water, then I said 'beta, you all eat all day' – I say it in my mann, Ekta ji. When they are not around, then I just say 'Mahalakshmi (Goddess) – where are you all? Come here. I've given food for you all'. Wherever they are, Ekta ji, each of them comes to eat food, each one. 15-20 birds come together.

The act of devotion is responsible for making something sacred – as Diya said, "*If you worship a rock then God will become present in that too*". Through her devotedness, she seemed to find sacred relationships in the everyday world around her – something Veena did as well.

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Veena seemed to anchor herself into the world through attachments with the nonhuman, particularly dogs and cows – a route to nonverbal connectedness of the mann with an Other, in a form of relatedness which also perhaps kept her connected with her mother, to whose immense suffering she had borne witness and whom she had seen as profoundly supported by their dog, as well as with her community, and her faith.

Veena: Yes, didi, there is – in our village, they used to say, us – meaning I'll tell you what it is in our religion, in Hindus – that from every single cooking area (rasoi), a roti, you take out first the dog's, and the second the cow's. The people from the village – now, we are not able to find a cow here. So it keeps lying there – meaning you've made it and it's kept, but you don't have time also, and when you have time, then there's no cow. And the dogs here are like this – they don't eat it also……. So at our place, they say a dog… for his bite of food, he says even if they give me just bites, even then my stomach will remain full. Now God knows if it's a lie or true, but in the olden times, they would say it – my papa and mummy and others

used to explain it to us, they would say that the land which is there, this first belonged to the dog. Meaning our ancestors would say – this land belonged to the dog. Now the dog and the jackal sat and the decision was made… They decided on 'to whom should this be given?' Because we don't have hands and legs, all of us, and we can't earn and eat also… So the dog has decided for this land to be given to the human. The human who is able to farm, who works hard at it, they will also eat and they will feed us also. That's why he gave the land – all this land which is there, people from earlier, babas – all this belongs to dogs.

When our papa went to jail – didn't I tell you, in a murder, he got stuck – at that time, we had adopted a Moti. Moti – he was in our village. That Moti, jiji [sister], was very faithful to my mummy. He was very faithful. So – in whomever's house, the head goes away, it brings a lot of grief – then my mummy, when my papa was presented, then she cried so much, then our dog also cried with her – with her…. She told us.

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Diya reached for an internal sense of sameness – the shared fate of suffering – through which to build a sense of existential interconnectedness with living beings. To do this, she told the story of the birds – various species of birds who all took turns feeling sorry for one another because they each carried some form of suffering, until they realised that their sameness lay in that very suffering. She emphasised how this existential suffering was an equaliser of the rich and poor.

Diya: Even if one is a crorepati (millionaire), he does have money, but have you seen inside his house? How much struggle and upheaval does he go through in his house? They say in big houses, there is upheaval – in a poor person's house, there's upheaval and everyone around hears it, but in a big house, they're not able to hear it. Because as they say, they cover it up with money.

This sense of sameness particularly connected her to the suffering of women in what felt like an internally housed sense of feminine solidarity. It expressed itself in the form of her storytelling, from which she branched frequently into the stories of other women she had encountered in life – and with whom she shared the inevitability of experiences of womanhood that she called as an '*agnipariksha'*, trial by fire.

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Perhaps a most subversive act of attachment was the sustenance and reclamation of the attachment to one's own parents – of whom one had been made bereft in early life. Diya insisted on providing care to her parents, asserting in the process that she was still their child and had the right to be – a right which was finally recognised by her father when he divided up his land amongst his children, and gave her also a share.

Diya: At this time, earlier, my mother was very unwell. And at that time, when money was asked of my brothers, then my brothers didn't even give it. I gave it then, I gave 10,000 [rupees]. I gave 10,000 and said it to my father – you get mummy treated. Mummy was treated, mummy recovered, then my father said that my daughter gave everything. The way in which I was given an equal share of soil from my father, like that, being a girl, like a son, I fulfil my duties (farz). What else can one want in life?

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Building bridges over ruptures: on creative acts of linking

In the rupture of the life-world which resulted from rural to urban migration, the psychic creativity of place-making seemed to have been deployed in the service of crafting links by which the rift could possibly be traversed, without falling in the gap. This was through finding channels of continuity – eg. through religious rituals like fasting, and through continued

traditions such as the feeding of *rotis* to dogs and cows, through which continuities in nonhuman relationships could also be kept.

It was also through creative acts of exchange between the two worlds, which perhaps stitched them together, by which they seemed to become simultaneously inhabitable for a fuller self.

Safreen carried plants from her village to the city, and began to grow them in an employer's household – and took plants back as well, to plant them in her own house there.

Abida carried ideas for the house that she's building back in the village from the houses seen in cities here – the style of balconies, the colours of walls and curtains – which could allow her to spatially recreate an environment known here in the environment sought there.

Diya slipped through the cracks of language – lapsing into Hindi on occasion while speaking Bengali, and lapsing into Bengali while speaking Hindi, collapsing the distance between the two.

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Returning, repeating and working through: on dreams of home

A most important dimension of the dream of return – having earned enough money to secure a future back home – was the dream of returning to one's parents' home, to build a house on the very land from which they were first removed.

Abida fought vehemently to buy that land from her sister, imagining recreating upon it the life she had lost too soon.

Abida: That place - I'm very fond of… That house has 4 rooms, a verandah on all 4 sides, bathroom, a cow shed, I can also keep cows, buffaloes, goats, ducks, hens, there are trees – mango trees, jamun trees, guava trees. There is a tahal (Bengali?) – so I can live off fish also. Everything… | Even now, after 4 years – I'll go to the village. 4 years – I'll stay for 4 years –

I spoke to Ghazir (her son) and said that I'll stay for 4 years, and after that, send me home. I want to see the house, I want to see the fields. I like greenery, I want to raise cattle and hens and ducks. At the time of mangoes, for mangoes to come on my trees – at the time of guava, for guavas to come… I want to touch the fishes in the pond. He says, 'ma, what are you – what do you want from life?' I said, 'I want a lot. The thing which I lost in my childhood – that thing, I want back. Send me home.'…

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Aside from this dream of home were the homes they dreamt for their daughters – dreams in which both repetitions, the inheritance of loss, and transformations could be gauged.

Veena, when I met her, was preoccupied with worry over her daughter who had turned 17 – what she explained as a dangerous age for the parents of an unmarried girl. She kept a close watch on her, rushing home right after work on most days to keep a check on her interactions, and worried about earning the money to get her married as soon as possible.

She expressed the importance of a '*kanyadaan*' – the ritualistic giving away of the daughter – without which the courtyard (*aangan*) of a house remains unmarried, unattached to community. It is a ritual of supreme importance to the family and the community, she said – and being unable to give her would lead them to internally suffocate until they die. As she spoke of her deepest wish – to give her daughter away – she also spoke of her deepest love for her, of the sacred depths of mother-daughter intimacy.

Veena: A daughter, didi, has been made – holding her to your body, it has been made, that a daughter is parayi no matter what. Everyone knows, that she will have to be given – if you're not able to give her, even then there'll be a suffocation (ghutan) inside. If this bed falls and we're not able to give our daughter's hand to anyone, then didi, we'll suffocate and suffocate till we die, that we were not able to give our daughter...

As much as a daughter will come and say in front of her mother, she will not say to her father. She won't say it. There are some things which we hold inside and stay. We can't say it to our father, and we can't even say it to our brother. If we talk to our friends, amongst ourselves, then they'll go say it at home and they'll say it there and it'll become a big thing… If you sit in a room and tell your mother something, then she won't say it to anyone – she'll never say it. Whether she's poor or rich, she'll keep it her heart forever. What her daughter has told her, she'll never give out. (begins to cry). That's why it's very important to have a ma. The one who doesn't have a mother, they don't have anything…

A daughter is a huge support, didi. If you have daughters-in-law – they say that if your breath leaves your body, then daughters-in-law will sit there quietly. They come and drink their tea – whoever comes then they serve it to them. A son also doesn't bother so much. When a daughter comes, then the house cries. (crying) In the whole village, you get to know.

Saadhna's mother – whom she said was possessed by a djinn, which internally scattered her into "sometimes saying this, sometimes that", following giving her away in marriage – would recover momentarily whenever Saadhna would return home to visit. This was another testament to the anguish lived in the loss of the mother-daughter bond. In the love and grief of this, in relation to her daughter, Veena seemed to write the repetition of her own childhood loss. This was a repetition that Diya expected as well – with an important difference. Having educated her daughter more fully than she could ever be educated herself, she hoped that she wouldn't be as vulnerable – a hope that Veena also held.

Diya: The same thing will happen to my daughter, what happened with me. My daughter – however beautiful she is, however anything she is, whatever happens – will her mother-in-law ever consider her as her daughter? She won't, right? She can't. She'll only consider her own daughter as her daughter. My daughter, however much her mother-in-law

likes her, that's how much she'll make her work. That's why I'm educating my daughter – for this reason – that she be able to go and stand on her feet. So she doesn't have to take abuse from anyone… That's why I'm educating my girl, so she's able to know everything.

As much as Abida hoped for her daughter to have a life of more agency than she did, when her husband stopped her from working and earning her own money because she was pregnant, she couldn't say anything. Her daughter was married and belonged to another's house – and the impossibility of return, though not imposed by her, was a part of the social structure which was as internalised by her daughter as it had been by herself.

Abida: She is of a different house. If I tell her, then they'll say – 'oh, she doesn't want to give her daughter anything so forces her to go to work.' I moved back – I turned around and moved back, I wasn't able to say anything… She said, 'ma, see, the one whose baby it is, the one whose house it is, the one whose world it is – if he is saying no, then how can I forcefully go? I can't come to your house, right, ma?' She was explaining it to me. 'I'll be a burden for you.' I said – 'why are you saying such things, crazy things – that you'll be a burden for me?'

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iv. Apnapan (ownness) in the research relationship

Diya described the intimacy between us in the same language as she'd used for the sense of home, the sense of own-ness known as *apnapan,* which I was deeply honoured to receive from her.

> *Diya: See, I'll say one thing – look at people – they don't just say it like that – they say the relatedness of the heart is deeper than the relatedness of blood. Isn't it? Only blood relatedness is not relatedness, heart relatedness is also relatedness. It's not that there's always love between real sisters – they say it, right? Like you are my own, you also now, so that is the only thing. Isn't it?*

The capacity to be at home lies perhaps in the capacity to build intimate relatedness, to bear separations and separateness, and find/create from it a space or route to identification and closeness. The intimacies shared during the research interviews, in which the alienations of social class and religious difference were also ever present, said much about the strength of this capacity in my participants – deriving at least in part from a certain cultural propensity, of which I grew aware (following some initial confusion) when Laila told me stories with reference to "your brother-in-law" (*tera jija*). She was speaking of her husband – and while part of the reason for this phrasing was a cultural discomfort with taking his name[57] (Mahnoor also, for example, made reference to her husband as her son's papa), it also expressed a cultural way of articulating kinship in everyday forms of addressal.

The development of forms of closeness in research relationships also perhaps said something about the facilitations of the methodological and ethical frames which shaped interactions (a reflection upon which is offered in the form of an afterword to this thesis as a whole) – as

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[57] As a gesture of respect and reverence, women in traditional Indian society often carry a cultural prohibition on speaking the husband's name

places in which forms of giving and receiving, *lena-dena* which signals involvement and the keeping of meaning, were made possible.

Over and above the time, life narratives and emotional experiences of my participants, I received interpersonal gestures of care and nourishment – for example, from Diya as she voiced worries about my thinness and asked me to eat better, and from Safreen who brought me some packets of chips one day, as an accompaniment to the tea I carried for us. I received warmth and openness, and the privilege of being invited deeper into their lives as they showed me pictures of their homes – in the city and in the village – and families. I believed that they too had received something from me and the interviews, perhaps something quite basic: a listener.

As we came to the end of our interviews, I asked Veena (as with all the others) how her emotional experience of being interviewed was, and if any parts of it had felt difficult. She responded saying that it was nothing like that, instead, she felt that "at least today, someone has asked… You asked from your heart, so I told you what's in mine." Saadhna, although we met only once, also expressed a similar sentiment that brought to mind how important a witness is to not only trauma, but also grief. She said, "Everyone's life has its own unhappiness, but you can't tell anyone… I have to bear so much – and I can't tell anyone… I've only told you all this. Before today, I've never told anyone." For Esha, the presence of a recipient seemed to make possible both a recognition of, and separation from, her suffering – which she reflected upon to assert that "this is how the system is, but it's wrong". Abida – who expressed her delight at participation in this research as a platform by which she could contribute her story and be heard, preserved and remembered – seemed to find through it a place to occupy: both in the work itself, and in my mind as the researcher. When I told her that it offered her no direct benefits, she promptly responded – 'it doesn't matter! It's very good – if something that I say helps you, if you do well because of it, then it's very good. You will keep me in your heart.'

The meaningfulness of having offered a listening presence, however, was also tempered by its meaninglessness – articulated by Mahnoor who said flatly, in response to the same question: "it didn't feel like anything – what difference does it make?"

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PART 3 | Discussion of Findings: Suffering and surviving homelessness

Before attempting to make sense of the findings of this research through the language of psychoanalysis, perhaps one must once again remember the discipline's historical tendency to colonise the language of subjective experience of the Indian self (see Akhtar & Tummala-Narra, 2005, for a detailed overview). Remaining cognisant of this, I approached the 'findings', the stories and inner reflections which were shared with me, through a restorative 'hermeneutics of faith' (Josselson, 2004) rather than that of suspicion (traditionally associated with psychoanalytic inquiry[58]) – attempting to take seriously the meanings explicitly shared and locating them in the Indian self-and-world-view, without reading into them alternatives historically anchored into the Western conception of the subject and its formative environment. In other words, I took the chief analytic task to be a search for the *implicit* rather than the *repressed* in their narrations. While possibly limiting, I believed this was essential to allow this work to contribute to the cultural-psychoanalytic dialogue which has been characteristic of psychoanalytic writing emerging from the subcontinent.

Tethered to the spirit of co-enriching interchange between these two (internally plural) ways of viewing subjectivity, this chapter will be structured into two parts: the first will attempt to understand the narratives through the culturally-informed psychoanalytic frame figured in the theoretical background – exploring it's 'psychosocial' application by focusing upon points of contact, separation and interchange between intrapsychic, interpersonal, and socio-political realities. The second will explore what the narratives may potentially add to that frame – taking an approach to the cultural that retains space for, but perhaps helps to reformulate through its worldviews, the universal. That is, while the first part looks at the narratives through a cultural-psychoanalytic understanding of *home* as a psychosocial experience, the second part seeks to

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[58] Paul Ricoeur famously considered Marx, Freud and Nietzsche to be three 'masters of suspicion' – seekers of disguised meanings

expand the initial cultural-psychoanalytic understanding through the narratives, and the dimensions they contribute.

<div align="center">*</div>

In order to introduce the first portion of this chapter, I'd like to begin with a story. During my PhD, and as mentioned in the chapter on methodology, I had worked in a voluntary capacity with a Delhi-based organisation, The Community Library Project, through whom I also hoped to build relationships which could facilitate access to potential research participants. In February 2024, The Community Library Project held a fundraiser at which renowned theatre artist, Mallika Taneja, performed a haunting rendition of a folk song titled '*Amma mere*' (my mother). The song is the story of a girl child asking her mother for the world – her father, her dreams, her path – and being repeatedly, painfully denied. On hearing this, I found myself preoccupied with wondering how she found the will to continue to seek despite repeated refusals, when – if ever – she would stop asking, and what the world offered to her which kept her anchored to it. I realised that these were the same affect-heavy curiosities which the stories I'd gathered had sparked in me – and they form the organising core of the section to follow.

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a. Indian women and their cultural-psychic weapons of resistance

This portion of the discussion of findings explores the *structural* homelessness of the Indian woman, the socio-political enactments through which it appears in lived experiences across different places called home, and its intergenerationally-reproduced internal ramifications – that is, the inheritance of (self-)loss through the mother-daughter relationship.

It then explores the transformations of this loss made possible through the inhabitation of suffering, enabled by mutual witnessing and the co-emergence of the sufferer in both the mother and the daughter – which mobilises them to hold on steadfastly to the homely bond formed between them despite its institutional foreclosure, and develop an enhanced capacity for empathy and kind-ness across gulfs of varying kinds. For suffering – the acute grief and rage of being denied a home in the world, and the attachment to and loss of the home in the mother – to be continually inhabited with a desiring self intact (and even transformationally produced) perhaps implies a tethering to the cycle of home-seeking which is itself the nature of home[59], supported by something through which this loss can be repeatedly borne. Pondering the further elaboration of at-homeness beyond the primary mother-daughter dyad and the separations embedded into it, this section postulates that the psychic resources to which Indian culture grants access situate subjectivity into a widened world beyond the category of the human. Access to subjective oneness with the more than human environment (in particular, through interspecies kinship) seems to provide a form of relatedness that can be securely inhabited – that is, left and returned to – allowing it to act as a channel for the self and its development of a sense of home in the world. This relatedness – with the (m)other and maternal substitutes found in the more-than-human world – can be seen as offering the possibility of turning away from the oppressive in the patriarchal world of human sociality in a gesture of

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[59] The psychoanalytic understanding of 'home' reflects the profound truth that American author, David Foster Wallace (2005), succinctly articulated: that "our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home."

refusal as resistance, and providing a site to which return is made possible – in a powerful act of reclamation of that which has been systemically denied, i.e. home. This personal journey is articulated through, and opens another reading of, the Sita myth operative in the Indian woman's psyche – one centered on her rebellion.

The role of *geographical* displacement in the form of rural to urban migration – the form of home-loss it brings and the relational experiences in which it is encased – is then explored as an event[60] in which the loss of home can be both relived, and reworked.

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[60] Intended to carry the analytic meaning of the event as a rupture in the continuity of ordinary life

i. A song of refusals and the latitudes of inconsolable longing

Homelessness as a structural condition of Indian womanhood

"*Aurat ka koi ghar nahin hota hai*", I was repeatedly told – a woman *has* no home. This emphatic statement usually came as soon as I introduced my research topic, and spoke not only the experienced homelessness of being made a migrant, but more significantly the structural, systemic homelessness of Indian womanhood at large, experientially inhabited across various socio-spatial landscapes. While the next subsection will illustrate the latter – that is, its hauntings in lived experiences – this one will briefly outline an overarching conceptualisation of homelessness as a gendered condition[61] in India, embedded into the construction of the woman as 'object' of relatedness (the one who is had, and not the one who *has*).

As illuminated through the theoretical background, there exists a powerful unconscious signification of home in the experience of the mother – particularly the maternal body – which Durban (2017) called the 'primordial situation' encountered in-utero. In this primordial situation, which he says provides the structural basis for all future feelings of having a home, the embodiment of the mother is what is inhabited – she occupies the position of 'object' in the subject-object configuration which encapsulates at-homeness as a subjective sense. In simple terms, perhaps it can be said that early on in the developmental trajectory, the mother is the home – and not the being – of 'being-at-home' as a form of 'dual unity' (Mahler, 1967). This work has led me to believe that there may be far-reaching consequences of this deep-rooted symbolic association[62] for the perpetuation of homelessness amongst women, particularly Indian women.

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[61] A number of psychoanalytic feminists have illustrated the complex gendered trajectory followed in psychical maturation along various developmental lines – in a similar manner, I propose here that 'the capacity to be at home' also moves along a gendered path, through uniquely gendered obstacles

[62] As Narayanan (2023) writes – "When men are able to grieve childhood memory – the lost body of the mother and the narcissism of imagining infinite access to both male and female anatomy – they no longer need a melancholic control of women as a souvenir of mother" (pg. 67).

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The Indian woman carries the imprint of the Indian mother throughout her life – not just of the actual mother(s)[63] of her own infancy, but that of the symbolic form with which the patriarchal-cultural imagination is enthralled (see Kakar, 1995). This symbolic, fantasied maternal form is imbued with immense power and presents a corresponding danger: in contrast to Freud's imagination of an original act of patricide, Kaul (2018) utilises folklore rooted in a cultural imagination of the primordial feminine to offer the hypothesis of an original act of *matricide* in the creation of "ordered, civilised, patriarchal society" (pg. 62). In order to fill in the void left by the act of matricide, Kaul writes that, in the myth, though the primordial mother "is partially resurrected, she is pared down, reduced, contained: a pale, domesticated shadow of the fiery original." (pg. 63). It is the power of the mother as an independent being, and the danger she represents to the male psyche, which is met with a murderous response – a part-murder enacted through her domestication, or perhaps, through her entrapment into the object-position of home. In other words, the threat of her power as subjective agent appears to be dealt with by the misogynistic rewriting of her as a part-person, meant for relational use by the other – in the myth, and in society.

Narayanan (2018) notes how Kakar's maternal enthrallment places the mother (and the woman, in the culture of the maternal-feminine) "*in-thrall*", that is, "trapped, into a compulsive relationality with her child— and also to Indian society itself" (pg. 13, italics in original). Being unable to separate from this relational role, transmitted through maternal identifications in gendered development and the cultural imposition of the maternal upon women, inhibits access to the agentic mobility through inter-psychic spaces which is required for the development of the *sense* of home (see theoretical background). To occupy the place of the mother, with her

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[63] See Roland (2005) on multiple mothering in India

relational trappings in culture, means a foreclosure of the development in the girl-child of the *being* who can *have* a home, the experiencing I-self (Fast, 1998) who inhabits an-other within whom she can feel a sense of personal agency – most fundamentally perhaps, the agency to *leave*, and to *return*. Indeed, a departure from relational spheres does not carry much hope for return – because it brings with it the threat of annihilation of the subjective self (through its social and interpersonal non-recognition of existence or aliveness – see Kakar, 1989, Kakar & Kakar, 2007, Kumar, 2013).

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"Aurat ka koi ghar nahin hota hai" – a transliteration of this, to my mind, would look something like: "Of a woman, there is no home."

The experience of finding oneself in another, Kohut's 'twinship', is an experience fundamental to being at home (see theoretical background) – this is subtly, but significantly, different from the colonising experience of finding the other in the self. While in the first instance, the subjective experience of the self expands through an outward movement, in the latter, it is shrunk, diminished, erased, and bleached of life. Yet, a structurally impinging[64] inter-psychic configuration flows from an entrapment in the object position of home – making one unable to engage in expansive acts of leaving and returning, but instead being made to bear a combination of encroachments and abandonments, forced into the merging advances of the other, and denied agency over one's developing boundaries. 'Of a woman, there is no home' – but perhaps of the home, is the woman who carries its image in the image of the mother.

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[64] Marked by environmental encroachments into the self and its possibilities – see Winnicott, 1960

It was this configuration, this border experience, which seemed to reappear through the narratives as they unfolded over varied 'places' - beginning at birth, and enduring over space and time, as well as generations.

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Homelessness through the lifecycle and its institutional sustenance

"When a girl is born, it is like a clay pot is born", said Diya, while speaking of the manner in which the heads of the family and community, particularly the mother, are considered to be lowered by the birth of the culturally unwelcome girl child[65]. To my mind, this statement reflects a fatal failure of recognition which designates her as non-living, unalive – and deposits a death in her at the moment in which she seeks to emerge into life, with potentially hazardous consequences.

A UNFPA report released in 2020 estimated that over 45 million girls were 'missing' in India over the past 50 years due to pre and post birth selection practices – female foeticide and infanticide. However, even if a physical death is evaded, the threat of a psychical one persists: a 'soul murder' (Shengold, 1989) of the unwelcome child, who then tends to die "easily and willingly" (Ferenczi, 1929, pg. 127). Agarwal & Paiva's paper on the infant observation of a girl child in India (2014) testifies to the psychic violence enacted within the first year of birth by an unresponsive world – taking the observer through the researcher's own inner gendered homelessness to a real-isation of the neglected infant in the mother which is passed on to her baby. This is a point to which I'll return in the next subsection.

Writing about Kakar's body of work on Indian women, Narayanan (2018) asserts that it unearths "a stage-wise structural model of the process by which a deprived personhood occurs: at birth where the mother experiences disappointment at delivering a girl; at puberty where the girl is distanced from her father; at marriage which is an invariable disappointment; and, at the birth of her first child, the closure of her erotic life" (pg. 4). The narratives which constitute this work also move through such stages, staged primarily in the *natal* and *marital* homes, and then in the home in the city, emphasising the intrusions and entrapments of the outside world

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[65] The term 'girl child' is a hauntingly well-known one in India (far more emotionally loaded than 'female child' or 'daughter' or any other term) – so much so that in January each year, a National Girl Child Day is observed

in which a home cannot be *had* – and which relationally deliver an erasure, in place of an elaboration, of the sentient self.

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The childhood home – often romanticised in imagination – is not always, or even often, a place of carefree abandon for the Indian girl child, who is acquainted with the societal shackles on her little body early on. As evidenced by the story of Mahnoor, who told of the impermissibility of play in her young life spent largely confined in the physical home, she comes to dwell in her body aware of its potential for misuse by others and it's synonymy with the household. By this, any violation of her would bring dishonour upon the home and family at large, and so, the latter are necessarily implicated in the work of keeping her protected – by keeping her bound. A lack of safety in public spaces, as well as heightened scrutiny (by way of community moral policing) of girls in them, sustain these enactments of childhood suffocation. In her reluctant acceptance of these confines for the sake of her dignity and that of her family, she is perhaps made to renounce the impulse for exploration which is essential to the strengthening and furthering of attachment bonds.

It is not only the 'honour' of the home that attaches to the girl-child's body and keeps her physically and relationally bound, but also the full weight of its misery – which she carries within as a culturally-derived sense of herself as a *bojh*, a burden, necessarily draining of the (m)other whose 'head loses a fist in value', as Diya elaborated, with her birth. The social system of dowry[66] links the girl-child with a significant, sometimes un-survivable, financial demand anticipated at the time of her marriage – endlessly reproducing her position as a burden to the home by her very existence. This adds to, or perpetuates through guilt and the reparative obligation it brings, a responsibility which is already placed upon on her – to take on the role

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[66] Legally prohibited since 1961 but still widely prevalent – considered socially unavoidable across the participants of this research

of nurturer-provider, and forsake her own needs and desires in something akin to what Winnicott (1964) has poignantly called 'the inhibition of healthy greediness'. Safreen's decision to drop out of school as a 10-year-old, to tend to her home and father following her mother's death and elder sister's marriage, perhaps spoke of a depressed willingness to sacrifice her own dreams for caregiving, as much as it spoke of the immense weight of caregiving responsibilities which rendered dreaming unsustainable. Conditions of poverty, deprivation and institutional abandonment of rural persons necessitate many such self-sacrifices of the girl-child as part of an "intergenerational contract" (see Mattila, Raju, & Jatrana, 2016, pg. 77) which implicates her in intra-familial survival, and can designate to her both caregiving and earning responsibilities.

The early repudiations of the self, and its needs for physical and inter-psychic nourishment, which are enacted in and by the circumstances of the first home and family, foreshadow the intensified deprivations which threaten her future. Perhaps, she even undertakes these sacrifices in an attempt to preserve – for as long as possible – that which was never fully had, and was yet promised to be prematurely lost: the childhood home, and her family of birth.

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The girl-child in Indian culture is largely viewed through the lens of *parayi* – seen to be belonging elsewhere, and only temporarily present in the family into which she's born. Around puberty, her place there can become untenable, as the danger she carries as a sexual being requires that she be swiftly married (re-domesticated before her adolescent desire leads her to individuate – Veena's anxieties around her daughter's marriage seemed, in part, to reflect this cultural fear). Diya's story of being pulled unwilling from the safety of her father's lap and married into a large family of strangers at the age of 12, materially illustrates the loss of home and childhood that is often attached to the event of menstruation.

The marital home introduces new dangers and violations, often at an age at which the psyche itself is too vulnerable and unfortified to bear them. To briefly illustrate, according to a 2020 UNFPA-UNICEF report, India is home to the largest number of child-brides in the world (223 million) and still faces thousands of dowry-related deaths each year. In addition, as per NFHS-5 (as mentioned in the theoretical background), nearly 30% of all married women face domestic/ sexual violence in the country – likely a gross underestimation since many cases of such violence go unreported. Diya's account is a testament to this reality – despite enduring extreme physical abuse and violence, and forced starvation, as a child bride, as well as total abandonment as an adolescent new-mother, she could not seek or access protection. Numerous barriers to this access exist – including the fear of not being believed, hostility and danger in interactions with the police system, the cultural threat of dishonour which comes with having one's 'private' affairs being made public, amongst others. But it could not even be sought – because she had nowhere else to go, and the social order can be acutely violating of a woman unattached in a relationship to a man (Kakar, 1989, Narayanan, 2018). And, perhaps most significantly, this was also because a return was impossible – and her claim to her natal home irrevocably, inconsolably, lost.

Being unable to imagine leaving, and largely confined to the house to ensure that the domestic sphere remains socially sealed alongside her, Diya described an intense, inescapable suffocation. The marital home – far from offering a promised sense of belonging 'here' (the '*mera yahaan'* of the expression of home in Hindi) – can bring with it further isolation and subjective placeless-ness. She recalled being able to talk to no one, placed within a network of manipulative relationships in the house in which openness and privacy – the conversational experience of a border as both open and closed (a simultaneously permeable and impermeable boundary described as a fundamental feature of home in the theoretical background) – were inaccessible. If attempted – as she mentioned in the context of her inability to speak with her

husband without him reporting the conversations to his parents – it brought with it intense retaliation in the form of physical violence. Very soon then, she ceased to attempt.

Marital life brought with it a further erosion of her desiring self – demolished alongside the dreams of continuing, and perhaps even completing, schooling, to which Diya had fought hard to hold on. As the youngest daughter-in-law, she was the last to eat and the family would often run out of food before it was her turn – leading to her habituation to hunger and her active killing of her appetite by the consumption of water to fill herself. Her survival response to her psychic and relational starvation seemed to mirror her physical – in the form of a habituation to unfulfilled needs through their simultaneous killing and fulfillment through whatever nurturance was available[67].

In this journey elaborated across the two primary homes that in-form the homeness of an Indian woman, one can see the repetitions of a pattern of constraining boundaries and an invasive world – alongside the impossibility of leaving and returning – as foreclosing the sense of home as it is psychoanalytically understood. The boundaries enveloping her seem to exist for the elaborative movements of the other, and necessitate her subjective removal from them through successive erasures. With this, the 'song of repeated refusals' risks coming to an abrupt end – for an incremental erosion of the self through inhabiting this configuration, with its longing for home remaining un-consoled for unbearably long, can create an inner emptiness which makes it impossible, and possibly futile, to seek. This is an emptiness socially re-iterated, and can be seen as psychically inherited primarily through the mother-daughter relationship – that is, through the renunciations within which it is embedded.

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[67] This will be elaborated upon in the following section

Homelessness as an intergenerational inheritance of maternal loss

The theoretical background explored the loss of home – the primordial situation of being safe and nourished in, and emerging from, the mother's body – as irrevocable, producing an ordinary interminable yearning which the human spirit must live to bear (and bear to live, for as elaborated, there is no coming into life without the pain of separation). The subsections above demonstrate how this early loss is particularly *inconsolable* amidst the boundary conditions, and forms of relatedness made available through them, within the primary homes of Indian womanhood – wherein consolation is viewed as the vital possibility of getting something back through a creative re-finding.

This loss and its extreme irrevocability are pre-ordained by the cultural imposition of the maternal imago upon the girl child. While this research illustrates this point by utilising a body of work that examines this predominantly from the Hindu worldview, it's important to note that it also transcends it: for example, Abida brought to my notice the figure of Fatima from the Islamic cultural universe, who is also constructed – and therefore constructs an ideal of womanhood – through maternal reverberations (see Ruffle, 2013). It is by the *maternal-isation* of the woman in these religious-philosophical systems through which she inherits the loss *in* the mother as a gendered lack (in a manner transculturally similar to what Chodorow, 1999, has described) – which is inscribed through repetitions of subjective erasure in relational spheres[68]. This leads to the incremental death in life of the *possibility* of regaining the maternal body in the form of a 'home' – a provision which, by its ongoing responsive presence, becomes usable for the crucial task of beginning and continuing to 'matter', through the mattering (becoming real in the world) of psychic experience.

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[68] It may be possible to see women's willingness to carry this maternal image as deriving from the social abjection of the woman outside of it

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This socially imposed absence in the possibility of subjective inhabitation of relational realms is heightened by the loss *of* the (m)other[69] herself. The mother-daughter relationship thus becomes an important 'place' for the intergenerational transmission of loss – of self and home – as touched upon in the theoretical background. This loss becomes more acute in the context of paternal absence – as an embodied presence on whom aggression can be tested, and as a figure of identification through whom the symbiotic orbit can be expanded, and inhabitable (containing, and not constraining) internal space can be created (see, for example, Prof. Salman Akhtar's talk at the Second Annual Psychoanalytical Conference, 2015, in India). While there is a dearth of literature on the absence of the father in daughter's lives in the Indian context (perhaps tellingly, the paternal role is spoken of more often in the context of its place in the life of sons – see Paiva, 2016, Prof. Sudhir Kakar's talk at the Second Annual Psychoanalytical Conference, 2015, in India, and Kakar, 1994), the experiences shared in this research draw attention to it: fathers had largely either abandoned families or been taken away from them. Where neither was the case, intimacy with the father was either absent[70] or brought to a sharp halt by puberty (as seen also by Kakar, 1990) – a separation made more unbridgeable by the daughter's being taken away to the marital 'home'. The loss or foreclosure of the paternal realm perhaps exacerbates the anguish of loss or foreclosure experienced in, and through, the maternal.

In a culture of son-preference, where the mother's opportunities for becoming a speaking person, and laying claim, are tied to the mothering of sons (Kakar, 2012), the daughter can be made to experience painful neglect from her earliest infancy (see Agarwal & Paiva's paper

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[69] Multiple mothering allows for the removal of the mothering role from the birth mother – as seen from Abida's story, this was a role played for her by her elder sister-in-law

[70] Encouragingly, in some parts of the body politic of the country, this has been seen as changing (Chaudhary, 2013, Roopnarine & Suppal, 2000)

referenced earlier) – as a transmission of the neglected infant in the mother who has birthed a girl[71]. It is first the mother who renounces her infant's needs for her, perhaps having had no access to the means of fulfilling those needs herself. This can create an impossibility in the maternal tie – expressed in the story of Diya, who carried its absence as an affectively empty rupture – by draining it of longing or desire. She attributed it to her mother favouring her brother, and loving him more – tending to him with an attentiveness that she could never have nor perhaps even seek, whose loss represented more what could not be, than what was.

That the mother herself is often tasked with policing her daughter, blocking her access to the outside world where relational substitutes to her could potentially be found, can enhance the distance between them and inhibit trust and intimacy. The notion of the daughter as *parayi* – belonging to an elsewhere and destined to leave – ensures her closeness with her mother is woven through and laden with loss, even where it does manage to, often intensely, exist (Johri, 2010).

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Freeman (2005) elaborates how maternal responsiveness "offers the infant an external point of reference, leading the baby to anticipate that experiences of discomfort can be relieved and that his or her expression of emotional feelings can initiate this process" (pg. 14). Responsiveness perhaps – by allowing the self to live in and return from the (m)other – builds a communicative channel, a capacity for passage into the world, from which it is possible to experience a return. In this, it orients and locates the self, becoming an external point of reference, an anchor for subjective reality in the outside world. In other words, responsiveness both routes, and roots, the self – and allows for it to develop a sense of agency, a creative potential, and a being (in-the-world). The homelessness of being denied routes, and correspondingly being un-rooted,

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[71] Dynamics of envy and what psychoanalysis calls as an 'identification with the aggressor' may also play up here

expressed itself through a particular proximity to the grief and terror of absolute aloneness repeatedly lived – and vividly[72] remembered – by the participants of this research. This felt and described void seemed to be the experience of an 'ontological' loss of being, or a loss within being – the unmarked inner topologies where it had its possibilities for an inter-psychically unfolded existence cut short.

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The narratives tell the story of home loss, including maternal loss (as in the case of Diya above) and self loss (as expressed by Mahnoor and her lost childhood home *and* self), when it plays out as the loss of an absence – a possibility for coming into being rather than the being itself. There can be a close, but perhaps not always precise, apprehension of home-loss through the lens of trauma – driven in part by its magnitude, the expansive range of supporting elements that such a loss amputates which risks it being catastrophic (exceeding the relationally-unsupported psyche's digestive capacity), and in part by the common ground they share in their deleterious impact. That home-loss is a self-loss even under 'ordinary' conditions has been made apparent in the literature (see, for instance, Zarnegar, 2015), and the self-loss encountered in this work was of a kind which felt most fitting with Kanwal (2018) – who describes it as a 'suffering without a sufferer', the loss of a *possibility* for a self-state to emerge and inhabit the world, to deepen the capacity for homeness of the self. Kanwal describes this as a loss which cannot be mourned because it represents not only a loss of links but of linking capacity, and possibly, of the self who could have linked. An un-mournable loss – where the one who loses is herself lost – is perhaps a loss which can fail to catalyse the inner creativity that is driven by the desire to re-find/ recreate the lost object (see theoretical background). And so, it threatens to send one into a more absolute and endless homelessness, by extinguishing the will to seek.

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[72] By bringing experiencing states into their re-membering

In place of the will to seek, a will to renounce exists in the depths of the cultural unconscious of Indian women – described by Kakar (2012) and further unfolded by Haq (2018) using the myth of Sita from Hinduism (see theoretical background). It feels fitting that Haq describes this proclivity for renunciation through the notion of an 'ascetic self' in Sita that recounts Mandodari's – her mother's – renunciation of her. It felt as though this willingness to repudiate or renounce the self and its desires – it's appetite for elaborative inter-psychic ties – following a renunciation and abandonment at the hands of the other, had imprinted upon Veena. She expressed the quietest sense of hopeless despair in her assertions that she had nothing to live for now aside from her daughter's giving away into marriage, the final renunciation which she had to complete. Besides that, she wanted next to nothing – just for her hands and legs to keep working for as long as they can, and to be minimally fed by someone once they are no longer so. It may be possible to see in her testimony that it is desire that is extinguished with the death of possibility, making it near impossible to escape a psychic abyss.

Yet, she – and all the others with whom I worked – did often (or, at least, sometimes) desire, link, and perhaps quite significantly, suffer. They remained tethered to the cycle of home-seeking despite overwhelming home-loss and the repeated refusals of the outside world to grant them recognition or access, existence or claim. They retained through this journey – to varying degrees – a more-than-culturally-permitted level of emotional aliveness to their experiencing self, and in powerfully subversive ways, made use of it to affect intergenerational reparations and transformations.

That the ones with whom I worked all told the stories of others who could not be interviewed was a sobering reminder that resistance to such an onslaught is not always possible for the self in the harsh relational conditions in which it occurs. But that it was for these selves made it possible to witness something important in their inner journeys – steadfastness in the face of

suffering through retaining the *capacity* to suffer[73], and the subversive wresting of homeness

utilising the forms of relationality to which Indian culture grants access.

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[73] Recalling Durban (2017, quoted in theoretical background) and the risk of home-loss as resulting in an inability to tolerate or endure psychic pain

ii. On the inter-psychic survival of suffering and it's cultural contours

'Steadfastness'[74] through the mutual witnessing of mothers and daughters

Veena wept as she spoke about the necessity of giving her daughter in marriage – going on to elucidate how, in the mother-daughter bond, lies not only impossibility, constriction, and absence, but the strongest life-affirming recognition which can act as a lifelong source of support. Saadhna perhaps also made visible the immense power of the mother-daughter relationship when she spoke of the mental illness, the *djinn*, which took hold of her mother when Saadhna got married – fragmenting or dispersing her into "sometimes saying this, sometimes that" – from which she only recovers briefly when she goes home to visit. Despite the social and institutional foreclosures of this bond, it is one to which both mothers and daughters can subversively hold on (see Johri, 2013) – finding, through a deep recognition of suffering in one another, that which is overwhelmingly denied: proof of a subjective existence, a 'one who suffers'.

It is interesting that Kanwal, speaking of the form of home-loss that can't be mourned because it represents the absence of a self-state which could mourn, writes that the missing link is established, or 're-associated', through a sensory experience – which can be thought of as an embodied form of encountering it in an-other. In the language of Laub (1992a, 1992b), perhaps one can say that the impossibility of inhabiting a self-state which could never be homed in the world is overcome through the reconstitution of an internal witness, enabled by mutual witnessing in the mother-daughter dyad. Veena's testimony to the extent to which only a daughter knows her mother's heart, and vice versa, illustrates the depths of intimacy and privacy found in their spoken and unspoken communications. Veena and Mahnoor both spoke of the manner in which they witnessed, and empathised with, their mother's suffering in their

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[74] Borrowing the term from the Palestinian 'Sumud' (explained in the introduction) – a form of everyday, nonviolent resistance through a refusal to leave, to be forced out of one's home

early childhoods, nonverbally responding to and accommodating it through their own internal adjustments. This intergenerational reparation offered upwards – from daughters to mothers (an important and overlooked dimension of their relatedness, see Raja, 2009) – also seemed to return downwards, for instance through the manner in which Mahnoor's mother(s) refused to stop looking out for her, keeping her in mind, even when it meant that they could only do so by sneaking in to her house when her husband was away.

Haq eloquently expresses the role of the 'secret passage' between mothers and daughters, possible to be elaborated into other 'spheres of femininity', in allowing for more than absence and renunciation to be inherited in their bond. She writes:

"While there may be proclivities within Indian women, raised in a patriarchal society, to turn the aggression inwards into feelings of worthlessness and inferiority, strong identifications with the mothering persons and the secret passage to spheres of femininity through domesticity or cultural ideals offer an alternative to young girls so that their silences take on puzzling meanings." – 2018, pg. 68

Through these secret 'routes' – which were steadfastly held despite foreclosures and offered the possibilities of staying, leaving, and returning – they seemed to be rooted enough to retain and build the 'capacity to suffer'. To suffer is to withstand what can potentially be a generative experience in the worldviews of Eastern philosophies (see, for example, Prof. Honey Oberoi Vahali's 2022 webinar with the Foundation for Universal Responsibility), and indeed, also perhaps in mainstream psychoanalysis (through the intimate relationship between loss and creativity to which it grants recognition). Perhaps it was by inhabiting their suffering that they also managed to affect significant intergenerational *transformations* of loss – such as in the case of Veena and Diya, who both had no choice but to get their daughters married, but retained hope that their suffering would be spared the extremes to which their own had gone, as an

empowering outcome of the education they had worked hard to get them (in equal measure to their sons).

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What seemed to live, despite societal strangulation, in the relationship between mothers and daughters was a sense of 'devotion' – grounded in the capacity for making a tie sacred[75] through making it inviolable – resistant to socially-enforced distances and severances. For Winnicott, it is the ordinary *devotion* of the good-enough mother which allows the 'true self' to begin to live in the world – and, aligned with this view, in the materiality (which will be discussed in the next section) of the Indian cultural tradition, it is *devotion* that can be seen as real-ising sentience. Diya's statement – that 'if you worship a rock then God will become present in that too' – speaks of its power. In the 'metonymic thinking' found in the Indian psyche, the idol (rock) is considered to be not merely a representation of a goddess but the goddess herself (Roland, 2005, pg. 83) – and so, a summoning devotion can be thought of as a potently *creative* capacity. This enlivening love seemed to have called the subjectivities of both, mother and daughter, into existence in the world – allowing for a tethering to it by the form of intersubjective 'place' which they offered to/through each other.

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The mother-daughter relationship, which acts as a primary channel for the intergenerational transmission of homelessness in Indian womanhood through erasures and renunciations of subjectivity, can also perhaps be a generative source of powerful relational resilience that allows for the subjective selves of both mother and daughter to be routed and rooted. This may catalyse the intersubjective co-emergence of a suffering, and desiring-transforming, self-state

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[75] From the Latin etymological root of 'devotion' (devovere) – meaning 'consecrate'

that keeps one tethered to the vital journey of home-seeking amidst home-loss – what is perhaps an endless search for the one from whom one feels, or has felt, called[76] - however, tenuously.

The enforced distances and long disappearances of this maternal relational presence – through culturally-imposed ruptures which disallowed the continuities characteristic of 'home' as an environment facilitative of an experiential *ongoing*-ness – required that its functions be shared by other bonds of kinship through which to come, and remain, alive.

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[76] The gravitational pull of home has been discussed in the theoretical background, and was also expressed in the narratives by Esha

Continuities of homeness through interspecies kinship

Veena, raised by a devastated single mother following the wrongful imprisonment of her father, seemed to find in dogs a relationship of mutual recognition – through experiences of nonverbal responsiveness and embodied intimacies – as a stark contrast to the unresponsive human world in which she was placed. Perhaps one can say that the dog of her childhood responded to her call (vocal and devotional), and in the process, made real her voice and allowed it to carry meaning in the world. In this way, the dog (Moti) seemed to have formed a relational channel for her to subjectively link with the external world around her, and also perhaps provided a path for linking with her mother, as well as her wider community.

Veena situated her love and respect for dogs by recalling her mother telling her of how Moti had shared in her own grief and isolation – responding to it with his empathetic cries and bodily provisions of protection, care and warmth. In a similar vein, she located it within her community's belief of indebtedness to animals for their land – explaining that it used to belong to dogs, and was given by them to humans to till, and provide. A spirit of exchange – the '*lena-dena*' (give-and-take) which enables a sense of involvement ('*matlab rakhna*' - keeping meaning) – shone through the view of interspecies kinship in this belief system, and seemed to have been lived in the care and companionship Moti offered to both Veena and her mother, in response to the devotion they offered to him. This was a bond made sacred – communicated through the community ritual practice of offering the first *roti* cooked in the morning to a dog – and continued through different life-stages and movements (including the geographical which will be discussed in the next section).

Diya too described several such bonds – with dogs, and cows, and goats, and birds – through whose suffering she seemed to give expression to her own silenced violations. The animals in her life – whom she likened to the Hindu Goddess associated with abundance, *Mahalakshmi*,

expressing perhaps the ways in which she experienced a maternal boundlessness through them, and mothered them in return – offered her access to both 'holding' through embodied intimacies, and 'containment' through projective identifications, and other communications essential to self-making (see theoretical background). A relationship of mutual signification through the other seemed to make real the personal significance[77] of both – described through the special exchanges, internal acts of 'calling' and being heard, shared between her and her community birds.

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Perhaps it was not only the dialogue with other species, but also the wider more-than-human surround, which created the relational conditions for the sense of homeness. The boundless Other (culturally emphasised in India, see theoretical background) whom Abida seemed to find in her village fields, for instance – or the predictable familiarity of a particular, reappearing cloud she described – may also have allowed for the finding/ creation of homes that could be 'had'.

The mature capacities for empathy and mutuality across barriers – nurtured through the shared suffering of mothers and daughters – may have contributed to their access to, and ability to make use of, these bonds beyond distance and species. However, these capacities and their varied expressions can also meaningfully be thought of as emanating from what Indian culture offers to the psyche – especially, perhaps, a woman's psyche: a primary relational creativity embedded into a widened, and more fluid, world (see Kakar, 2024).

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[77] I'm reminded of the timeless classic, The Little Prince (1995), in which the fox says to the little boy: "But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world…"

Psychic-cultural facilitations of home: when primary creativity meets a wider world

The Object Relations Institute for Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, in one of its course descriptions, succinctly describes Winnicott's notion of 'primary creativity' as addressing "the lifelong work of a human subject's effort to live authentic experience" – an effort which I see as intertwined with the existential striving for home (in the living world), with its potential for imperfect achievement residing in the subjective 'capacity to be at home' (see theoretical background).

For the participants of this research, this subjective capacity was partly developed through the facilitations of the relational environment between mothers and daughters and the enlivening acts of recognition in which they took part. The identification of girls with mothers and the mothering role was also perhaps simultaneously deleterious and generative – involving an identification with both absence and a sacred, unassailable creative potential. This psychic creativity is accessed not just through devotion in relationship to the (m)other herself, but through what Dhar refers to as "identification with goddesses" (2020, pg. 156), a powerful dimension of the maternal imago, through which the "girl's body locates itself in a position of power."[78] Kaul's exploration of the primordial feminine[79] in Kannada folklore – which stories its women without the Sanskrit-ised split between what Ramanajun (1986, cited in Kaul, 2018) refers to as 'tooth' and 'breast' goddesses – returns to mind at this juncture as an illustration of both the creative and destructive potency in the image of the divine mother.

It also seemed at least partly developed through the use of interspecies kinship, alongside wider forms of relatedness with the more-than-human environment, and the identifications – by means of finding oneself in another – which these enabled.

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[78] Diya's finding signs of divinity in her body seems illustrative of this
[79] Also explored by Akhtar & Tummala-Narra (2005)

The ability to develop and make use of these identifications however, for both *inhabiting* and *defying* suffering through creative linking, can be seen to belong to the larger cultural context of the Indian psyche – and the form of selfhood embedded in it, which allows it multiple channels for a coming alive through an expansively-rooted (and routed) being-at-home in the world.

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Dhar (2020), in her examination of the structure of subjectivity in India, devotes a chapter to the Indian girl child – whose negotiations with the world she examines to postulate that "the structure of the modern Western subject (stable, fixed, and intensive, with an opaque core) is unlike that of the rural Indian one (slippery, mobile, and extensive, with a transparent core)" (pg. 147). That the latter allows for a more fluid, multi-positional[80], and contextually-derived inhabitation of subjectivity has been reiterated by multiple authors who have worked in the region, albeit with their own descriptive language for it (see, for example, Siddiqui and Davar, 2018 and their study of the plurality within women in states of spirit-possession). Dhar emphasises the choices and maneuvers made available to women through the intersubjective mobility offered by this multi-positionality and plurality of the self[81] – maneuvers which I believe allowed the makers of this research to weave in and out of the *other* to craft for themselves an experience of 'place'. This intrapsychic capacity for place-making[82] seemed expressed in how Diya enveloped her narrative in the narratives of the women she had known through her life, and layered it with the world of birds with whom she inhabited a shared condition, amidst whom she could be located and oriented.

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[80] Related to and made possible by multiple mothering in India (Roland, 2005)

[81] She refers to this through the capacity for radical enmeshment, which allows for the resolution of afflictions across time, place, and person – i.e. for both suffering and healing to take place across locales

[82] A form of simultaneous self-making and world-making through what Siddiqui & Davar call 'subaltern askesis'

That selfhood in India is less bound by categorical distinctions, and is more oceanic and mystical in orientation (see Saarinen, 2012), was discussed in the theoretical background. This self appears to be constituted of relationships (see Kakar, 2018): even at the core level, within the private sphere of the dual-self structure of Indian subjectivity described by Vallabhaneni (2005), through the externality of the unconscious and the outward flows of desire described by Dhar (2020). An example of this from the interviews which springs to mind is that, in the Indian imagination, dreams are something one *sees ('sapna dekha')* – as if the dreamer is a communicating other external to the self. Abida's description of the Book of Mann as being constantly written and shared privately between the self and divine other seemed to me as an illustration of this form of inherent relatedness – in the language of psychoanalysis, perhaps one can say that the incommunicado core of Winnicott is always already in-communion in the Indian self. This is a self which is both timeless and transient – beyond the life-historical space-time dimension described by Kakar through the notion of the eternal 'Atman', and highly contextual and shifting as described by Roland and Dhar.

This self, with its permanent and slippery relational moorings, not only enables the inhabitation of a relationality within which multiplicity is always present and adaptive mobility[83] inherently granted – it also widens the possibilities of who can act as a relational channel, beyond the category of the human individual. Through access to this widened world, it seemed possible to develop an expansive rooting, capable of withstanding – and actively bridging – catastrophic ruptures in lived relationships with humans, and human-made spaces and places.

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Vallabhaneni, like Kakar, emphasises how the self in India is not strictly a human category – with human life geared towards an experiential self-realisation in the form of a 'de-

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[83] A function that can also be linked to the 'connective imagination' of religious culture, as described by Roland, 2005, pg. 23

individualisation' (2005, pg. 372). She uses the concept of *atmadarshanam*[84] – the real-ising of the *atman* (self) through '*darshanam*', experiencing it in another – and Advaita-Vedantic philosophy to situate the self in *sentience*, beyond the 'illusions' of the body, senses, and mind. This sentience – perhaps seen in the use of the terms 'Mann' and 'Dhyaan' for interiority in the interviews – is de-linked from the primarily thinking function of the rational mind, existing instead perhaps at the level of the sensing and feeling being of the 'soul'. Following an extensive experience of working with subjectivity in India, Hoch (1993) too shifted to a view of psychotherapy/psychoanalysis as a spiritual endeavor – collapsing the distinctions between soul/spirit and mind.

In the collapse of this distinction, the fundamental divide between human nature and that of nonhuman animals – established in the childhood experience of each culture (Freeman, 2005) – is also blurred (Akhtar, 2014, Kakar, 2024). Akhtar & Volkan (2005a) have explored how this gulf, situated in the Western view of humanness, is less prevalent in rural societies, where collaboration and cohabitation form a part of the ordinary experience of everyday life. In Indian myths, stories, folklore – humans, animals, and gods often take on each other's forms, blurring the boundaries between them. Mathur (2018), through his paper on the 'frontiers of faith' in yoga and psychoanalysis also interestingly illuminates how the postures and praxis of yoga have developed out of closely experiencing, and perhaps embody identifications with, the nonhuman world. Dhar too draws attention to the absence of forced dualities in Indian subjectivity – considered to be constituted in very 'direct and material' (2020, pg. 133) ways through the wider world, of which humans are only one part.

The cultural emphasis upon nonverbal relatedness (Kakar, 1985) – the truthfulness ascribed to it – also facilitates a deep potential for what Gentile (2018) has aptly called 'interspecies co-

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[84] Linked to Kohut's concept of 'cosmic narcissism'

emergence' through communicative experiences embedded into everyday cohabitation. By the separation of verbal speech and truth, this emphasis perhaps allows for inter-psychic passages between beings which may be devoid of words, but can yet be built upon a distinctly affective language (which Diya described through her ability to understand the language of birds) co-developed through an ongoing and interactive being-with. This communicability seemed to carry the potential for interchange made possible through a mutual recognition of sentience – an experience of finding in another what is sentient, subjectively alive, in the self, such that a 'relational home' (see Stolorow, 2006, in theoretical background) can be formed in/ by the link. That the Gods of Hindu mythology often have animal others as their vehicles, or *vaahan*, to reside in the world can be seen as a testament to the depth of this cultural-relational capacity and its potential.

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It was through these cultural-psychic means – the mobility and multiplicity of the Indian self and it's transcendence of the category of the human – that each of the makers of this research work seemed to navigate their way into relationships which allowed for the sustained subjective inhabiting of suffering, the survival and coming to life of subjectivity through it. Having access to roots/routes which ran both deep and wide – anchored into 'self-realisation' through finding kind-ness (in the sense of own-ness or *apnapan*) in spheres of femininity and the more-than-human world – seemed to allow them to access a sense of home, and retain a living and breathing self through the violence of systemic homelessness.

To my mind, to be at home in a world which overwhelmingly denies access to homeness can be, in itself, a powerfully subversive act – as can, perhaps, its repudiation. A 'turning away' (Temeles, 1983) from oppressive bonds in which a response, a confirmation of subjective existence, could not be elicited can be thought of not only as a renunciation of these bonds, but

as an active rejection, that is, an enraged act of refusal as resistance. Abida and Mahnoor stood out to me as examples of such a rejection – in which it was not only the need which was denied, but the power of the hostile and negligent provider for that need. And by allowing place for its 'good-enough' fulfillment elsewhere, the homes they (and others) found and created also seemed to catalyse the desire and active intention to undertake another powerful rebellion against 'the order of things'[85]: an insistent return as an agentic reclamation.

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[85] Borrowing the term from Michel Foucault (1970)

iii. On Sita's rebellion: an act of refusal and reclamation

The theoretical background laid out, and the stories of participants reflected, the important place occupied by religion and mythology in psychic and everyday life, and meaning-making, in India. The Hindu mythological figure of Sita, particularly through the work of Kakar and Haq, was emphasised as playing a formative role in women's subjectivity in/from the region – something which perhaps Diya also made visible as she drew on the account of Sita's '*agnipariksha'*, trial by fire, to express and give meaning to her sense of the inevitability of women's suffering.

It has been noted that myths emerge from and respond to (Slochower, 1970, Javanbakht, 2006) the shifting circumstances of socio-political life. That is, while they are in a sense received, they are simultaneously created – reinvented and personalised in the subjective worlds they come to inhabit. Through tracing Sita 'through the time warp', Haq makes room for this important recognition: that perhaps myth and mythopoesis, the constructions of 'personal myths', often interactively co-evolve[86] (Bank, 1997, Rudge, 1997). The narrative constructions of self which seemed to underlie the journeys of suffering and survival encountered in this research – expressed through the experience of an *agnipariksha* – may so open up another reading of the Sita myth, and its corresponding psychic possibilities. Doing so also perhaps illustrates the manner in which the same cultural symbols can spawn and find place in psychosocial enactments of oppression, as well as liberation[87].

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[86] This is pertinent to note because, as the plurality within cultures yields significant variations in mythological stories themselves, the plurality of persons may make possible a similar textural vastness in their use in the work of mythopoesis.

[87] While this section speaks to this with reference to the Hindu figure of Sita, the earlier mention of Fatima from the Islamic imagination necessitates a stated acknowledgment of the endless multiplicity possible within there as well (see, for instance, Kasheni-Sabet, 2005, Shanneik, 2022, Gocek, 2001)

Haq offers an overview of the Sita legend in the following passage:

"The Ramayana narrates Sita's kidnapping by the demon-god Ravana who is slain by Rama. Doubting Sita's fidelity, Rama puts Sita through the *agni-pareeksha* (trial by fire). The fire god himself testifies to her purity and they return to Ayodhya. Unable to put his suspicion to rest, Rama banishes Sita again. Dejected, Sita embraces an ascetic life and gives birth to twins. The twins grow up and return to their father. On seeing his sons, Rama repents and asks Sita to return to Ayodhya. However, he asks her to take the trial by fire again, to prove her purity, leaving Sita to embrace her death wish; she calls upon mother earth to swallow her." – 2018, pg. 68-69

Sita's story is one of injustice and repeated subjective violation at the hands of Rama, who cannot resist, and cannot help but transmit, the demands of the social milieu. Her response to this experience – of forsaking and renouncing unto death – has been read as existing in Indian womanhood broadly through the lens of the ideal of the dutiful wife, and the depressed act of actively abandoning as a way to re-member and work through one's own abandonment. If I attempt to imagine the presence of Sita in the eyes of Abida as they flashed with rage and she said, "I will not give up my pursuit of the world… I let everything go to hell – my husband, relationships, everything" – another dimension seems to emerge. To paraphrase Camus – perhaps, one must imagine Sita angry.

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A feminist re-telling of the Sita story – one which I believe to be, in many ways, aligned with the subjective journeys contained in this work – has been offered by a Telugu writer, Volga (P. Lalita Kumari), through her 2016 book titled 'The Liberation of Sita'. In her novel, she explores Sita's journey as she makes her way back to Rama after her time spent in exile in the forest. Along the way, she encounters four other women – 'minor' characters in the Ramayana –

meeting more in herself through the experiences which she meets in them: mutilations, abandonments, independence/ ferocity, and isolation. All these meetings take place in a relational atmosphere of sisterly solidarity – built upon a sense of oneness accessed through the shared suffering of womanhood. It is the emergence of her subjectivity into and through these bonds of kinship which leads to Sita's liberation – from patriarchal society.

Reading Sita's final act – *calling* 'upon mother earth to swallow her' – as a liberating departure from the wrongful confines of society, and a return to the Earth mother, i.e. the land itself which birthed her, feels particularly fitting to the stories grounding this work. In these too, a rejection of social bonds – as expressed by Abida – was accompanied by an act of laying claim, through the wresting of ownership and own-ness, to the *land* of home itself.

As Abida said: "*I want to see the house, I want to see the fields. I like greenery, I want to raise cattle and hens and ducks. At the time of mangoes, for mangoes to come on my trees – at the time of guava, for guavas to come… I want to touch the fishes in the pond. He [her son] says, 'ma, what are you – what do you want from life?' I said, 'I want a lot. The thing which I lost in my childhood – that thing, I want back. Send me home.'*

Perhaps it is also fitting then that, in the Sita myth, the Earth mother responds to the call, and provides a channel for merger, oneness, and death – that is, perhaps, *home* (see the cultural contours of home laid out in the theoretical background).

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

iv. Between the places called home: repeating and reworking loss

The first section of the first part of the discussion of findings explored the structural/ systemic homelessness of Indian women – as a particular relational configuration attached to the woman's body, lived across different places, and socially reproduced over generations. The second section explored the cultural-psychological journeys undertaken in service of surviving it, with a suffering self intact, to and through the sustenance of relational homes accessed in being-with women and the more-than-human world, catalysing multilayered acts of rebellion and transformation.

The third section will now shift to the role played by the event of geographical dislocation in the furthering and easing of this subjective struggle, within the context of the conditions under which it occurred: from villages in different parts of rural India, to the urban villages in and around New Delhi.

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Re-membering maternal loss in losing the village home

The theoretical background demonstrated similarities in the experience of home-loss of a material home in studies of geographical dislocation, and the inner homelessness encountered in the clinical situation – through the lens of the loss or absence of a containing structure which carries the metaphorical significance of the maternal body. The loss of a geographical home, as discussed, brings on the experience of 'disorientation' – that is, it is a loss of the 'here-ness' of a self, the ground (or in the words of Papadopoulos, 2021 – the 'mosaic substrate') upon which it exists in the world. In rural societies, where the manner of being-with the land is more intensely relational, the loss of a physical place experienced as home appears more prominently bound up with self-loss – not only pertaining to the individual unit self, but the familial and community 'we-self' seen in India (see Roland, 2005).

The literal ground – the land of one's birth – can be itself the site of a sacred tie[88] in Indian cultures, captured in the notion of the '*Janamabhoomi*' which Esha described. Veena's hushed voice as she spoke of having mortgaged her ancestral land in the village due to financial necessity also spoke of the sacrilege implied in such an act. A separation from this land – by which one separates from their ancestors and lineage – can so be experienced as more deeply violating and devastating by virtue of its relational status as a site which is culturally deemed inviolable.

The devastation of this loss was compounded by the conditions in which it occurred – not merely the involuntariness of departing, but the blow of arriving, and the impossibility of returning – a repetition of the inconsolability which had been a larger feature of their loss of the maternal body as something which was once 'had', that is, experienced as one's own.

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[88] In her poem titled 'In the Navel of the Mother' to which I've previously referred (Srivastava, 2022), Jacinta Kerketta makes reference to the tribal practice of burying the umbilical cord in the land of one's birth – symbolising the eternal anchoring of the baby to the soil of that place

The initial stages of the journeying towards and arriving in the city of Delhi was overwhelmingly described as a period of paralysing grief and terror. For all the hardships which their early lives in the village had held, they were – at least to some degree – bolstered through them by relationships within their families and communities, and the envelopment of the more-than-human surround. Their terror, however, was not only a factor of the disorienting effects of the loss of a known and familiar everyday world of inhabitation – but strongly derived its intensity from the coalescing of two precarities: by way of how the city treats its women (Tewari, 2023), and how it treats its low-income migrant workers (Ramaswami, 2012, Trisha, Mohan, Derhgawen & Mistry, 2023, Jaiswal, 2023).

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The loss of the known and familiar was multifaceted – so far removed that the city of Delhi was seen and experienced as a 'foreign land'. The encounter with it was an encounter with newness in terms of food, language, seasons, environmental surround and social organisation. The resulting sense of alienation between person and place was immense – drawing in large part from the urban village[89] settlements in which they came to live, the civic abandonment of which made them particularly unpleasant and physically indigestible. Safreen spoke of how most newcomers to the settlement in which she lives vomit soon after entering – the mountains of garbage dumped there from affluent households, for the purpose of scavenging, fill the area with an unbearable stench. Esha too recalled with fresh tears her devastation at moving from the open fields and large home of her village in Bihar to a tiny, dilapidated structure in the city – saying that, "for us, even the house of cows and buffaloes isn't like this." The experience of

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[89] In India, urban villages are erstwhile villages which have been swallowed up in the flows of the rapid urbanisation around them. They exist as habitats without adjoining agricultural land, and are largely exempt from building by-laws, often not falling under the purview of civic authorities. Rampant construction in such spaces allows for the provision of affordable housing in the city – most often used by migrant workers and others amongst the urban poor.

dehumanisation was not only channeled through their new residences, but also their new workplaces – and the thoughtlessly discriminatory practices normalised there.

That the city of Delhi posed a threat to women – particularly to women alone – was something they were each warned about before coming to it. The risks which it posed – of sexual and physical violence, human trafficking, and other catastrophic violations – were compounded by the risks of getting lost in the faceless mass of people moving through the city. Perhaps this experience of city space both expressed, and *intensified*, the fears of falling into 'shapeless unbounded space' which accompany the 'loss of continuity in sensory dominated experience' (discussed as autistic-contiguous anxieties of being) – a continuity lost in being suddenly enveloped by multidimensional foreign-ness. The Wikipedia page of the National Capital Region (comprised of Delhi and its suburbs) pegs its population at over 46 million; an estimate by the National Capital Region Planning Board (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India) placed it somewhere closer to 64 million by 2021. After coming from a village in which everyone knew everyone, and she felt personally seen as being a 'daughter of the village', Safreen entered the terror of feeling like any degree of physical violation of her could not only take place, but go wholly unnoticed. Diya, who would not go to the bathroom without her husband standing outside and keeping an eye out, was also well-acquainted with this terror. The absence of social support, in the manner in which it had once existed, impacted their mobility in the city by constraining their access to protective presences – not only for themselves, but for their children. Abida's stories of leaving her children lying in public parks and Mahnoor's narrations of leaving her infant locked up in the house while they went to work spoke of the pain of being left unprotected, and correspondingly unable to offer protection.

The city of Delhi, its settlements and employment opportunities, generated a sense of absolute aloneness which could not be easily overcome – social relationships in the urban village, where everyone is preoccupied with the pressures of their own lives, combined with the dangers of

public places and the disenfranchisement of relatedness in the workplace, sustained this isolation as an enforced vulnerability. That this disenfranchisement extended to the relatedness of a migrant worker with the city was most palpable in the imposition of the Covid-19 lockdown and the horrors it brought (see Misra, 2020), as recounted through Veena's personal experiences.

All of this made access to a return to *homeness* (elsewhere) near-impossible – the binding boundaries, abandonment and environmental penetrations of life in the city reinforced those already placed upon their gendered bodies. A return to *home* – the lost home in the village – was also near-impossible, and the financially-necessitated extended separations from it constrained the possibility for periodic refueling (Bowlby, 1988) through revisiting .The sense of being anchored 'there' also began to fray through these absences (spanning several years at a time) – in which the village itself underwent numerous changes, and the place which they'd once known seemed irrevocably lost.

This resulted in a form of dual alienation which seemed more like a de-placement than a displacement, an un-rooting rather than an uprooting – for while one left one home, they did not arrive in another and could not re-turn. The risk of this seems best captured in a phrase used by Harlem (2010) – of producing a self 'lost in transit'.

Yet, as we know from the previous section, most (if not all) of those I met were not only *not* wholly lost despite the losses they'd endured, but significantly creatively expanded – as Vahali (2021) has written, "even as exile inevitably endangers, it also creates conditions for empowerment and motivates a search for a 'true self'" (pg. 255). And while there were inherent cultural-psychic endowments and relational facilitations through the lifecycle which helped sustain this search and allowed for a resiliently expansive intersubjective rooting, the event of rural-urban migration also allowed for some relational continuities to be found/ created against

the odds, birthing a new set of subjective possibilities. Somewhere in the rupture of this separation, a separateness seemed to have found space to emerge.

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Re-enlivening through creative findings in the city

Papadopoulos (2021) has written extensively about the concept of 'Adversity-Activated Development' in speaking of the range of subjective responses to traumatic, i.e. wounding, events such as involuntary dislocation. This, alongside related concepts such as Post-Traumatic Growth, emphasises the creative potential possible to be released by a wounding loss (as demonstrated in the theoretical background through an elaboration of depressive symbol-formation as something which occurs in response to the loss of the object) – driven perhaps by the impulse to creatively re-find. As in the case of all other maturation through cycles of loss, a large part of the ability to do this resides within the facilitating environment. As illustrated through the previous section – the desire to have one's suffering consoled can perhaps only subsist in the presence of relational recognition through which the sufferer can survive subjectively inhabiting it.

While most spheres of mutual relatedness in the city were systemically foreclosed, there were some bonds which persisted, especially if they already had close family members here – not uncommon since networks of kinship can act as lifeboats for migrants in the city (Banerjee, 1983), and often enough (as in the case of this work), the cities to which one moves and where one lives within them are chosen on the basis of the presence of such networks. It was, however, the new kinship found across greater divides – utilising the capacities made possible, real-isable, by both culture and gender in the psyche – which felt most subversive, creative, and significant to the task of self-elaboration which is the function of 'home', and seemed to enable the creation of continuity, as well as the possibility of a new composite supporting the self.

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Diya recounted settling in to the city, beginning to move around and go to work, as having been supported by the presence of her coworkers – women with whom she could walk. They

would not speak much amongst themselves because the fear of private matters socially spreading limited the realm of the speak-able – but their embodied presence carrying a shared precarity seemed to offer her a sense of having something of one's own in one's surround. She went on to describe this sense of own-ness as coming easily to her without *knowing* (through spoken exchange) much about a person – a belief in the shared condition of suffering 'placed' her amongst the other women with whom she walked, the women in wealthy homes with whom she'd worked, and the larger world of sentient beings who all suffered even if they didn't communicate, or put into language, their suffering. Her 'story of the birds' illustrated this ease of 'own-ness' as anchored into an unknowable, yet incontestable and resolutely known, shared situation. Her enhanced capacity for creating breathing links seemed to have supported her along this process – perhaps developed through bridging ruptures in the mother-daughter bond and communicative differences with the more-than-human world, but perhaps also furthered through the women with whom she walked.

Esha, similarly, described having made only one close friend in her neighbourhood since she arrived in Delhi over 15 years ago – but the intimacy of that friendship offered her a 'place' in which she could participate in authentic interchange. Saadhna formed relationships with other domestic workers with whom she would commute, and with other women in her neighbourhood with whom she'd speak as they all sat in the common cooking area, working over their respective *chulhas* (stoves made with the support of mud and bricks). Veena had developed close relationships with other domestic workers in one of the households in which she worked. Safreen had developed familial attachments with her women employers – not only as a provider of care to them (a part of the nature of domestic work, such as cooking) but as its recipient. Abida also spoke of the huge role played by her women employers, the 'madams', in supporting her through the difficult work of rebuilding her life when her husband abandoned

her alone with two young children. In various pockets, and despite their socially reinforced divides, a space for intimacy and mutual recognition beyond language interpersonally emerged.

Perhaps it was by offering a compensation, or form of *consolation*, for separation, that this allowed for separateness – an internal 'room of one's own'[90] – to begin to thrive. Within the bonds of women, they encountered something of the lost homeness which could be re-created and re-found (elsewhere, for these also consisted of something new and unexpected, not least due to the dense multiculturalism in the habitats in which they met). In various ways, they also retained slivers of continuity through the material and embodied enactments of rituals, and of ritualistic relationships with the more-than-human world – the dogs which Veena continued to feed, the birds with whom Diya continued to speak. Being tethered to these channels perhaps offered an alternative – an opening from relational entrapments – through the felt, or *sensed*, presence of relational support.

Financial independence also perhaps played a highly significant role in this formation of psychic independence – as Saadhna stated plainly, "if there is money, there will be strength." This too seemed to have been supported by access to geographical distance from the gaze of one's community, one which had kept Veena unable to work and earn despite grappling with physical starvation. Through these generative ruptures, it seemed as though they insistently retained their own internal continuities. And through these continuities, which made ruptures consolable and offered space for the inter-psychic inhabitation of their pain, they seemed to create their own possibilities for self-transformations, through transformations in the mosaic called home: illustrated, for example, in Safreen's bringing plants back to Delhi from her village, and taking plants from Delhi back to her home in the village, rooting herself into both.

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[90] Drawing from the spirit and title of Virginia Woolf's book (2004)

b. Lessons on homing for homeless times: expansive roots, relational resilience and the more-than-human world

To pay heed to the cultural as offering a perspective on the universal – that is, to say that the previous part of the discussion, and the 'findings' upon which it's based, has something true to say of not just *Indian* subjectivity, but of subjectivity at large – is an important part of the 'ethical project' of decolonising psychoanalysis (see theoretical background). This decolonisation opens space for co-enriching dialogue which not only allows for psychoanalysis to 'know' something about its cultural *other*, but discover parts of itself which were obscured by the cultural-philosophical emphases and prevailing worldviews that shaped its development in the Western world.

While making space for the somewhat radical *potential* embedded into this cultural other, in this case the Indian self[91] and its perspectives on 'home', it is important to also refrain from attributing to it a cultural exceptionalism or venerating superiority – to refrain from painting a romanticised view of a complex cultural composite[92] and its people. This is particularly pertinent when perversions of 'home', belonging and identity have been growing features of a fervent, religious-nationalistic fundamentalism in India, driven by movements emerging (at least in part) from a postcolonial psychic vulnerability around the same themes (see, for instance, Nandy, 1983, Kakar, 2018, and Dhar, 2020).

With that caveat in place, I believe that the lessons learned from the study of *home,* with this group of eight people and their culturally embedded journeys of resisting the oppressive in culture, help to counter the tyranny of narrowly-defined and accessed belonging in certain currents within India and other parts of the world, as much as in psychoanalysis. Alongside

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[91] Heavily influenced by the dominant philosophies of Hinduism in the region
[92] As evidenced in the previous part, both oppression and liberation are carried forth through culture

exploring the novelty in these terrains, perhaps one must briefly also lay out some of their continuities – by which the distinctiveness between 'Indian' paths to home and those emanating from psychoanalysis can be simultaneously appreciated, and bridged.

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i. On the meanings of home and its materiality

The Sanskrit root word for 'home', Grha, from which the Hindi 'Ghar' is derived, makes reference to a 'house' – seemingly lacking in the affective dimension attached to the English 'home'. Yet, it's literal translation as something which *holds* or *attracts* carries powerful resonances with what has been described as its immense psychological significance – for orienting, through a being-called (attracted) into existence of attachment and its associated desires. This is reflected in its varied hermeneutic dimensions – for example, Grha is also used to make reference to a planet, but more specifically, the planet as something which exerts a determining force on human life in Indian astrology. The everyday use of the phrase, '*mann lagta hai*' – literally, the *mann* (mind/soul/spirit) gets attached – also emphasises this function of home as something which is grounded in, or calls into being, an attachment. That in this phrase, the *lagaav* or attachment is a verb, demonstrates perhaps its ongoing-ness and continual recreation – not a stage that is ever to be finally reached but something that undergoes dynamic shifts through moment-to-moment experiencing. It is interesting, and revealing, that it is the material world and the physical home which tend to be emphasised in these meanings – as the sites of attachment that hold one *in* place.

That the materiality of home is an essential, irremovable part of the sense of home and self has been acknowledged in psychoanalytic literature on dislocation[93]. This takes on a particularly sacred quality in the Indian imagination, as elucidated through the concept of *Janamabhoomi*. The 2022 Indian film[94], Three of Us, tells the story of a woman faced with early-onset dementia who returns to her hometown to reconnect with parts of herself scattered through the place.

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[93] The intensity of this attachment is also evident in numerous situations of conflict in which people are willing to die for their physical homes, and die with their homes, rather than leave.

[94] As Sudhir Kakar (2018) notes – "Psychoanalytical knowledge of a culture is not equivalent to its anthropological knowledge… [it] is primarily the knowledge of the culture's *imagination*, of its fantasy as encoded in its symbolic products—its myths and folktales, its popular art, literature, and cinema." – pg 171

Perhaps it is the universal fantasy – a longing to return to a material surround called home which is intensified at the time of self-death (through physical or psychical obliteration) – which this movie reflects: as a final grasp at wholeness in/with the world before saying goodbye to it.

There have been global calls for the explicit recognition of 'domicide' – the intentional destruction of physical homes – as a human rights violation, such that it may be recognised as a war crime in contexts of political violence (see, for example, Akesson, Basso & Denov, 2016). That the physical home is conceived in this work as sacred amongst the sites of internal rooting – in which multiple strands by which a self is supported coalesce, through the ways in which we deposit/ invest in (or cathect, in Freudian terms) and psychically occupy the lived spaces of our everyday surround – I believe, supports the view that a violation or destruction of this site can be appropriately conceived as a direct violation of the self, and its vital possibilities.

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ii. On origins and the multiplicity and dynamism of relational coming into being

A word used in reference to home in 'Three of Us', *Udgam*, strikes me as particularly evocative because it makes reference to the concept of 'source', both as *origin* and as *cause*. Both these dimensions found space in the analysis of narratives – home as the (historical) place from which one originates, but also home as the 'place' (relational experience) which continually causes, or brings into, being. The subsection above elicited the meaning of 'home' in its materiality as well as its dynamism – one is never finally at home, but eternally in a process of *being* at home through different, and shifting, relational environments. That the healthy development of the capacity to be at home itself involves multiple homes was elaborated in the theoretical background – and the previous part of the discussion foregrounded the capacities for relational resilience as born out of the elaboration of such expansive rootings.

The tyrannical construction of home[95] as a fixed entity for all belonging and identity to be anchored has hazardous consequences – for women (whose bodies bear a strong unconscious relationship to the fantasy of such an entity), and for the perpetuation of various forms of closed-group identifications (see Volkan, 2017). It is a tyranny that also obstructs the work of healing following geographical dislocation, particularly when such a movement is against one's will (see Papadopoulos, 2021). In contrast to such a dangerously unitary conceptualisation, the journeys illustrated here bring to life the radical potential of creatively re-finding home in a progressively changing and expanding life-world – perhaps making possible the corresponding inhabitation of a 'psycho-diversity of self-states' (Kanwal, 2018, pg. 433 – a point to which I will return in the afterword).

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[95] It's important to note that this is a tyranny that psychoanalysis often fails to disrupt with its traditionally unidimensional focus on the mother/ primary caretaker as the base of belonging – at the expense of the wider world of bonds of care and kinship through which maturational movement takes place (see Curtis, 2021 for an effort to plug this gap)

Freccero (2018) quotes anthropologist Anna Tsing to propose that identities "need to be understood as ephemeral coalescences of encounters and becomings. "Ways of being," she writes, "are emergent effects of encounters" (p. 22)" (pg. 6). That the capacity to be at home is grounded in the implicit, procedural unconscious (see theoretical background) seems to complement this view – leaving room for its continual evolution through interactions. It is this manner of interactional, shifting and mobile emergences that are characteristic of Indian subjectivity – emphasised in the 'Indian family-community matrix' which Dhar (2020) describes. She writes that this matrix has "extensive relationships and desires and instead of being pushed inwards it is thrown outwards, connecting with numerous partial objects the subject encounters every moment since its birth" (pg. 133). She considers this to be in line with Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the 'nomadic subject' – whose desire she expresses through the term 'intensities': moving, unstable and unpredictable flows outwards which "*get attached* to places, people, and things" (pg. 135, italics in original). A lack of emphasis on 'interiority' seen in the subcontinent perhaps stems from such an extensive, outward-oriented subject structure.

I find it useful to think of the 'intensities' of desire through the concept of libido – in line with Kakar (2024) as he talks about the 'full flow of Eros', using the Sanskritic-philosophical concept of *Ananda,* as the not-always-reached 'destination' of the analytic (and presumably, psychic) journey. In 'A difficulty in the path of psychoanalysis' (1917), Freud wrote of two instincts modelled on hunger and love – describing them as preservative and procreative respectively. To think of the libido as fundamentally procreative – i.e. seeking to disseminate the self – means that the expansive elaboration of home through cycles of unification and emergence (anew), driven by the flows of Eros to attach wider and wider, can be seen as derived from the life instinct. This is particularly interesting in the context of the relationship of 'home' to the death instinct (by the internal pull to a loss of boundaries, and even existence) discussed

as the mystical striving for oneness in the theoretical background. To put it simply, perhaps what remains constant in the pulls to live and to die is a striving for home.

In the Indian subject, since 'intensities' get attached to places, people, and things – and personhood is not an exclusively human construct – it is a wider world that is recognised as providing psychic envelopment. If bonds of mutual recognition can be found/created in this field, roots[96] (i.e. routes) are formed, and the simultaneous inhabitation of a self and a world is made possible – particularly through the suffering which threatens to break that overarching dual unity called 'being-at-home'. Perhaps it is the view of subjectivity and subject-formation that arises from such a structure which can allow, more distinctly, the significance of the more-than-human world to be seen. As Searles (1960) stated decades ago in his work on the nonhuman environment: "Consciousness arises through contact with things" (pg. 50) – that is, it is through the encounter (and all that takes place in making 'contact') that subjectivity, the I-self of experience, emerges. That the emphasis on the nonhuman, or the more-than-human, is heightened when faced with disappointments in the human social world comes through the narratives. It is also perhaps a wider reality – as Spitzform (2000) demonstrates through clinical vignettes in her spectacular paper on the 'ecological self' – that the more-than-human world can provide "a sense of I-self as "good enough""[97] when that sense is missing in the human structural framework one inhabits (pg. 279).

The sentience recognisable (and present in a very real and material way) beyond human boundaries in the Indian cultural classification of living beings can perhaps pave the path for a new perspective in psychoanalytic being and becoming – expanding the world of animate beings in which this interactionally unfolds (i.e. the 'facilitating environment'). The

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[96] It is interesting, considering how closely linked the idea of home is to the image of 'roots', to note that roots are ever-evolving and can be thought of as not only existing underground to hold the plant in place, but in and as the veins of leaves which support their structure and carry nourishment, making outward growth possible

[97] Alper (1993) has also written of the self-object function played by pets in an otherwise impoverished relational environment – and the theoretical background linked the sense of home to a self-object experience

environment reaches outwards to include various ways of understanding animate existence as shared and co-created between "those of us who breathe" (Freccero, 2018, pg. 3) – those of us who inhale and exhale, introject and project, recognise and reflect each other. Pellegrini (2018) refers to Laplanche's statement that before identification *with* others is possible, there is identification *by* them, to ask a question pertinent to the reconceptualisations which the Indian subject potentially opens up: "Must they be human others? Must *we*?" (pg. 18-19, italics in original)

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iii. On finding 'oddkin' in the wider world

The world beyond the category of the human has had a series of fascinating psychoanalytic forays, spanning a range of sub-topics and perspectives (see, for example, Akhtar & Volkan, 2005b). This includes a rich body of work pertaining to self-making in the journey of early development, self-remaking and sustaining in adult life, and also specifically, the nonhuman environment in experiences of losing home (for instance, see the exploration of materiality in involuntary dislocation in Papadopoulos, 2021, or the role of animals in migration in Akhtar & Volkan, 2005a). This literature, exploring the place of the more-than-human world in human subjectivity, speaks extensively of physical objects (Bollas, 1979, 2009, Searles, 1960, Tustin, 1980, Volkan, 2017), pets (Alper, 1993, Hutton, 2016, Beck & Madresh, 2008, Triebenbacher, 1998), wild animals in fantasy (as in the case of Freud's wolf man, 1918a), the animals in stories, fairy-tales, religion and myths (Foulks, 2005), animal symbols in the community (Freud, 1918b), as well as the wider more-than-human surround (Hartmann, 1939, Rapaport, 1960). In this process, it places the more-than-human, especially the nonhuman animal, at the centre of human psychic existence. While these varied dimensions of relatedness were present in numerous ways across the life-worlds of my participants, I believe they also opened up another one which has perhaps been relatively less prominent in psychoanalysis: the experience of more-than-human, or interspecies, *kinship*.

Donna Haraway (2016) coined the term "oddkin" in the context of the kinship formed between humans and animals through a community practice of sheep-raising. Snaza (2018) sees this kinship as residing in "[o]ur material intra-activity with each other", which "opens entities to the aleatory, pleasurable, unsettling, and hospitable work of making kin. This making transpires in a variety of languages and modes of affective communication, and it happens largely unconsciously, or nonconsciously" (pg. 25). It is this relational intra-activity that best described many of the animal relationships experienced by the participants of this research – relationships

which lie beyond the pet-wild, domesticated-undomesticated binary, and are so closer to an interactional, every-day and ordinary being-with each other. The mutuality of relatedness in this form of being-with can perhaps potentially take a step towards reinstating the subjectivity of the animal being – the power in their gaze located in their own complex inner world[98] – in recognising and valuing the personhood[99] (the sentience, the subjective existence) of the human. To put it simply, perhaps it makes room to see something which they give to us beyond what we put in them. The Oscar-winning documentary, The Elephant Whisperers, tells the story of such *kinship* – born of settling into a rhythm of everyday life together, co-navigating it in a manner containing dozens of affective communications beyond words. In these communications, in which the animal too possesses a language and requires a response – while also recognising and responding to their human companion – it is the human's linguistic-affective (and correspondingly, self-state) repertoire that is broadened. Perhaps it is an authentic meeting of two subjectivities – distinct and contiguous – which allows for the 'contaminated collaborations' involved in a participation in "the intersubjectivities… of multispecies worlds" (Frecerro, 2018, pg. 5). In other words, it opens space for the 'interpsychic' dimension in human-animal relatedness.

Bolognini (2011) describes the interpsychic as "that dimension of cohabitation and cooperation in which the sense of the self is extended – naturally, and not in a pathologically shared way – to another contiguous being, with effects that at times are reciprocally propagated at the level of the central ego (Fairbairn, 1944, pg. 71) as well" (pg. 99). This seems to speak of the self-elaboration that ensues from relational homeness – a necessary possibility for the recovery from, or continual withstanding of, home-loss. That this possibility can be actualised as much

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[98] See Snaza's (2018) powerful argument for the existence of an 'animal unconscious'

[99] Marcus (2007) recounts an anecdote shared by Levinas about a dog called 'Bobby', whom he came to know while interned in a Nazi POW camp: "Says Levinas, while the onlookers "stripped us of our human skin … [and we felt] no longer part of the world, … for him [Bobby], there was no doubt that we were men"" (pg. 654).

from the animal other as the human animal is an idea to which the narratives, and the worldview from which they are 'sourced', gives credence. Perhaps, it places the animal other in an agentic role in the interpsychic process of self-making as *askesis* – a Foucauldian knowing (or in the Hindu way, real-ising) of the self through exercising it, practicing it, and caring for it (in/through another), in a way similar to what Siddiqui & Davar (2018) refer to as "subaltern *askesis*" (pg. 32, italics in original).

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iv. Towards a new ecology of psychoanalytic subject-formation

Opening space for relational self-making in the human-animal bond as a journey undertaken by two *subjects* – both of whose real existence and qualities *matter* – grants to both a response-ability, that is, the power of a communicating interiority that can call-upon the other, thereby inviting them into existence. In contrast to the traditional psychoanalytic view in which nonhuman animals "assume the passive role of being looked at" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, quoted in Genosko, 1993, pg. 614) – this acknowledgment of subjective existence within the animal raises questions of what happens when the animal looks back[100]. To my mind, what ensues from this *response-ability* – the material implication of the animal other in the system of intersubjective exchange by which the human animal is made and sustained – is an ethical interpersonal *responsibility*, perhaps seen in the 'moral maturity' (Kohlberg, 1981) I experienced in my research participants. It is this ethical obligation that Marcus (2007), following in the footsteps of Levinas, sees as emanating from his dog's face: "an irresistible ethical call, an ethical supplication, of responsibility for the other" (pg. 640).

Perhaps this sense of obligation can be understood through the work of Marcel Mauss (1954) on the Gift – the system of exchange that produces the solidarity of kind-ness – for it is the spirit (which he explains using the Maori '*hau'*) of the gift that compels that it be returned. A psychoanalytic subject formation that makes space for the more-than-human facilitating other as one who *gives* us something which is unique to them, would perhaps carry a new ecological ethics – based upon a responsibility or obligation to return which inheres in the human animal. This was expressed in Veena's community belief of indebtedness to dogs, from whom they had inherited the land – an indigenous system of interconnections that re-evaluates, and helps

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[100] Freccero (2018) tells the anecdote of the first (and last) time she used rat poison to deal with a rat problem she was facing – powerfully recounting the moment when she and the dying rat locked eyes: "she with the eyes of a dying mortal, and I with the eyes of a murderer, newly conscious of the enormity of the crime I had committed against her." – pg 5

restore, our embedded-ness as living beings amongst other living beings. As Spitzform (2000) astutely noted: "perhaps we must play catch-up to indigenous cultures, which are frequently marked by a deep sense of ecological place so conspicuously absent from our psychoanalytic theoretical foundation" (pg. 266). That we share the instinct for home with other species (as evidenced through the phenomenon of territoriality, or through zoological observations of 'maternal mouthbrooding' (see the work of Otto Rank, referenced in Marinelli & Mayer, 2016)) perhaps makes it possible to see interspecies kinship and the work of belonging as being more potentially mutual. That we also share the destruction of home with them (but largely as a consequence of only human actions) makes it more urgent.

While it is easiest to see this two-way interchange as taking place through the nonhuman animal, their responding eyes and face as producing a responsibility in us, it can perhaps also be extended to a wider range of nonhuman 'others'. Mountains, trees, clouds, plants, rocks, rivers – all were revered as sites of anchoring in this research which are profoundly *alive*. Can these too be thought of as possessing a sentient soul? Do these too call-upon us to respond, by offering to us what they do? It is these unanswered questions with which this work will close – hoping that their asking itself enlivens new curiosities in psychoanalysis.

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Conclusion: In praise of re-wilding

"Sometimes you don't survive whole, you just survive in part. But, the grandeur of life – is that attempt", said Toni Morrison (CTForum, 2020) at an event of The Connecticut Forum in 2001.

This thesis marks one exploration – amidst the innumerable possibilities existing in the psyche – of the psychosocial dynamics which can keep one attempting. That is, it traces an intersubjective journey of survival in-part-enough to continue to seek wholeness, to be (in search of) home. It does so by offering an understanding of 8 lives – out of the millions lived amidst the systemic and everyday assaults inflicted through the degrees of homelessness that mark Indian womanhood – through whom it is itself routed/rooted. A 9th, in constant conversation with them, belongs to the researcher. It presents these degrees of structural homelessness and the enduring struggle for home utilising the frames of gender, culture, and psychoanalysis – and places them in conversation with the event of home-loss through geographical displacement, within the situational particularities which envelope rural-urban women migrants in Delhi. At the intersection of this dual being-homeless – that is, in the survival of *being* through two forms of homelessness – it searches for sources of resilience and creativity, and their facilitative relational channels in the face of repeated and multi-layered environmental collapse.

In the 8 lives studied, survival and creation in the face of loss seemed to be made possible by, and expressed through, a capacity to suffer – to withstand and carry the currents of grief, helplessness, aloneness, dread, and rage in their violent intensities – and to make use of this to seek and effect change. Through this capacity and its use, the sustenance of a psychic resistance struggle was examined as a potential site for political transformation. The relational facilitations for this capacity[101] and all that it birthed – in a social order in which such suffering

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[101] Perhaps one which is essential for all elaborations of, movements in, homeness

is overwhelmingly normalised, and therefore, often unwitnessed and unrecognised as suffering – seemed to be made available in large part through two broad inter-psychic places: the mother-daughter relationship, and the more-than-human world.

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For the participants of this research, the mother-daughter relationship emerged as a potent site for the inheritance of loss, as well as deep recognition. The homelessness transmitted through it was examined for its cultural moorings – as was the generative power and unassailable intimacy it can offer. A subversively steadfast holding on to the latter seemed to catalyse possibilities for (two-way) intergenerational transformations, thereby creating openings in cycles of violence through psychopolitical paths to effecting social change. Creatively sustained intimacies through loss and foreclosure in this bond seemed to lay the groundwork for inter-psychic capacities through which one could not only find ways to repeatedly return, but recreate their support elsewhere: for example, through mutual witnessing found in the bonds of women in the family and village ecosystem, and those encountered in the city.

Another interesting channel, through which the functions of the maternal tie could find continuity through ruptures, was also one towards which the Indian cultural-psyche is somewhat uniquely oriented: 'interpsychic co-emergence' with other species and other living members of the wider world, with whom humans cohabit.

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Toni Morrison helps us see survival without denying the tragic dimension of traumatic loss – that it is not always possible to survive whole, or for that matter, even whole-enough. The makers of this research, by virtue of having survived, offered and enabled an exploration of their mechanisms of survival in the context of inconsolable loss – that is, the (inter)psychic possibilities of aliveness which they found and created, as well as their limiting by that which was dead, irrevocably lost through re-enactments of being made homeless. In a similar manner, they couched their own living stories within the context of the stories of other women they'd known, who had been unable to survive.

Through testimonies, descriptions, and evocations of the limits placed upon their possibilities for survival and aliveness, they made visible – in the form of a subjective telling – the violence of the structural situation surrounding them. By this, they made it possible to witness both what they went through, and their inner experiencing of it – of structures and events, and the personhoods of those who experientially live through them. I believe that this visibilisation is in itself of value to the work of countering the socio-structural dehumanisation of low income women migrants in India's cities – and its 'findings' reiterate both the importance of attending to women's access to 'place' (interpsychic, of which the material-spatial is an important dimension), and the potential place of woman-to-woman relatedness in channelling it[102], in this context. What I see as the more conceptual contributions of this research, however, will be presented in the following section – based on my understanding of what it offers, and to whom that may be of interest.

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[102] See Apurva (2023) – a fascinating article on how women's beauty parlours in Jharkhand's villages act as "pockets" of resistance and solidarity

This research joins in the repertoire of rising engagements with the 'psycho-social' – explorations of psychical reality in conversation with wider (and widening) socio-political and cultural worlds. Supported by the subject of study – home, which itself traverses the boundaries between the inner and outer worlds – perhaps the engagement with the subjectivities of Indian women in response to their lived displacements offers a perspective on the space between, and the hyphen that joins, the psycho-social and the psycho-cultural. The hyphen, in this work, makes possible the conceptualisation of the relationship between these realms as one which is inescapably tied together, yet also consists of an in-between space – that is, the hyphen both limits and allows mobility.

While the tie is an important emphasis, it draws attention to this mobility as a means by which the survival of psychic life can be effected in *opposition* to, perhaps through a subversive use of, social and cultural currents. In the journeys that constitute this work, where cultural and socio-political forces drive repetitions in cycles of homelessness, psychic life – by its myths and mythopoesis, what it receives and what it creates with it – seems to open some possibilities for renewals in dwelling, within and across generations. That culture and psyche interpenetrate in ways that are both predetermining and personally inventive, as do the psyche and the social world, is demonstrated through the place of Indian culture and cultural objects in both the psychic oppression and liberation of displaced women in the country. An exploration of culture which derives from ordinary people and their inner reflections, in addition to cultural symbols and objects belonging to the region, allowed for the deeply personal psychic workings of/with cultural meanings to be gauged. This, to my mind, re-stor(i)es the place of culture in resilience and creativity in the face of potentially traumatic loss – alongside its place in foreshadowing it.

Through the manner in which this research views the interplay of psyche, social life, and culture, it is hoped that those inclined towards exploring psychoanalytic applications outside

of the consulting room, and outside of Western cultural worlds, may find something of interest in it. Perhaps to a lesser degree, it may also hold something of interest to those practitioners working with an attunement to socio-cultural experience within the consulting room as well. The social and cultural worlds from which it is grown, particularly the dimensions of *home* discernible in them, are also thought to be potentially valuable – for analytically-oriented scholars, as well as others in the multidisciplinary fields of migration and forced displacement, or those seeking to work in psychologically-informed ways with these experiences in varied capacities (for example, as social workers, psychotherapists, legal support providers etc.).

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This work offered a conceptual vocabulary for understanding the *sense* of home – including, but not limited to, its relationship to the material places one inhabits – and explored its translation into a distinct cultural-linguistic context, which had its own contributions to make to the conversation. In this, it examined the cultural not merely as a source of insight on the culture it represents, but for the 'kernel of truth' it contains pertaining to all cultures – believing, as Kakar (2018) did, that the dimensions of human experience which are prominent in one cultural landscape are also present beyond it. Through such a two-way interweaving of psychoanalytic and Indian cultural worldviews, it unveils something of the sense of home as a form of relationality – one that could possibly be meaningfully described as modelled upon the embodied experience of the skin[103] as a breathing, and endlessly dying and regenerating, entity.

This conceptualisation – of home as a relational *process*, constantly evolving – demonstrates, and derives from, the importance of thinking of home in ways that are elaborative, procreative and connective, to counter the dangers released by the hardening of borders and rigidities of psychic belonging which have been seen as a possible (and dangerous) defensive response to

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[103] In a Winnicottian understanding, every bodily function is elaborated in the psyche – and so, perhaps one can also say that every psychic experience originates in the body

home loss. Through the creative ways in which this process was seen to have unfolded in this research, I also see in it something potentially of value more broadly: to those of us searching for ways to be at home in homeless times – particularly in relation to the homelessness of the anthropocene, as well as the post-human reinvention of disciplines that it demands.

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In the understanding contained in this work, the sense of home is located in experiences of the possibility for interchange – even as this remains forever an imperfectly realised possibility that exists only procedurally in its instinctual strivings, driving the movement that expresses animacy or aliveness. That there is an inherent creativity in this instinct is described by Freccero (2018), through the argument of Brian Massumi that instinct, "far from being a mechanistic trigger-like automatism, is spontaneous, inventive, and relationally responding to the world" (pg. 6). I believe it is such inventiveness that is demonstrated in the seeking of home, through the creative breathing in contexts of suffocation, which is explored through a cultural lens in this research. Through this, perhaps it says something of the mechanisms and psychic endowments by which this creative breathing can be made possible in different forms of inhabiting a suffocating world. In exploring the psychic creativity of the self which is prominent in India, along with its widened facilitating environment – it adds simultaneously to an understanding of the sources and nature of such creativity (the relational, expansively rooted and mobile nature of subjectivity), as well as the forms of support it can find in the world beyond the category of the human.

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It is interesting that Freccero also categorises animate beings as 'those of us who breathe', thereby placing breath at the centre of what joins human and nonhuman living beings – texturally similar to how we are joined in our striving for home. It is the openings for joining together – in a manner that is both topically important and historically overlooked in psychoanalysis – which the Indian cultural context (particularly the rural Indian) brings to light.

Mathur (2018) has described a "metacultural" idea, in the Indian view of real-ising the self, of "non-difference between not only human beings, but also between human beings and all other kinds of things in the universe" (pg. 153). This research demonstrated various ways in which

this non-difference allowed for forms of relatedness with the more-than-human that supported the making and sustaining of subjective aliveness – forms which I believe to be useful to rethinking, or rewilding[104], psychoanalysis in a post-human world, and perhaps even to the search for personal channels by which one can subjectively survive it's surrounding conditions.

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These forms of relatedness, encapsulated perhaps in the term 'interpsychic' by Bolognini (2011), refer to the way in which a non-conscious attunement satisfies a "*basic quantum of microfusionality in cohabitation*" (pg. 106, italics in original) – a microfusionality associated with having a relational home, through an attunement which can exist in cohabiting with more-than-human others, which psychoanalysis has neglected to its own detriment. That it has done so, despite having recognised at its inception the 'arrogance' by which the human placed 'a gulf' between their own nature and that of nonhuman animals (Freud, 1917), seems to exemplify the difficulties of separating from one's cultural worldviews. Of course, as Freud himself wrote that this arrogance is missing from children and 'primitive' men, it is perhaps meaningful that a psychic imagination emanating from what Freud had called the 'Indian jungle' may carry potential means of shrinking this gap.

Freud's view of the more-than-human world, driven intellectually by a "post-Darwinian conceptualisation of human/animal kinship" (Powici, 2002, pg. 9), was limited by themes of domination and control as well as a reduction of the animal to the symbolic and representational realm (see Alper, 1993) – what was effectively a murder of the living animal of phenomenological reality. Nowhere is this more visible than in his famous analysis of the Wolf-Man (Powici, 2002, Alper, 1993, Ponder, 2019) – wherein the erasure of the actual wolf in Freud's interpretation led the Wolf-man himself to later point out the "irreversible blindness to

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[104] The term 'rewilding', first used in the early 1990s, refers to "the large-scale restoration of natural environments" (see Chakour, 2024) – perhaps as essential in the physical world as the psychical

animals" in psychoanalysis, in a letter to Muriel Gardiner in 1945 (quoted in Genosko, 1993, pg. 604).

This blindness in the psychoanalytic view of nonhuman others contains a misapprehension, through a categorical erasure, which can perhaps be seen to be both racial and gendered as well (Gentile, 2018, Butler, 2004, Narayanan, 2017). It is the recognition of otherness in both its alterity and sameness that carries the ethical obligation for its reparative restoration – and shades of this recognition may be seen as potentially residing in this work. By offering – to a degree – a differing perspective on the place of the animal in interpsychic life, it can thus be considered to be a part of a multi-layered decolonising project, seeking to overcome the toxic combination of "both vilification and veneration" (Powici, 2002, pg. 2) that is unleashed on the animal, racial, and gendered other.

Despite its historical limitations, that the animal does exist at the core of psychic life in Freudian thought – which anchors all psychoanalysis – can make it a uniquely valuable frame for multispecies studies (Freccero, 2018) based on a Derridean ethics, and the de-centering essential to the anthropocene. The exploration of indigenous cultures may be a place to begin such a decentering – and while this research arrived here, at the realm of the more-than-human world and interspecies kinship, in an aleatory[105] way, perhaps it can also help re-enliven, and possibly deepen, a wider will to restore these relational sites to their place in psychic sustenance, and the foundations of developmental theory. That in this work, there could only be an overture into this sphere – but not a detailed or focused engagement with it – is one amidst a number of limitations which bind it. In the next section, I will list out some others of which I'm aware, in the hope that the limits themselves may spark further research.

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[105] Encountered by chance, surprising

This research is built upon the experiences of a small group of people – this, of course, forms its sharpest limit, set in order to be able to go into some depths of experience. To explore such depths with others, alongside wider explorations with other groups who have experienced forms of homelessness, could perhaps significantly enrich the understanding it offers. With the focus on something of a 'deep' understanding of subjective experience, the criticism of psychoanalysis as privileging the 'inner' world over the outer in psychosocial research also perhaps applies here too – in that, internal reality is analysed more deeply than the social and political structures with which it converses.

Within this interiority, the focus on the affective dimension of 'home' was retained – perhaps at the cost of more fully exploring other inner dynamics (around, for example, trauma, mourning, or memory) which could have been more deeply studied in richly meaningful ways had the time permitted a longer-sustained period of contact (such as in, for example, therapeutic contexts of engagement).

The focus on the cultural dimension, deeply implicated in 'home', also relies largely on the use of existing cultural understandings of subjectivity, which are drawn predominantly from – and therefore limited by – the worldviews of Hinduism. Although my curiosities were leading me towards different cultural sources, I had to reign them in to be able to stay on track – however, other religious-philosophical and linguistic symbolic worlds could have been explored to be able to sketch out more nuanced and representative cultural currents. For example, while this work offered an exploration of everyday language to understand the meanings of home and the self, this was limited to Hindi, and access to dimensions residing in participant's mother tongues could not be gained. Similarly, to go beyond Hindu-Sanskritic orientations felt important in a political climate that is trying violently to make this symbolic register synonymous with the idea of India, yet this was a journey that wasn't feasible within the bounds of this work. The poetry of the Indian saint, Kabir Das, for instance, piqued my interest as

carrying the potential for an expanded, liberation-oriented, cultural-textual psychoanalysis of Indian-ness – more so given his peculiar position of influence in Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, and having garnered it despite living his whole life in financial poverty, born to a family of weavers – yet the depth of study and reflection which would have been needed to meaningfully engage with his ideas, in a manner potentially usable here, could not be accommodated.

Similarly, existing psychoanalytic literature speaking directly to the theme of 'home' was drawn upon in this work – while an exploration of other analysts whose works may contain insights of relevance (despite perhaps not addressing it directly) were left aside. For instance, while Winnicott's writings have been explored quite abundantly in psychoanalytic writings of home, perhaps the work of Christopher Bollas – his emphasis on the real, material world and external objects – could be further mined for significant contributions to the topic. I believed that his notions of the transformational object (explored by LaMothe, 2020), mnemic object, evocative object (explored by Ceccoli, 2004) and aesthetic experience may all have a place in this – yet, could not pursue a sustained meditation upon them within the parameters (and perimeter) of this particular project.

The focus on home in relationship to migration, rather than on migration itself, also placed limits on the depths to which the immensely complex and layered experience of geographical displacement could be understood (although many such deep dives exist and could be meaningfully applied to understand aspects of the stories pertaining to geographical movement).

In carrying the disappointments – the interruptions to fantasies of wholeness posed by *limits* – which pertain to this work, I also bear in mind their importance (Craib, 1994). For me then, at least this loss is (somewhat) consoled.

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Afterword: Social suffering research across borders – A methodological reflection

The often probing activity of research into lived contexts of social suffering, as mentioned in the methodology chapter of this thesis, can perhaps only be justified if it takes into its purview the ethical imperative to respond meaningfully to it. While it is my hope that the manner in which this work is used takes a step in that direction, I had also been conscious acts of this imperative in the immediacy of the fieldwork context, and my ways of being in research relationships, and inhabiting interview encounters.

This was an imperative to give something in exchange for what I was receiving – as the recipient of lived stories (which impacted me significantly, as mentioned in the Preface). To this end, I drew on sensibilities informing literature on the vicissitudes of listening in the task of bearing witness – particularly influenced by the work of Dori Laub – with the recognition that what I was collecting as 'data' were, in fact, testimonies. They were somewhat complete narrations of remarkable and devastating and fierce lives, lived in extremely challenging circumstances – often finding subjective expression, in such experiential wholeness and in the presence of a listener, for the first time. To make room for this wholeness – layers, multiplicities, paradoxes and contradictions in the stories and those who told them – I drew from the Adversity Grid framework proposed by Papadopoulos (2021) as an internal point of reference, as well as psychoanalytic and phenomenological attitudes to dreaming the unknown, and tolerating not-knowing.

As mentioned in the 'Findings', what emerged from this were intimacies and acts of interchange[106] which indicated that some amount of 'homeness', *apnapan*, could be fostered

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[106] In line with Marcel Mauss' theory of The Gift, whose spirit calls for it to be returned, these acts of interchange and what I received through them sustained my commitment to accountability, to return my 'findings' to participants and the communities from which they came

through the methodological process. While psychosocial theory is critical of being "'therapeutic' as an aim, seeing it as potentially normalizing" (Frosh, 2019, pg. 103), I believe the therapeutic impact of these intimacies may be seen as more disruptive – as in intimate conversations during and beyond interviews, what seemed to emerge instead were spoken *recognitions* of injustice, overwhelmingly normalised by systems and structures (as in Esha's statement of the system being what it is, but also being wrong). In line with Stolorow's (2006) formulations, perhaps the homeness of the interview relationship widened the intersubjective field in a manner that also helped expand 'what could be allowed to be felt and known', and thereby possibly also widened the 'psycho-diversity of self-states' (Kanwal, 2018) which could be inhabited – for a fuller self. That this was a not-always-comfortable, but essential, expansion which I also experienced as the researcher was perhaps an important part of the facilitation of this – a consequence of the manner in which the research encounter was designed, and held.

While the methodological sensibilities mentioned above were crucial in allowing multiple voices and self-states to find space in interviews, and possibly the (re)constitution of an internal witness to these – thereby possibly allowing for the inhabitation of deeper inner privacy – a perhaps equally important role was played by the research 'frame' as the physical and symbolic 'place' in which interactions unfolded. Perhaps to think more deliberately about the frame could be of value for other researchers interested in experiences of social suffering to consider, especially when it lies across socio-political and cultural distances from the location of the researcher.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In line with the merging and emerging that underlies the rhythms of home, I believe it was the ability to make space for both identification and difference that the research frame – the outcome of decisions around where to have interviews, in which language, when these should

begin and when they should end, as well as how they should be structured, received, and responded to – made possible. The *apnapan* – which benefitted me as a researcher (for the depths it helped bring into conversation), as well as at a personal level, and also seemed to have had something small but meaningful to offer to my participants – owed in large part to the dual efforts in these decisions: to bridge the gap, and respect the gap.

The latter part of this, preserving "non-sameness" (Volkan, 2017, pg. 99), involved a receptivity to articulations of indifference and otherness (as through the words 'you madams' or 'you Hindus' which sometimes made me internally flinch during interviews) by remaining alive to, bearing, the feelings of guilt and shame which these provoked – an inevitable part of such encounters with the historical injustice of the 'other' (see Vahali, 2015), in which one is themselves also positionally implicated. I could not avoid these – and the personal memories they brought up – without unconsciously obstructing the difference which needed to be invited in, to make intimacy possible. What the intimacies brought up – confrontations with my own jagged and violated parts – were sometimes equally difficult to bear, and both these forms of intensity (deriving from interpersonal closeness and distance) emerged as much by the structuring of interactions as they did from softer ways of being in them.

Meeting in shared places and a shared language was as much a part of allowing intimacy, bridging the gap, as were efforts at empathic listening. Similarly, decisions to allow participants agency in when to begin (by choosing not to follow up after making initial contact, even if it meant an impact on fieldwork timelines – to the extent to which this could be absorbed) as well as when to end (for example, after one or two or six interviews) were as critical to respecting separateness and autonomy as was the largely unstructured approach to interviewing. It was only after engaging in this research process that I began to more fully appreciate the range of elements determining the interpersonal landscape of the research 'field', and the need to

deliberate upon these as both ethical and tactical negotiations, particularly in the wider territory of psychosocial work.

Indeed, to my mind, it is the space for rhythms of coming together and moving apart – encountering and acknowledging sameness and otherness in one another in the research relationship – that is to be credited both for the creation of a potential space for intimate coming together across significant difference, and the co-creation in this space of aleatory insight. In this, I do not believe that ethical considerations necessarily lie apart from, or work to limit or constrain, research curiosities – on the contrary, and in the context of this work, I believe that perhaps they can often awaken, deepen and transform them significantly.

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