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"Where do I belong?": Intersectional experiences of home/lessness and un/belonging among South Asian trans and gender-diverse migrants

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: 'Home' is often conceptualized as a site of belonging, yet research remains sparse on how it manifests for individuals occupying the multiply marginalized intersection of transgender, people of colour, ethnic minority and migrant identities.

Objectives: This qualitative study explores the meanings and experiences of home for South Asian trans and gender-diverse migrants in the Global North, through an intersectional lens.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 individuals (aged 21-34) who self-identified across binary and non-binary gender labels.

Results: Reflexive thematic analysis yielded five themes and four sub-themes: Home/lessness in Intersectional Un/belonging, Intersectional Uniqueness of Oppression, Disconnect from Collectivist Cultural Roots, Home as Dynamic and Plural, Home in Intangible Feelings, Home in Community, Home as Agentic Place-Making, Yearning for a Missing Home Drives the Future and Systemic Change as the Path to Home. Findings highlighted the experience of home as an elusive and unattainable construct. Their yearning for a missing sense of home significantly drove participants' decision-making about their future plans. The term 'intersectional unbelonging' was coined to describe the layered sense of unbelonging in home and host countries which participants explained as resulting from their intersecting marginalized identities. Intersectional unbelonging contributed to affective homelessness, which in turn shaped extreme isolation—forming what appears to be a vicious cycle in which these conditions seem to reinforce one another.

Conclusion: These findings call for systemic policy reform and participatory future research to holistically address the intersectional, structural discrimination that hinders homemaking and belonging for this uniquely marginalized population.

KEYWORDS

Home; belonging; intersectionality; transgender; gender-diverse; non-binary; migration; trans migrants

Introduction

Trans identities encompass diverse socio-cultural, legal and political identities that often diverge from a cisheteronormative, binary understanding of gender restricted to the categories of 'men' and 'women' (Chevrette & Eguchi, 2020). While some trans and gender-diverse individuals identify within the gender binary (e.g., trans men or trans women), others exist beyond it—using labels such as agender, genderqueer or non-binary—or may reject labels altogether. Amin (2022) argues that taxonomically categorizing transness into rigid social identities propounds a Western binary logic, which trans people's lived realities might be an inherent rejection of. In the current study, the word 'trans' is adopted as an umbrella term to refer to the diversity of trans folks, including those identifying with gender labels within and beyond the gender binary. This choice reflects the first author's lived experience of her politicized gender identity as a trans woman, and acknowledges 'trans' as a term rooted in resistance to cisheteronormative gender systems and structural marginalization (Murib, 2015; Shelton et al., 2019).

Trans people and communities face challenges across borders. A comprehensive survey report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2024) reveals an alarming increase in trans and intersex people's experiences of hate-motivated violence across Europe, including physical and sexual attacks, in the 5 years before the survey was

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conducted. Notably, trans and intersex folks continue to report the highest rates of experiencing discrimination among the wider queer community in Europe. Furthermore, Whittle et al. (2008) highlight a lack of comprehensive and cross-cultural statistics on trans and intersex populations. In the recent past, there has been a rise in divisive and polarized political discourses attacking the rights of trans folks as well as various migrant communities in Canada, Australia, India, Argentina and several other nations (Calderón, 2024).

Contextualizing Trans Experiences in South Asia

The term 'desi,' from Hindi and Urdu, translates to "from the sub-continent" (Chaudhary, 2009, p. 32) and is used interchangeably with 'South Asian' in this study to refer to the diaspora. The South Asian diaspora comprises the present-day nations of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (The World Bank, 2024)—which were once a part of colonized India. Diaspora historically denotes "displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile" (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 1). Chaudhry (2016) highlighted the nature of South Asian family dynamics and cultural values. As she mentioned, "South Asian cultures are considered collectivistic due to the emphasis on family as central to society" (p. 16). In collectivist cultures such as in South Asia, people have a greater tendency to perceive themselves in association with others within their community, which is referred to as having an interdependent self-construal (Chaudhry, 2016; Shea & Yeh, 2008).

Considering the South Asian context, trans communities in this region face significant social stigma and marginalization in their daily lives because of their gender identities (Pandya & Redcay, 2020). Suleman et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of social stigma on the mental health of trans folks in Lahore, Pakistan and New Delhi, India. Their findings highlighted that pervasive social stigma, ostracization and non-acceptance by families, blatant discrimination in educational institutions, barriers in accessing healthcare services and employment opportunities—comprise some of the severe daily challenges impacting trans folks in these countries. Rejection by families, extreme stigma and discrimination in social spaces for trans people is a motif that has been observed in other studies as well, such as Chakrapani et al.'s (2021) research on the experiences of transmasculine people in India.

These findings unfortunately only shed some light on the lived experiences of systemic exclusion trans folks in South Asia face, which are exacerbated on account of the culture-specific socio-political norms in this region. As Chaudhry (2016) explains, it is also important to note that "the experience of stigma cannot be analyzed without placing it into a cultural context" (p. 11). Additionally, to maintain an ideal image within a collectivist society like South Asia, stigmatizing traits are concealed and kept out of public sight (Chaudhry, 2016). Particularly, a complex and interconnected history of colonization and globalization has shaped the unique struggles of desi trans communities. As Nair (2022) explains, the colonial era in South Asia witnessed how the British colonial regime, with the help of the Indian elites, sought to 'reform' the poor, vulnerable and marginalized masses in the guise of ushering modernity, globalization and eventual autonomy for Indian citizens. Various socio-cultural groups of trans folks have existed across the South Asian subcontinent for generations. These include communities such as 'Hijras' in parts of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and 'Khwaja Siras' in Pakistan (Jain & DasGupta, 2021). While these groups form a dominant part of the larger trans community in South Asia, not all trans people in South Asian countries identify as part of specific trans cultural groups. Many trans folks, often in urban areas, self-identify as trans and may use different labels for their gender identities (Pandya & Redcay, 2020). It is important to note that this might partly be the case because communities like the Hijras comprise some of the most socio-economically marginalized groups in present-day South Asia.

Understanding Migrant Identities, Conceptualizing 'Home' and Sense of Belonging

It is intriguing to consider that the concept of home itself can be ambiguous and understood

across a variety of dimensions (Bailey, 2023; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Lin, 2020; Liu, 2014; Wiles, 2008). According to Gorman-Murray and Dowling (2007), home encompasses more than just a physical space, and can also be perceived as "a place of belonging, intimacy, security, relationship and selfhood" (para. 4). In the case of transnational migrants, home often carries an emotional attachment to their place of origin, evoking a nostalgic yearning or desire for their homeland (Wiles, 2008). In fact, home has been suggested to encapsulate qualities of imagination, dreams and being beyond an individual's reach (Boccagni, 2017; Brah, 1996; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024). Mallett (2004) suggests that home is simultaneously a physical place and "a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings" (p. 63). For instance, Lin (2020) noted the significance of ethnic food in contributing to a feeling of home among migrants (Bailey, 2023). Lin's (2020) findings also situated home as an experience found in communities and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, although home can usually be emotionally associated with feelings of safety, warmth, happiness, or positivity, Brickell (2012) suggests that other connotations with negativity and alienation ought to be considered as well. In many cases, the home may possibly represent a setting of violence, hostility, fear, ambivalence or emotional conflict. According to some scholars, home could be better understood as being dynamic, fluid and an ongoing process rather than as a static space rooted in a fixed selfhood (Bailey, 2023; Boccagni, 2017; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Lin, 2020; Ling, 2018). This process, which Blunt and Dowling (2006) refer to as "home-making practices" (p. 199), involves attributing meaning via a continuous and mediated dialogue between oneself, other people and one's physical space (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Liu, 2014). Boccagni (2023), in fact, described homemaking "as a unique form of place-making" (p. 3). In a similar vein, Ahmed et al. (2003) view home as a crucial component of the ongoing, always shifting 'uprooting/re-grounding' rituals that migration enacts. Relevant in the context of queer and trans folks, Brown (2000) talks about the "spatiality of the closet" (p. 50) in terms of coming out about their gender or sexuality. Talking about gay men, he highlights how experiencing marginalization, disownment, loss, hostility or violence originating from enacting their gender and/or sexuality "means having to relocate oneself, to leave 'home' and reconfigure it elsewhere" (Brown, 2000, p. 50). Moreover, recent literature has also highlighted that home is conceptualized in relation to intersectionality (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Hoselton & Drolet, 2025; Lin, 2020; Ling, 2018; Şahin, 2021). Although Liu's (2014) paper offers insights into how greater transnational mobility influences migrants' perceptions of home, identity and emotional connections with various spaces, it has not been specifically examined in the context of trans migrant populations.

It is also important to note that the notion of home seems to be inextricably tied to a person's sense of belonging (Cicognani et al., 2010). People often form deep emotional attachments with the places where they live (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983), which are typically their homes. Such attachments, termed "Place Identity" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 57), allow individuals to gain a sense of belonging and find purpose in their lives (Cicognani et al., 2010). Low and Altman (1992) described the theory of place attachment as "the bonding of people to place" (p. 2) and also emphasized the centrality of emotions to this bonding. Research by Lambert et al. (2013) has evidenced that a person's sense of belonging strongly correlates with how meaningful they perceive their life to be. Previous research has also linked the absence of cultural or ethnic belonging among migrants to a lack of belonging in their host countries (Lin, 2020; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). However, there is sparse to almost no research on the experiences of home or its relationship with belonging among trans migrant communities, with the majority of existing research examining these notions among queer communities at large (Bryant, 2015; Gorman-Murray, 2013) or queer migrants in general (Asante, 2018; D'Angelo, 2020; Fortier, 2020; Porziella, 2021; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir, 2018).

Towards an Intersectional Understanding of Trans Migrants' Experiences

Crenshaw (1989) initially coined the term "intersectionality" (p. 140) to critique the "single-axis

analysis" (p. 139) of social identity categories—explaining how this approach failed to capture the wholeness of Black women's unique experiences at the intersection of being Black individuals and women. Intersectionality acknowledges that every individual holds multiple varying identities across domains like gender, race, ethnicity and class, which interact and intersect in complex ways to mutually constitute their unique lived experiences in society. This comprises experiences of privilege, oppression, power and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989).

Although similar critiques of single-axis analytic frameworks have since emerged, particularly from Black and people of colour (POC) feminist scholars (Bowleg, 2008), psychology as a discipline is at a nascent stage in incorporating intersectionality in theoretical frameworks and research methodologies (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009; Grzanka, 2020; McCall, 2005). When Tajfel and Turner (1986) mention self-referencing in the context of discussing social identity as a concept, they seem to perceive relative comparisons between an ingroup and outgroup as a highly isolated process that inherently focuses on a single social identity marker. Therefore, traditional social-psychological theories using single-axis analytic frameworks like Social Identity Theory fall short in explaining trans migrants' realities by virtue of their existence at the unique intersection of being trans and belonging to migrant communities. In considering this particular intersection, trans migrants' identities separately as trans people and as migrants are made salient. However, despite this salience, the intersectional nature of trans migrants' experiences cannot simply be measured by adopting an additive approach that conceptualizes the experiences stemming from these two identity markers as "singular, independent and summative" (Bowleg, 2008, p. 314).

Porziella (2021) pointed out that despite the significance of home and homelessness for queer and trans migrants, there continues to be a lack of research on these concepts. She explained the intersectional struggles of navigating the "emotional homelessness" (p. 20) queer migrants experience on account of being POC and queer at the same time, describing the acute isolation they experience in host countries as a result of their inability to belong:

> Moving out by migrating has not emancipated her, instead it has isolated her, as she has been rendered extraneous to her ethnic network because of her lesbian identity, and alien to the mainstream Italian LGBT community because of her body marked as 'Other': migrant, racialised, different. Hers is, thus, a homeless condition. (p. 25)

This quote also succinctly describes the experience of "intersectional invisibility" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 378), which has generally been described as failing to fully acknowledge individuals with multiple subordinate identities as members of the groups they belong to. As Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) explain, individuals who possess multiple subordinate identities typically do not conform to the prototype attributed to their distinct subordinate groups. This is often the case with people belonging to underrepresented groups within already oppressed groups, such as migrants among the trans community or vice-versa—inevitably positioning them in a social location of extreme invisibility. Existing scholarship has linked the intersectional influence of the social locations inhabited by people to their sense of belonging (Anthias, 2008; Bailey, 2023; Yuval-Davis, 2006), while also documenting the broader relationship between intersectionality and un/belonging (Anoosh & Thorpe, 2023; Christensen, 2009; Spector-Mersel, 2025). Similarly, in a study on Southeast Asian queer migrants, participants realized that despite having increased freedom to live as their queer selves post-emigration, they "became vulnerable to racism and xenophobia as non-white migrants in a white majority society" (Sharon & Tang, 2022, pp. 40-41).

By virtue of their intersectionality, trans migrants are subjected to interlocking manifestations of discrimination, referred to as "intersectional discrimination" (Beltran et al., 2019, p. 2). Thus, trans migrants might experience discrimination that is mutually constituted at the intersection of transphobia, xenophobia and racism, as opposed to separately experiencing these. The compounded effects of intersectional discrimination can have profound repercussions on trans migrants' mental health and overall well-being, posing an increased risk for mental health disorders like anxiety and depression (Cerezo et al., 2014; Mizock & Lewis, 2008). The presence of

intersecting social identities exacerbates inequities at the systemic level, which has been evidenced in matters of education and employment of trans people (Conron et al., 2022; Sugano et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 2015). Prior research has also demonstrated that the impact of anti-trans discrimination is most profoundly experienced by trans people with multiple marginalized identities who are often subject to further marginalization even among the broader trans community (Beltran et al., 2019), particularly POC, homeless and migrant trans women.

Research Gaps and Aims of this Study

A review of the existing literature reveals several critical gaps that this study seeks to address. First, there is limited research on the experiences of queer and trans migration. Existing studies primarily focus on broader queer migrant communities, where trans participants are often minimally represented (Alessi et al., 2018; Chavez, 2011; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017; Fuks et al., 2018; Lee, 2015; Morales, 2013). Research that centers trans migrants specifically is sparse (Altay et al., 2021; Castro et al., 2022; Cerezo et al., 2014; Hermaszewska et al., 2022; Pravattiyagul, 2021; Purayil, 2022; Rosati et al., 2021; Thongkrajai, 2022; van der Pijl et al., 2018).

While a handful of studies include a few participants who were South Asian queer or trans migrants, the focus of these studies was broadly on queer migrants' experiences (Alessi et al., 2018; Şahin, 2021). As a result, the unique experiences of South Asian trans migrants remain largely undocumented and underrepresented in current academic discourse and global research.

Secondly, much of the literature on trans migrants lacks an intersectional approach. Trans migrants often inhabit layered identities shaped by gender, migration histories, racialization and cultural belonging. However, few studies meaningfully engage with these intersectional axes of identity (Altay et al., 2021; Cerezo et al., 2014; Hermaszewska et al., 2022; Rosati et al., 2021), resulting in analyses that overlook the complexity of trans migrants' lived experiences. Another critical gap lies in the complete absence of research on the conceptualization and experiences of 'home' for South Asian trans migrants..

Taken together, there is virtually no research that centers the lived experiences of South Asian trans migrants in the context of homemaking, and especially not from an intersectional perspective. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the nuanced, intersectional realities of this community, with particular attention to how home is understood in the context of gendered, ethnic and transnational migration.

Methods

Research Paradigm and Design

To understand the nuanced lived experiences of participants and how they negotiate meaning-making around the notion of home, a fully qualitative or Big Q qualitative approach was deemed suitable for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This Big Q approach was rooted in social constructionism as the research paradigm. Social constructionism posits that the human experience is not bound to a singular reality or fixed knowledge systems, but rather constructed through the mediation of language, culture and history (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2013). Specifically, this study employed a macro social constructionism approach, which acknowledges the centrality of the concept of power as it relates to social structures, relations and systemic practices in shaping individuals' constructions of their experiences (Burr, 2003). This became a useful approach to consider and challenge social inequalities arising on account of identities such as gender, disability, migrant status and diasporic context—making it particularly relevant in the context of South Asian trans migrants (Burr 2003).

Participants

The target population for this study comprised individuals who met the following inclusion criteria: those who were 18 years of age or older, self-identified as trans and/or gender-diverse, self-identified as part of the South Asian diaspora, and resided in either Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America or a member country of the European Union following migration. A total of 12 participants were recruited and interviewed, with their ages ranging from 21 to 34 years

($M = 24.92$, $SD = 3.59$). To self-describe their gender identities, participants used the following labels: transfemme (n = 1), trans woman (n = 1), trans man (n = 1), queer/non-binary (n = 2), genderqueer (n = 1), queer non-binary (n = 1), genderfluid/no labels (n = 1), transmasc non-binary (n = 1), queer transmasculine (n = 1), non-binary (n = 1) and transfemme/trans woman (n = 1). Their countries of origin in South Asia included India (n = 10) and Pakistan (n = 2). Participants' current countries of residence after migration included Canada (n = 3), the United Kingdom (n = 4), the United States of America (n = 3), the Netherlands (n = 1) and Belgium (n = 1). The years in which they migrated to these countries of residence ranged from 2001 to 2024, and all participants migrated voluntarily. Their primary reasons for migration included the pursuit of higher education in the form of a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree program (n = 10), the desire for a better education and future for themself (n = 1) and the desire for a better life (n = 1). All participants spoke and understood English and were at least bilingual, with most participants (n = 11) speaking and/or understanding three or more languages. The diversity of languages spoken and/or understood by participants included Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, French, Garhwali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kumaoni, Marathi, Mewadi, Oriya, Pahadi, Punjabi, Tamil and Urdu. In terms of their educational backgrounds, all participants had completed at least high school and a bachelor's degree, with multiple participants having completed or currently completing a master's degree (n = 9) and a few participants currently completing PhD programs (n = 2) across a variety of subjects. In terms of their current occupation, several participants were full-time students (n = 6) or simultaneously engaged in part-time work (n = 3), while some were employed or self-employed in a full-time capacity (n = 6). Most participants self-identified as neurodivergent (n = 10), many as both neurodivergent and disabled (n = 6) and some participants as neither (n = 2).

Data Collection and Procedure

This study received ethical approval from ISCTE-IUL (ISCTE-IUL Comissão Especializada de Ética de Psicologia, Parecer 29/2025). Non-probability convenience sampling was employed to recruit participants, as this approach is well-suited for studying hard-to-reach, marginalized populations otherwise difficult to locate through traditional sampling methods (Mammen & Sano, 2012). The first author, as a member of the target population, leveraged their insider status to reach participants via personal networks (Mendez et al., 2024) across Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Discord. To acknowledge their time and contributions, participants were provided a 20-Euro Amazon gift voucher (or local currency equivalent), distributed on April 15, 2025 after the completion of interviews.

Data were collected via individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews to capture the richness and complexity of participants' narratives (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). Interested individuals contacted the first author via email, confirmed eligibility and received a Participant Information Sheet and consent form. Consent was obtained through signed forms or verbally recorded before interviews began. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Data collection was guided by a semi-structured interview guide, which involved designing key interview themes with open-ended, non-leading and flexible example questions which were adapted to the context of each participant's interview (Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021). At the end of each interview, participants received oral and written debriefing outlining the study's aims, ethical information and additional reading materials, along with contact details for follow-up. A list of supportive resources was also provided, tailored to each participant's country of residence.

All interviews were conducted remotely via the Microsoft Teams software, and ranged from 34-75 minutes. A pilot interview was organized with a peer from the target population to confirm the appropriateness and suitability of the interview guide and ensure that participants' comfort with the interview process was prioritized. This interview was included in the final dataset to uphold the pilot participant's valuable contributions. While all interviews were conducted in English, some participants used Hindi phrases to contextualize certain aspects of their experiences, which were translated during transcription. Recordings were transcribed manually

using orthographic transcription, which focused on the verbatim transcription of participants' spoken words and sounds (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Transcripts were pseudonymized by designating a unique Hindi or Urdu name for each participant.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), a method focused on generating themes which highlight patterned meanings across the dataset. The reflexive approach is unique in positioning itself within a fully qualitative paradigm and emphasizing the researcher's critical engagement with their positionality (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Adopting this method helped achieve methodological coherence (Mayan, 2009) in this study, ensuring congruence between the research paradigm, philosophical underpinnings and methodology (Poucher et al., 2019). Coding was conducted using NVivo 15, systematically tagging segments of the pseudonymized transcripts that revealed patterns of meanings relevant to the research question—resulting in 112 initial codes. Following an abductive approach to coding (Thompson, 2022) allowed for concurrent engagement with data and theory, particularly intersectionality (de Vries, 2014; McCall, 2005). Initial themes were generated by clustering codes into 18 candidate themes and subthemes, each united by a central organizing concept. These were visually mapped using a rough thematic map to explore initial relationships, after which discussions in the research team took place to refine and select final themes based on their salience to the research question. The final phases involved refining theme definitions, selecting illustrative quotes and writing up the results by integrating findings with the theoretical framework, research paradigm and existing literature.

Reflexivity and Researcher Subjectivity

We recognize the research process as being subjective and understand the significance of critically engaging with our positionalities as researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The first author is an upper-middle-class, Savarna, queer, disabled, neurodivergent Indian trans woman and migrant. She has lived experience of transnational migration in Canada, Portugal and the Republic of Ireland in the capacity of an international student. Throughout her life, she has lived in semi-urban and urban locations. She is also a native Hindi and English speaker with basic verbal proficiency in Urdu. We understand that reflexivity goes beyond acknowledging our positionalities in relation to membership in certain identity-based groups, and "is about the role of the researcher as an active agent in the production of knowledge" (Trainor & Bundon, 2020, p. 707). However, mentioning these identities is crucial since these situate the first author as an 'insider' or in-group member of the population we were working with (Mehrabadi et al., 2024). The first author's lived experience of navigating intersecting marginalized identities has shaped her own intersectional experiences of home, which considerably informed her interest in exploring the intersectional nuances of home and belonging through academic research. In contrast to perceiving her positionality as a potential source of bias, the first author followed the lead of other minoritized scholars (Pervez, 2025) in critically drawing from the insights and knowledge gained from her lived experience to better understand the nuances of the research topic of this study (Mehrabadi et al., 2024).

The first author chose to explicitly disclose her intersectional identities during recruitment, as being an in-group member helped establish trust and rapport with this highly marginalized population. In fact, most participants disclosed that knowing she shared their unique intersectional identities made them feel safer and more comfortable discussing their personal narratives. Given the remote nature of the study and lack of prior relationships with participants (except with the pilot participant), concerns about confidentiality were minimal, which may otherwise arise when members of the same community share communal and social spaces. Deep familiarity with South Asian cultural nuances and the ability to speak Hindi and Urdu also contributed to participants feeling more at ease during interviews.

The remaining team of co-authors was composed by the academic supervisors—cisgender women allies, one of whom is partially also a member of the queer community—who are experts in either trans issues and/or in qualitative methodological approaches to the exploration of lived experiences of diverse communities.

Results

A total of five themes and four sub-themes describing the experiences and meanings of home were developed across all participants: Home/lessness in Intersectional Un/belonging, including the sub-theme Intersectional Uniqueness of Oppression; Disconnect from Collectivist Cultural Roots; Home as Dynamic and Plural, with the sub-themes Home in Intangible Feelings, Home in Community and Home as Agentic Place-Making; Yearning for a Missing Home Drives the Future; and Systemic Change as the Path to Home. Provided below are detailed descriptions of each theme and sub-theme supported by quotes in English taken directly from the interviews. Participants' names were pseudonymized in order to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, their participant numbers and self-labelled gender identities were reported alongside their quotes to better contextualize their accounts. A visual map of the developed themes illustrating that these are all interrelated to each other is presented in Figure 1.

Home/lessness in Intersectional Un/belonging

This theme describes how participants' lived experiences of negotiating unique intersectional identities shaped the lack of their sense of belonging and concept of home, both in their host and home countries. Participants explained how navigating life as people with intersecting marginalized identities—being trans, South Asian, POC, migrants and in several cases also disabled, neurodivergent and/or religious—made them feel "othered" (Participant 2, Lekha, trans woman) in all spaces, feeling like they do "not fit in" (Participant 8, Samarth, transmasc non-binary person) anywhere and that no singular space is able to acknowledge all parts of their distinct personhood. While 'othering' and 'not fitting in' captured the social exclusion faced by participants, these did not fully encompass the intersecting nature of marginalization participants described—which manifested as a layered sense of not belonging across multiple identity axes. Thus, unlike general notions of unbelonging,

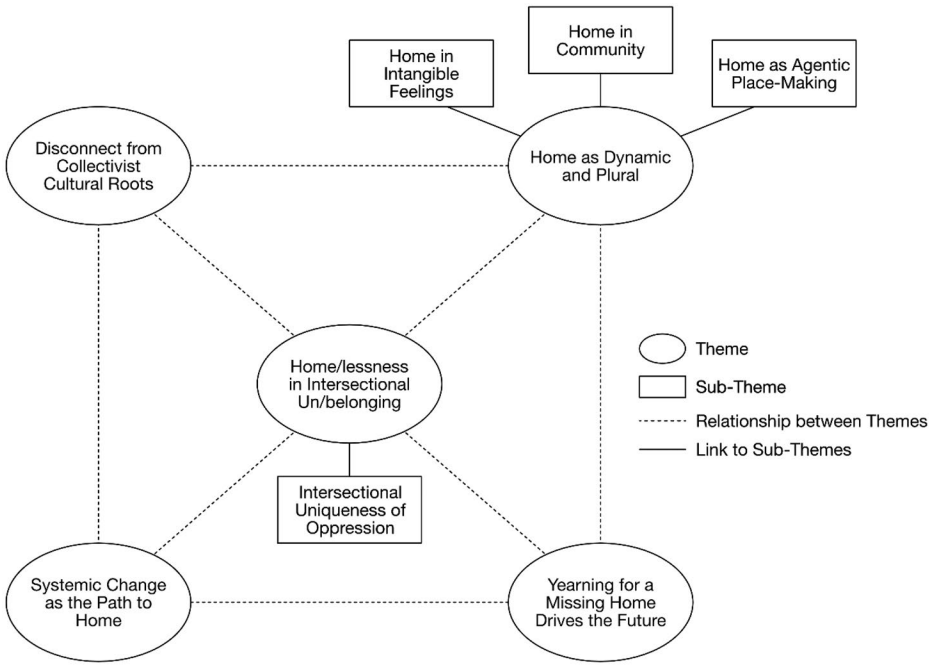


Figure 1. Thematic Map.

participants' experiences captured how their nuanced lack of belonging operates not in parallel, but through the interlocking entanglement of their race, gender, migrant status and cultural context—prompting the need for a distinct term, which we coined as 'intersectional unbelonging'. This intersectional unbelonging significantly contributed to a feeling of homelessness in participants' lives, with a participant emphasizing, "if I don't have freedom to express all of them [identities] altogether, I don't feel home" (Participant 7, Pehel, genderfluid person) (Porziella, 2021). As a consequence of intersectional unbelonging, participants described their distinctive experience of feeling uprooted and displaced from both their home and host countries (Ahmed et al., 2003), which contributed to their unique, emotional sense of homelessness. A participant explained this feeling of simultaneous displacement: "I feel like I don't fit in here [country of residence], but also I don't fit back there [country of origin]" (Participant 4, Shahin, queer/non-binary person). Participants also mentioned that this displacement created persistent isolation and loneliness in their everyday lives, manifesting from their intersectional unbelonging and affective homelessness and further exacerbating these notions in what became a vicious cycle for them. Gunreet (Participant 5, genderqueer person) explained how this vicious cycle of intersectional unbelonging, homelessness and isolation took shape in the following quote:

> Hm. I am not sure how it works with British culture. But I think um, it just, like, the the sort of like isolation thing that I was talking about, I think it gets worse once you sort of go down the layers, right? Cause there's this thing of, oh I'm a migrant so I don't belong with British culture. I come from a collectivistic culture, so I find it really hard to relate with like Americans and Canadians and stuff around me, because they have individualistic cultures. And then I get to the Indians and then it's like, oh, none of you people want to respect a pronoun. My God. So it's like, the more…the more I try to stay, authentic, to myself, the more I isolate myself. And to be very honest, I think my genderqueerness is the main thing that I have to get rid of, to belong. Because um, I know for sure, cause I've seen people around me complaining about, you know, somebody using non-binary pronouns. I've seen like the queer people around me make so much fun of neopronouns, and stuff like that. And I know, that like, I can't be that friend, you know, like that woke friend—that friend who's too woke to correct these people all the time, cause then that will lead to me, I'm just getting kicked out of everywhere. And I find that, I find that honestly terrible, because I on some level wanted to get away from home and be this far away from home so that, this wouldn't be the thing I would have to get rid of. And to come here and find out that it's the same situation again…um, it's it's weird because I mean, like, I don't feel like I belong either in the British or the Indian culture.

Intersectional Uniqueness of Oppression

This sub-theme captures the distinct intersectional nature of the identity-based oppression faced by participants, that shaped their intersectional unbelonging and homelessness in their host countries. Participants shared how their unique intersectionality as South Asian trans migrants entails qualitatively different, layered forms of bigotry, hatred and discrimination as opposed to the compounded or additive impact of holding several marginalized identities (Beltran et al., 2019; Bowleg, 2008). One participant described this experience as becoming a "quadruple target" (Participant 12, Aliya, trans woman) of identity-based oppression. This demonstrates not just a layering of marginalizations, but a transformation in the quality of oppression faced by participants. They did not simply face more oppression; rather, oppression was experienced in unique, interlocking ways—shaping a sense of unbelonging that was not merely intensified, but reconfigured, at the intersection of their identities as South Asian trans migrants. The lack of nuanced understanding about this intersectional nature of oppression and unbelonging shaped participants' feelings of homelessness in their host countries. Participants also differentiated the nature of their lived experiences of oppression from those of White trans or queer people and second-generation South Asian migrants—describing a "disconnect" (Participant 8, Samarth) from the discriminatory experiences of people singularly belonging to one of the multiple subordinate groups that participants were members of (Porziella, 2021; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Aliya (Participant 12) shared:

> But anyway, um um yeah, settling here was really difficult. I had to not only battle Islamophobia, um, racism, uh also like uh, I I always carried myself very feminine, so like homophobia at that same time. So it's like a quadruple target, you know—you have, you're a person of color, you're Muslim, you're an immigrant, and you are queer. So it's like quadruple targets. Um, so it was very very difficult navigating that.

Disconnect from Collectivist Cultural Roots

Participants described how uprooting their lives from their home countries to migrate contributed to feeling disconnected from their collectivist South Asian culture in various ways in their host countries, particularly as they noticed a clash of their collectivist cultural values with the expectations of their individualist host cultures. This disconnect from their cultural roots contributed significantly to participants experiencing intersectional unbelonging and feelings of homelessness and isolation, since participants understood home to be a site of "cultural belongingness" (Participant 8, Samarth) and conceptualized it in connection to their natal South Asian culture (Lin, 2020; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). The clash of cultural values became apparent in factors like differences in communication styles, difficulties navigating individualist social structures in host societies and the lack of an interdependent "communal lifestyle" (Participant 1, Pari, transfemme person). This disconnect became exacerbated as they dealt with the loss of diasporic elements from everyday life, which included elements like South Asian food, music, languages and media. Shahin (Participant 4) shared:

> Cause, I think some of it's also just like the hyper-individualized nature of, just social structures here, where I'm like, it's just so different. Like, I mean I grew up on the same, in the same neighborhood, and it's like everyone knew each other. Like I could walk outside, and literally everyone knew like, oh, you're coming from that house with that roof colour and that door and, um…this is your grandfather's name. This is your you know, it's like everyone knows each other, and I could go for like a couple blocks at least and people would still know you? And now it's very different, because I live in an apartment building with like, like 6 to—I think there's 6 floors, and probably 50 to 80 on each floor—and I barely, I literally know no one in my apartment building. And not even anyone on my f- I think like, I've lived here like 8 months and I've never, I've seen right into people like twice. That's it. Like…haha. So, it's just been very interesting from that perspective too, where it's like, how do you feel a sense of home, when it's just like you feel isolated? Because it is isolating.

Home as Dynamic and Plural

Participants described home as a multidimensional, dynamic and fluid concept that has multiple manifestations, was not restricted to a singular space (physical or imagined) and "keeps shifting meanings" (Participant 9, Arsh, queer transmasculine person) (Bailey, 2023; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Lin, 2020; Liu, 2014; Wiles, 2008). They experienced the plurality of home in different parts of their intersectional identities, wherein the trans part of their self-identity felt at home in a certain setting, the South Asian part in another and the migrant part was at home in a different context. Participants shared how this plural experience of home in intersectional parts made them feel a fragmented sense of belonging and home, with one participant highlighting, "I am not belonging in any one place—I'm belonging in so many different places" (Participant 8, Samarth). Their conceptualization of home also stemmed from the absence of a traditional, cisheteronormative notion of home, where the physical space in which one's natal family typically dwells might be taken for granted as one's home. Mrinal (Participant 6, queer non-binary person) explained this dynamic conceptualization of home:

> I would say—my idea of home, you know, it changes, it's so amorphous, so fluid. It is not fixed actually—it has changed drastically from the time I moved from my natal family, to coming to Delhi, to living in Delhi, to then moving out of Delhi. In every uh, you know, point in time, my idea of home has changed so much um in terms of what it meant to me, or who meant home for me, for example. Um…so, to starting from, you know, finding, having no sense of community, um you know, and just being around my biological family who have not been very, I would say I'm not, I've not told them about my gender identity or whatsoever, but like; I don't know, it's not the best place to be at, you know, growing up. So from there to growing, going out of that space, finding a sense of

> community, which did not exist in my childhood, um…to finding a group of people whom I might consider community, to that disintegrating as well; then you finding what it means to be alone, for example, or to be by yourself for example, and what could mean home for you when you are by yourself; to starting afresh in a different country where you have no context from before. So, yeah I would say, it is so relative, uh the idea of home for me.

Home in Intangible Feelings

This sub-theme explores participants' understanding of home as an intangible concept with "no definitive physical boundary to it" (Participant 7, Pehel), and how they experience home in feelings of safety, love, warmth, security and attachment to meaningful material objects that are symbolic of home (Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Wiles, 2008). As South Asian trans migrants who feel unacknowledged in their intersectional identities in most spaces, participants described how being seen, loved and celebrated for who they authentically were evoked a sense of belonging that felt the closest to home. Aliya shared (Participant 12):

> But I think the home is more of a feeling than a physical place and I feel like, when I'm, when I feel more secure in a spot, when I don't have to worry about my safety, um where I don't have to worry about financial stuff and where I'm surrounded by people I love I feel like I will feel at home. And that would be home.

Home in Community

This sub-theme encapsulates how participants' most salient experiences of home were found in their communities of people—in their friends, chosen families, romantic partner(s) and identity-based communities (Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Lin, 2020; Mallett, 2004). Participants emphasized that while access to physical locations and spaces they were in kept changing as they enacted migration and their trans identities, home could consistently be found only in these communities who mattered in their lives. Participants also highlighted the importance of the desi or POC trans communities in their host countries in homemaking, with one participant even sharing that they had "only felt community with other trans, um South Asian migrants" (Participant 8, Samarth). Gunreet (Participant 5) shared:

> It's just that, I think the feelings I have for people are a lot more concrete than the feelings I have for places; um, they stay with me longer, they're more consistent and they're more intense. Like if I consider like, you know, this idea that, oh, this place is home for me right now—why is it home? Like if I had the city and I lost the people in it, would I still consider this place home? No, but if I had another city and the same people in it, could I consider that place home? Yes. So, I think in that way, like, I learned that at least for me, people are definitely home. And, you know, like I like I said, you know, even if we stop being friends or not, that that feeling doesn't go away.

Home as Agentic Place-Making

Participants described homemaking as a process of "place-making" (Participant 9, Arsh), wherein they were the agents who actively transformed their physical environments into spaces that could be considered home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Boccagni, 2023; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Liu, 2014). In the absence of a singular space that made them feel at home in acknowledgment of their unique intersectional identities, participants shared how they made "active choices" (Participant 11, Surya, non-binary person) to create spaces of home for themselves. Thus, this practice became a self-sufficient practice to cultivate belonging for oneself, in an effort to tackle the intersectional unbelonging and homelessness in their lives. Their agency in homemaking also served as a radical solution to the persistent feeling of isolation they experienced. This homemaking practice could be viewed as an active and dynamic re-grounding of home in a new setting, stemming from the enactment of their South Asian trans migrant identities (Ahmed et al., 2003; Brown, 2000). Mrinal (Participant 6) explained:

> So for example, this room where I came to live here, right? It did not have its uh memory of me or me living here, right. But I started to give a meaning of myself, started to give this space my meaning, right? So, it was blank as such, right? But it is me that gives the meaning to this place, right.

Yearning for a Missing Home Drives the Future

Participants shared how the homelessness they feel due to intersectional unbelonging created a

deep sense of yearning for a missing home. They described home as a concept that was imagined and dreamt of but out of their reach (Boccagni, 2017; Brah, 1996; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024). Participants also explained how seeking home becomes a "driving force" (Participant 12, Aliya) shaping their future decisions about their lives; it impacted their personal and professional future goals, as well as present actions that moved them closer to finding the home they lacked and craved. This drive for seeking a missing home also served as a vital "sense of purpose" (Participant 12, Aliya) in participants' life journeys as they look to the future. Aliya (Participant 12) shared:

> Um, I mean right now I'm about to move so I've, I've been contemplating – I'm like, I move a lot. Like every three years I move, I've lived in so many states and I'm like, why do I do that? Because I'm searching for a feeling of home. A home, a feeling of home that I've never felt. That I can only imagine and I can see it in my dreams, that I can feel it in my dreams, but I've never experienced. Um, and I don't really have an answer for that, to be honest, because I am in search of a home.

Systemic Change as the Path to Home

Participants described the need for systemic change in both their host and home countries to be able to experience home—that otherwise lay out of their reach due to the intersectional unbelonging and oppression they face as South Asian trans migrants (Hoselton & Drolet, 2025). They emphasized the need for "better laws" (Participant 8, Samarth) and policy-making, more accepting mindsets and better acceptance of their unique intersectional identities in order to feel at home anywhere. Participants highlighted how their intersectional experiences of transphobia, racism, xenophobia, ableism and other forms of bigotry were due to structural factors beyond their control—existing at the societal and institutional levels across academic, career and personal domains of their lives—which shaped their experiences of home and feelings of homelessness (Hoselton & Drolet, 2025). Pehel (Participant 7) explained:

> Yeah, if I know that there are laws which will subject me to not express myself, I would understand that that labour market is not open for me. Because there are chances of something happening to me there. I would always look for much more safer places. I know that I can't express my 35 identities, but if I can express somewhere my 20 identities and somewhere I can express my 17, I would definitely go for the place where I can express 20 of those. That is why West suddenly becomes home to a lot of people—so it's an individual theory that I was just proposing right now. The freedom to do, most of what you do—not, if not all of what you do—makes more sense of a home for, it's true. And that is why the future decisions are mostly affected, you see?

Discussion

This qualitative study aimed to understand the experiences and meaning-making of home through an intersectional lens among trans migrants from the South Asian diaspora residing in Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America. Findings underscored the fundamental importance of adopting an intersectional approach towards coherently understanding the experiences and interpretations of home among South Asian trans migrants in the Global North. The concept of 'intersectional unbelonging' was a key contribution of this study—a notion put forth to fully capture the nuanced and layered experience of unbelonging rooted in South Asian trans migrants' negotiation of their intersecting marginalized identities. Theorizing intersectional unbelonging helped illuminate South Asian trans migrants' constructions of home as an elusive site and resource, marking their experience of homelessness as an emotional phenomenon across home and host societies. In this context, feelings of acute isolation prevailed in their lives, with home being a concept that consistently felt out of their reach as structural and institutional barriers continually contributed to their intersectional unbelonging in every space. The theme of 'Home/lessness in Intersectional Un/belonging' was found to be centrally situated in shaping the development of all themes.

The findings presented under Home/lessness in Intersectional Un/belonging and Intersectional Uniqueness of Oppression are supported by recent literature that explained how intersectionality is key to the construction and experience of home for migrants (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Hoselton & Drolet, 2025; Lin, 2020), although this link has been sparsely explored. Similarly, the intersectional nature of un/belonging for marginalized

communities has been underrepresented in existing research (Anoosh & Thorpe, 2023; Christensen, 2009; Spector-Mersel, 2025; Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, existing concepts and frameworks like 'intersectional invisibility' (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), 'intersectional discrimination' (Beltran et al., 2019), 'emotional homelessness' (Porziella, 2021), and 'intersectional homemaking' (Hoselton & Drolet, 2025) fail to theorize the distinct experience of unbelonging shaped by the intersectional occupation of multiple marginalized identities. Therefore, the current study addresses this gap by proposing the novel theoretical concept of 'intersectional unbelonging'. Grounded in the lived experiences of South Asian trans migrants, we define intersectional unbelonging as a layered sense of unbelonging experienced by folks occupying multiple marginalized identities across their home and host countries, which stems from navigating the distinct forms of exclusion and oppression shaped by the unique intersection of their marginalized identities (for instance, the intersection of their gender, racial, ethnic and migrant identities in the context of South Asian trans migrants). This intersectional unbelonging, in turn, appeared to shape affective experiences of homelessness; wherein South Asian trans migrants feel uniquely isolated due to the displacement from both their home and host countries, occupying what Ling (2018) described as "an intersectional, neither here nor there status—an elsewhere" (p. 7). Porziella (2021) described how LGBTQ+ migrants often experience a unique lack of belonging in their host countries, stemming from their "double ostracization" (p. 20)—rejection by their own ethnic or migrant communities due to their queerness, and by LGBTQ+ communities due to their migrant or POC status. This evidences the kind of intersectional unbelonging experienced by participants of the current study, who voiced the struggle of being both trans and desi, and the resulting exclusion from both mainstream queer-trans spaces and the South Asian community in host countries. Porziella (2021) also conceptualized 'emotional homelessness' in the context of LGBTQ+ migrants, but her focus remained on their exclusion and isolation in host countries. However, our findings expand on this concept by demonstrating that affective homelessness also extends to South Asian trans migrants' home countries and is shaped by their sense of intersectional unbelonging. Further, as a group at the intersection of multiple minoritized identities, participants in the current study became situated in a social position of extreme vulnerability and oppression, which shaped their experiences of intersectional unbelonging and home. Prior literature has evidenced this in highlighting the pivotal, intersectional impact of social locations in shaping the notions of un/belonging (Anthias, 2008; Bailey, 2023; Yuval-Davis, 2006) and home (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Hoselton & Drolet, 2025; Şahin, 2021). Anthias (2008) specifically employed the concept of "translocational positionality" (p. 15) to link this intersectional influence of social locations to a sense of belonging in migratory contexts. However, our findings add to previous research by signalling that intersectional social locations produce qualitatively different, layered experiences of belonging, that are not simply shaped by an accumulation of disadvantage. Participants of the present study described their experience of identity-based oppression as having a distinct intersectional nature, which was differentiated from the compounded effects of bigotry experienced separately by trans people, migrants and South Asians. This intersectional oppression is paralleled in the notion of intersectional discrimination in past literature (Beltran et al., 2019), which explained the mutually constitutive impact of multiple layers of discrimination. Lastly, South Asian trans migrants' experiences of home also supported the theoretical notion of intersectional invisibility, as their intersectional experiences of oppression was associated with a disconnect in terms of their ability to relate to members of the wider queer-trans or South Asian/migrant communities in their host countries (Porziella, 2021; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Further, the theme Disconnect from Collectivist Cultural Roots explained how South Asian trans migrants also became "culturally homeless" (Lin, 2020, p. 325; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999) given the disconnect from their home countries, since they viewed home in connection to a sense of cultural belonging attributed to their collectivist natal

culture. Describing their meanings of home, South Asian trans migrants conceptualized home as a multidimensional, dynamic, fluid, non-physical and plural construct—which are all ways in which previous literature has also characterized home (Bailey, 2023; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Lin, 2020; Ling, 2018; Liu, 2014; Wiles, 2008). However, South Asian trans migrants not only suggested that home can have multiple meanings and manifestations, but that the plurality of home is experienced in different parts of their intersectional identities that shapes a fragmented experience of belonging. This sense of fragmented belonging stemming from the intersectional, plural experience of home is another novel theoretical contribution of the current study. The subthemes Home in Intangible Feelings, Home in Community and Home as Agentic Place-Making showed how participants actively reconstructed home through affective, relational and spatial practices when dominant notions of home remained inaccessible (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Boccagni, 2023; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Lin, 2020; Liu, 2014; Mallet, 2004). Lin (2020) documented the positive impact of interpersonal relationships, particularly friendships, on the psychological well-being of migrants, and how having fewer friends greatly increases the possibility of loneliness. Furthermore, in enacting their intersectional identities in migratory contexts, South Asian trans migrants uprooted their home from their home countries and were attempting to re-ground and rebuild a new home in their host societies—a process of homemaking explained by Ahmed et al. (2003) in the context of migrants and by Brown (2000) as it relates to queer-trans people.

Building on the theme Yearning for a Missing Home Drives the Future, this study illustrated how the absence of home can become notably future-oriented: extending beyond a deep sense of loss or longing to a source of purpose shaping participants' imagined futures, personal goals and migration trajectories. This prominent, future-oriented impact of home and homemaking is not reflected in the majority of existing research (Asante, 2018; Bailey, 2023; D'Angelo, 2020; Hoselton & Drolet, 2025; Porziella, 2021; Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir, 2018), with limited scholarship discussing the temporality of home itself and how home for migrants shapes their futures (Boccagni, 2017; Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Liu, 2014; Şahin, 2021). Participants' conceptualizations of home as a site of imagination, dreams and desire that lies beyond their reach are characteristics also highlighted by Fathi and Ní Laoire (2024) in the context of migrants and marginalized communities, through the processes of homing desire (Brah, 1996) and homing (Boccagni, 2017). Brah (1996) linked the yearning for home to people with diasporic identities, and suggested home as a desired idea often outside the reach of marginalized groups (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024). On a similar note, the notion of homing as proposed by Boccagni (2017) views the search for home as an ongoing process, and that "home in migration is more an ideal than a reality" (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024, p. 4).

Finally, the findings under the theme Systemic Change as the Path to Home position home as a politicized and structural construct, rather than just a subjective or agentic experience. Previous research linking systemic change and power relations in the context of intersectionality to experiences of home and homemaking is sparse (Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2024; Hoselton & Drolet, 2025). In their theory of "intersectional homemaking" (p. 7), Hoselton and Drolet (2025) described homemaking as being inherently political in nature and not just a subjective experience. They explained that the existing power systems in society constitute the intersectional oppression that shapes migrants' experiences of home. Further, they underscored that by aligning with an increased awareness of intersectional oppression, policy-making can better fulfil minoritized communities' needs in relation to homemaking. Their findings were reflected in the accounts of South Asian trans migrants—who highlighted the need for improved policy-making efforts and laws—that address intersectional oppression and unbelonging—to experience home. Fathi and Ní Laoire (2024) also pointed out the significance of structural contexts in shaping the concept of home for migrants, stating that "home is as much about exclusion as inclusion" (p. 7).

Lastly, the current study provided valuable insights into the experiences of gender-diverse

migrants who exist outside the binary gender categories of 'male' and 'female'. Past research on trans people's experiences has largely failed to account for the narratives of gender-diverse individuals (Sühs, 2023). However, the current study included participants who identified across a diversity of gender labels, thus giving voice to the nuances of non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer and queer experiences alongside those of transfeminine and transmasculine individuals.

Implications for Theory, Practice and Policy

Future research should further examine the proposed concept of intersectional unbelonging, particularly among POC trans refugees and asylum-seekers, whose unique experiences of home/lessness are often marked by forced displacement (Şahin, 2021). Acknowledging the intersectionality of social identities and the interlocking forms of oppression that arise, appear to be crucial prerequisites for fostering a sense of belonging and home among people with multiple marginalized identities. Therefore, there is a pressing need for systemic policy reform that centers intersectionality and draws from the lived experiences of South Asian trans migrants to address the intersectional unbelonging and oppression contributing to their affective homelessness. Relevant domains for reform include policies on healthcare, immigration and integration, housing and shelter, and accessibility for disabled folks—that often operate through a single-identity-axis lens, failing to reflect the layered barriers to belonging and oppression that POC trans migrants navigate. Moreover, the results of this study underscore the necessity of qualitative research to understand the depth and complexity of South Asian trans migrants' largely unexplored lived experiences, particularly in relation to homemaking and un/belonging.

This study also suggests that South Asian trans migrants have a strong sense of identification with and attachment to their ethnic, diasporic and collective identities, across individuals from different countries of origin in South Asia. Their ethnic identity was also influential in shaping their experiences of home in migration, which merits further exploration. Future research with South Asian trans migrants could generate valuable insights by examining the role of collective cultural belonging in homemaking and the meaning-making of home. Additionally, psychological research could benefit from exploring the cross-cultural comparisons of trans migrants' experiences of home across different countries of origin within the South Asian diaspora or across different countries of residence in the Global North. Future interventions that aim to foster communal relationships and spaces for trans migrants also seem vital to their ability to belong in host countries (Powell, 2024; Spector-Mersel, 2025).

Finally, apart from policy considerations, the findings of this study call for the adoption of more equitable and decolonial approaches in academic research. We strongly suggest that future studies adopt community-based participatory research or participatory action research approaches to the study of South Asian trans migrants' experiences of home—that challenge the power dynamics between researchers and participants, and are especially less prevalent in conventional psychological research. Following these participatory approaches can center South Asian trans migrants' lived experiences by including them as co-producers of knowledge in research that directly concerns them, empowering them by aiming towards tangible action to achieve social change (Minkler & Chang, 2019).

Limitations

While participants of this study shared their year of migration to their current countries of residence to better contextualize their narratives, the focus of this study was limited to their experiences as shared at the specific point in time of their interviews. Given how South Asian trans migrants' legal status as migrants, their social integration and personal transitions in host countries could shape the dynamic and fluid meanings of home, the findings of this study do not reflect how their notions of home might evolve over time. This temporal aspect of home for South Asian trans migrants could be better explored through qualitative longitudinal research, an approach which is underrepresented in migration research (Winiarska, 2017).

A notable limitation of this study was the lack of diversity in participants' migrant statuses, as it did not include refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants who were survivors of forced displacement or those living in transit countries. Including these groups could have yielded rich insights into how intersectional unbelonging and homelessness might take shape under conditions of legal and spatial instability. This lack of representation was primarily attributed to the hard-to-reach nature of migrants with precarious status. While comprehensive demographic details relevant to participants' migration trajectories as South Asian trans people were collected, they were not asked if they had or were undergoing any form of gender-affirming medical care. Past research has demonstrated how access to gender-affirming medical services and healthcare is impacted by trans migrants' intersectional experiences of marginalization (Altay et al., 2021). Understanding the experiences of navigating such inaccessible healthcare systems could contribute valuable insights in relation to the systemic inaccessibility of home for South Asian trans migrants. Further, the study sample solely consisted of individuals who had completed formal education at least till the undergraduate level. Trans communities often struggle with lower levels of education due to the systemic and intersectional forms of oppression they are subjected to (Conron et al., 2022). Thus, the participants of this study constitute a relatively privileged sample among the wider community of South Asian trans migrants, which might have impacted their access to resources and social locations as part of their migration journeys and influenced how they experienced home. Lastly, a majority of the participants identified as neurodivergent and/or disabled, which added a unique layer to their interpretations of home, given the access and support needs and additional structural exclusion being disabled might entail. However, the intersectional focus of this study meant that the salience of a specific, single identity like disability status in shaping participants' experiences of intersectional unbelonging and homemaking could not be examined in depth.

Conclusion

This study provides a foundational understanding about the intersectional experiences and dynamic meanings of home and belonging for South Asian trans migrants residing in the Global North. Our findings shed light on the unique intersectional nature of unbelonging, emotional homelessness and isolation among this population—factors that participants described experiencing in a cyclical and mutually reinforcing manner. These insights challenge dominant, cisheteronormative understandings of home and belonging, emphasizing the need for policy changes that address the structural barriers constraining the homemaking possibilities of South Asian trans migrants. Future research and interventions aiming to foster homemaking must be co-constructed with South Asian trans migrants to cultivate a true sense of belonging—that moves beyond simply removing barriers to their inclusion.

Statement of Human Rights

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Ani Methi**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Carla Moleiro**: Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing; **Ronni Greenwood**: Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author, Ani Methi. The data are not publicly available due to their containing sensitive personal information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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