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Migration and Domestic Space

Ethnographies of Home in the Making

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Contents

Chapter 2
A House of Homes: On the Multiscalarity and Ambivalence of Homemaking in a Multicultural Condominium in Italy

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2.1 Introduction

"Entering other people's homes" means crossing an incredibly significant symbolic and physical boundary, as the home is the private place *par excellence*, the backstage space in which our lives and personal possessions should be protected and made less visible. For a researcher, entering other people's homes means making visible that which is perhaps "the most important place where people live" (Miller, 2020: 94). In recent years, research on the concept of home and on homemaking has significantly increased thanks to the contribution of geographers, anthropologists, architects, environmental psychologists and sociologists (Miller, 2001; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Duyvendak, 2011; Boccagni, 2017; Boccagni et al., 2020). These studies, despite their heterogeneity, have shown that the domestic space is not a fixed and bounded place to protect, but is a precarious arena made up of multiple social actors and struggles (Ahmed et al., 2003). Home is not a 'being' but a 'becoming' (Nowicka, 2006).

Researchers are thus going beyond the 'static' and conservative perspective that romanticised and essentialised the conception of home and that, amongst other things, gave the possibility to use domestic metaphors to underpin restrictive or hostile policies towards immigrants or other minorities (on this, see Walters' [2004] domopolitics). Focusing on the processuality of homemaking requires an analysis of "what happens in the mutual interaction between people and their dwellings, and what that means and entails" (Boccagni and Bonfanti, Introduction). This requires a particular focus on the everyday material, social and affective practices used by subjects in order to transform a place into a home (Hammond, 2004) also in the most inhospitable conditions (Giorgi & Fasulo, 2013; Neumark, 2013; Read, 2014). The significance and processuality of homemaking is even more evident when

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studying populations in movement, such as migrants. By definition they have left their home of origin and therefore have fragmented 'housing careers' (Boccagni, 2017; Miranda-Nieto, 2020). Indeed, migrants are constantly engaged in homemaking (Taylor, 2013; Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017) because in their new settlement context they have to find a home from both a material (a roof over their heads) and a symbolic (a place that feels like home) point of view. And usually they struggle to have their own 'spatial needs' (Cancellieri & Ostanel, 2015) recognised, because they are usually considered 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). Therefore, for migrants the concept of home is an interweaving of a past space that has been left behind (that can also be, as in the case of many refugees, a 'place of pain'), an often highly precarious present space and a future space, which is generally aspired to (Kabachnik et al., 2010). There is therefore a constitutive tension between home and migration. However, we must stress that "there is no migrant home […] to be set against an equally essentialized native, autochthonous or long-resident home or house" (Boccagni, 2021: x).

The continuous work of *uprootings and regroundings* (Ahmed et al., 2003) does not only concern the migrant population. On the contrary, we could say that the experience of migrants is a powerful litmus test of a constant and growing dialectic between home (making) and mobility that increasingly also involves so-called non-migrants (Urry, 2007). The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the processes of homemaking in a multicultural condominium called Hotel House, located in the small Italian town of Porto Recanati. In the last twenty years, and despite continuous transformations, Hotel House has always had an average of 2000 residents, 90–95% of whom have been of migrant origin. The research work was carried out through a lengthy process of participant observation within both the domestic and communal spaces of the condominium. The case study of this multicultural high-rise is a clear example of how home-searching and the importance of having a part of the world in which what you do has some effect and some 'weight' (Jackson, 1995) is a basic trait of human nature. In Hotel House migrants produce home both by imbuing domestic spaces with their own memories and meaning and by creating public and collective spaces characterised by 'homely relations', whereby they produce material and symbolic resources.

After laying out the case study and the methodology used, this chapter looks at the ethical and practical implications of entering other people's homes. It firstly focuses its analysis on the field access and the researcher's positionality; it then emphasises how entering Hotel House allows us to explore the daily material and affective construction of multisensory atmospheres and landscapes in the domestic spaces. The next part analyses practices of sociability and mutual aid that take place in the domestic spaces of Hotel House, with particular focus on a number of Senegalese families. The ambivalence of these practices will be brought to light, showing that they often end up generating tight and restrictive community ties, bringing about a continual negotiation between the public, community and private realm. The article ends by analysing the multiscalarity of homemaking processes and their possible emergence outside of the boundaries of domestic spaces. Again, I focus on the ambivalences of these processes that vary strongly across different ethnicities and, above all, genders.

2.2   Case Study and Methodology

This paper analyses the everyday processes of homemaking in a high-rise former holiday resort, called Hotel House (Fig. 2.1), composed of 480 flats and situated in the small city of Porto Recanati (about 12,000 inhabitants), at the centre of the Italian Adriatic coast. Since 2005 the building has been largely inhabited by migrants (95% of the total inhabitants) coming from forty different countries (half of them from Senegal and Bangladesh and the rest mostly from Pakistan, Tunisia and Nigeria).

The Hotel House project was explicitly inspired by Le Corbusier's idea of *'l'unite'd'habitation'*, which is a self-sufficient private condominium[1] characterised by verticalism and repeated straight lines. Nowadays it is a very recognisable multicultural enclave in the southern suburbs, clearly separated from the rest of the town of Porto Recanati. At the end of the 1960s, the firm that built Hotel House went bankrupt and the constructor committed suicide. Thus the completed condominium was left without services (even without a car parking), and the majority of flats, even if sold, remained empty for many years. These flats have been periodically occupied

Fig. 2.1 The Hotel House condominium in Porto Recanati, Italy. (Author's picture)

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[1] Hotel House is managed by a condominium administrator, who has changed several times. This is appointed by the assembly of the flat owners, as required by Italian law.

by a few hundred Italian holidaymakers and some very heterogeneous populations such as people who evacuated their homes after the Ancona earthquake in the 1970s or by aeronautic officers working in the nearby town of Potenza Picena in the 1980s. By the middle of the 1990s, when large numbers of migrants began to arrive in Italy, many of them saw the Hotel House as an ideal (because almost empty) place to settle. This new presence of migrant tenants was strongly opposed by the traditional Hotel House residents: the more the number of migrants increased, the more the Italians decided to sell their flats. This 'white flight' (Kruse, 2005) was encouraged by the interests of real estate agents, who could buy Hotel House flats at very low prices and then charge high rents for them. In a second phase, the relative ease of taking out a mortgage encouraged many migrants to buy their homes. In the middle of the 2000s, in only a few years, migrants had bought more than half of the condominium's flats.

The most substantial part of this research is based on lengthy ethnographic work conducted in Hotel House from October 2004 to July 2013. In the first period (2004–2006), I lived in Hotel House, first hosted by a Senegalese woman and then by a young Italian man who was working in the condominium as a lift technician. My intensive and continuous presence at Hotel House in this period allowed me to share the spaces and times of daily life with some of its residents, gradually widening my circle of trusted relationships. In the second long period I often went back for single days, routinely visiting friends in their domestic spaces and spending time in the collective spaces throughout the condominium. In this period I witnessed some major transformations, firstly the 2007–2008 economic crisis, which transformed the condominium from a place with a very low percentage of unemployed people to one with high economic precarity. I also discovered that some of the building's dynamics seemed to repeat themselves periodically. In particular, there were continual phases in which the building was strongly stigmatised and marginalised, resulting in the progressive worsening of people's life conditions which would then be responded to by a small group of residents who would self-organise to (re)build some collective services (e.g. from janitor service 24 h a day to a small library and a family doctor), and to demand more support from outside. Although these cycles of mobilisation have led to partial improvements, they have always been very fragile (as the institutional support they have received) and so have had a limited duration each time (Cancellieri, 2013; Camilli, 2018).

During this long and in-depth participant observation, I always informed people met in the fieldwork that I was doing research for the university in order to study everyday life in Hotel House. Generally speaking, at first I was mainly concerned with creating relationships of trust. Later on, I conducted and taped almost forty interviews in order to have residents' first hands accounts. In these cases I always asked the participants if I could record our conversations. All extended quotes in the article were taken from these taped interviews and all names are fictitious to preserve privacy and anonymity.

2.3   How I Entered Migrant Homes: Field Access and the Researcher's Positionality

Studying processes of homemaking by entering directly into other people's homes presupposes a long and complex process of trust building and the gradual negotiation of thresholds of domesticity and intimacy (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017). Indeed, people need to be put at ease to be convinced to allow a guest into their domestic backstage. Building and obtaining that trust in a context such as Hotel house could prove even more complicated, because the building and its residents are strongly stigmatized. Like so many places where socially disadvantaged populations due to national origin, ethnicity and/or socio-economic conditions are concentrated, Hotel House is in fact subject to powerful discursive practices of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007). In particular, local media have heavily contributed towards the representation of the town of Porto Recanati as a 'clean' fortress threatened by a high-rise that is increasingly perceived as a social 'rubbish dump' for unwanted 'alterity' (Cancellieri, 2013, 2017). Those "external" subjects that are generally interested in knowing more about these stigmatized places are law enforcement agencies engaged in social control or journalists who usually reproduce its stigmatisation. At the beginning of my research, I was lucky enough to be able to use the relationships of trust built by a fellow anthropologist (Giorgio Cingolani) who had just ended a period of participant observation in the condominium during which he developed a strong relationship with a group of Senegalese residents. Thanks to his intermediation a Senegalese woman (called Fatou) immediately accepted my request for a space and let me stay in her apartment, where she was living with two other Senegalese people, in exchange for a small payment. This flat soon became my permanent base in Hotel House, and remained so for the rest of the first period of my research. During my presence in the spaces of the condominium I had to engage in the daily confirmation and negotiation of the residents' trust, both with those who hosted me, and with those whom I gradually came to know in Hotel House's public spaces. In this daily work I discovered the fundamental importance of the 'desacralization' and de-institutionalisation of my role as a (white) university researcher. Indeed, often I felt that my position as 'white' and highly educated was experienced with a certain level of subjection, with people saying: "You understand a thousand times better than me" or "You know everything". To counter this reticence and to build trust I constantly tried to demonstrate my willingness to listen and to discover their lives and share their everyday experiences (e.g. eating together with a dozen Senegalese residents, helping and supporting all the residents in minor everyday tasks such as doing brief translations or giving them a lift somewhere). I also always tried not only to speak in Italian but in English and French, and gradually also to use the Wolof words I was learning (Wolof being the predominant language among the Senegalese residents). Last but not least I always tried to be the object of the gaze and questions of others, thus accepting that the depth of the observers' gaze would be turned onto me.

Entering migrants' homes presupposes trust but at the same time it is a practice that contributes to trust building because it allows the migrant to be transformed into the host, reversing the 'domopolitical' rhetoric of the migrant as a guest in 'our home'. Becoming guests within migrant's domestic spaces is therefore potentially also a device for the realignment and rebalancing of power, as it transforms the migrant into the host. Sometimes this had a negative effect on my research, most of all in the first period, as having adopted the respectful attitude of the host meant I could not ask too many questions. But at the same time, putting listening and recognition at the centre of my research brought to light migrants' desire for recognition, and to show and tell their daily lives. Often requests for greater 'invasion' ("Why don't you take photos?") prevailed over the fear of being subjected to the researcher's gaze. Ethnographic work, in particular that which takes place in the intimacy of domestic spaces, is thus transformed into the possibility offered to social actors of being listened to and legitimated. On this subject, Bertaux (1999: 76) invites researchers to

> get rid of your sense of guilt, because you are not robbers of lives but gatherers of testimonies […] giving 'social recognition' to the subject that they are perhaps not granted elsewhere. By interpolating them, you show that they know things that you don't know, even though you are an academic. Things that 'society' does not know. (Author's translation)

From being a place to be avoided because it was heavily stigmatised, Hotel House thus becomes an object of interest for universities, institutions which are still considered authoritative and prestigious. Research fields containing stigmatised subjects require special attention and a particular capacity to listen, but at the same time they are also inhabited by subjects who are more likely to be interested in being (finally) recognised and so willing to make the researcher's ethnographic experience strongly cooperative and collaborative (Colombo, 2001). This relative ease of accessibility into the spaces of everyday life of the Hotel House residents was strongly accentuated by my condition as a 'biographical stranger' (Lofland, 1998), that is, a person who was not involved in the relations of reciprocity and control of the building's everyday life. This freedom to easily cross some thresholds has also been experienced by other researchers in research contexts that have characteristics in common with Hotel House, for example, by Ferdinando Fava in his lengthy ethnography in the ZEN neighbourhood in Palermo. This specific condition of stranger was made very clear in the ethnographic note in which Fava discusses his access to the apartment of Vita, who is a resident at ZEN:

> I crossed, because she let me, the threshold of her house, transgressing, in front of the neighbours, the identitarian code that governs gender relations in the public space of the insula and that regulates the permissions and prohibitions regarding who can do what, such as entering into a family, for example, when the 'man of the house' is not there. My clear exteriority to the neighbourhood (I was not from Palermo, I was not a 'man from ZEN', and I was not a locatable resident in one of its insulae) authorised me to enter her domestic space; this however would not be sufficient in justifying our prolonged association. Vita would herself create the conditions for my frequent presence within her family, considering me (and acting accordingly) as neither male nor female, but as a person. Otherwise how would it be possible? I was not a member of her immediate nuclear family nor a relation in her extended family, not a boyfriend or a "friend of the family" who had become like one

of the family, and neither was I renting one of their shared rooms. To be in this space, in which I was asked 'only' to listen, while never being asked personal favours, money, advice, solutions, personal opinions on the discourses and the events I was told, I had to be stripped of every connotation of social gender with which Vita constructed her daily actions, constituting myself only as "listener", the catalyser of a word that was otherwise unspeakable. (Fava, 2013: 44) (Author's translation).

The ambivalence between inhabiting the spaces of daily life in a particular context and at the same time remaining a stranger and not being radically involved in the personal and social events of that place is the structural condition of ethnographers. They are suspended between observation and participation, constantly searching for the correct level of involvement and the right distance to take. In my case, this ambivalence was reinforced by the fact that I constantly tried not to bind myself to specific social groups, but to systematically traverse the social boundaries of the condominium, in terms of gender, age and cultural origins.

2.4 Material, Spatial and Affective Everyday Homemaking

Entering Hotel house, and, in particular, its apartments, allowed me to clearly see how in some cases migrants had reterritorialized themselves by breathing new life into the condominium's domestic spaces and decorating them with 'biographical objects' to recreate the sensorial landscapes of their country of origin: in many of Hotel House's flats, satellite dishes emitted familiar sounds and languages, the incessant import–export trade filled the air with the smells, scents and flavours of their home countries, and the pictures and videos allowed the residents to see people and places to which they were more attached. An example is given by the photos on the wall of many of the flats of Senegalese people in Hotel House, of the prophet Ahmadou Bamba (also known as Serign Touba, founder of Mouridism, the Islamic religious brotherhood to which many of the Senegalese residents of Hotel House belong) (Figs. 2.2 and 2.3). As Fatou clearly told me:

> For Mouridism, photos of Ahmadou Bamba on the walls show who you are. Everyone has them. When you enter a house and you see them you know who he is. There's no need to ask anything. (Fatou, 41 years old, Senegalese woman, Hotel House resident)

The following ethnographic note expresses the processes of homemaking that can be seen "behind the closed doors of domestic homes" (Miller, 2001: 1) in the condominium (cf. Boccagni, Chap. 7):

> I left the dark and grey corridor to enter Mamadou and Fatou's flat. All at once I am immersed in a dense and multisensory atmosphere: tangs coming from the kitchen, passionate mbalax music on the Senegalese satellite channels, Islamic prayers in the background coming from Malick's room. On the walls you can see a lot of photographs of relatives and religious leaders. The big images of Amadou Bamba, the founding prophet of the main Senegalese brotherhood, stand out. When the delicious food prepared by Fatou arrives, tastes, smells, colours and sounds are combined together to give rise to a total 'synaesthesia'! I like to move quickly from one apartment to another, and, by simply crossing a short corridor, trespass boundaries between different 'worlds'. I therefore find an excuse not to
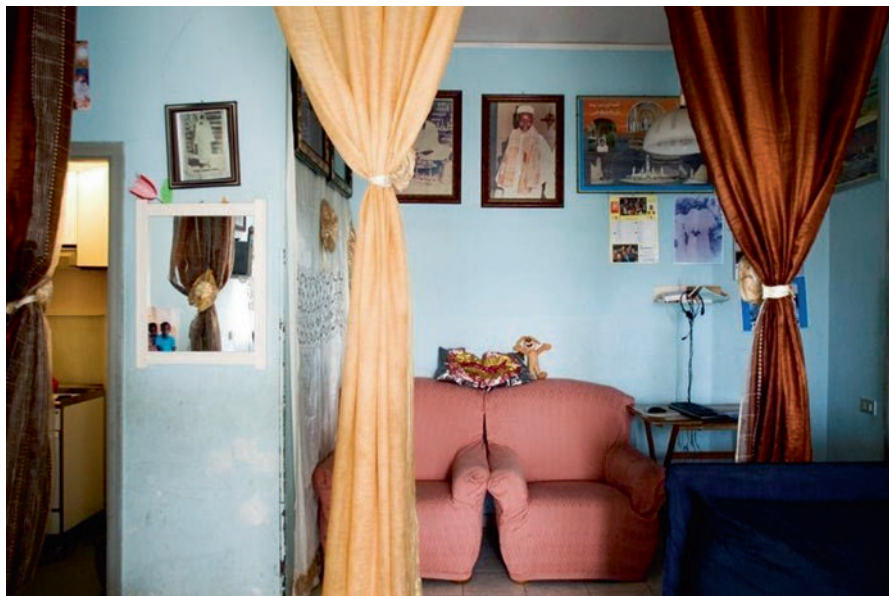
Fig. 2.2 Living room of a Senegalese family inside Hotel House. (Picture by Francesca Pieroni)
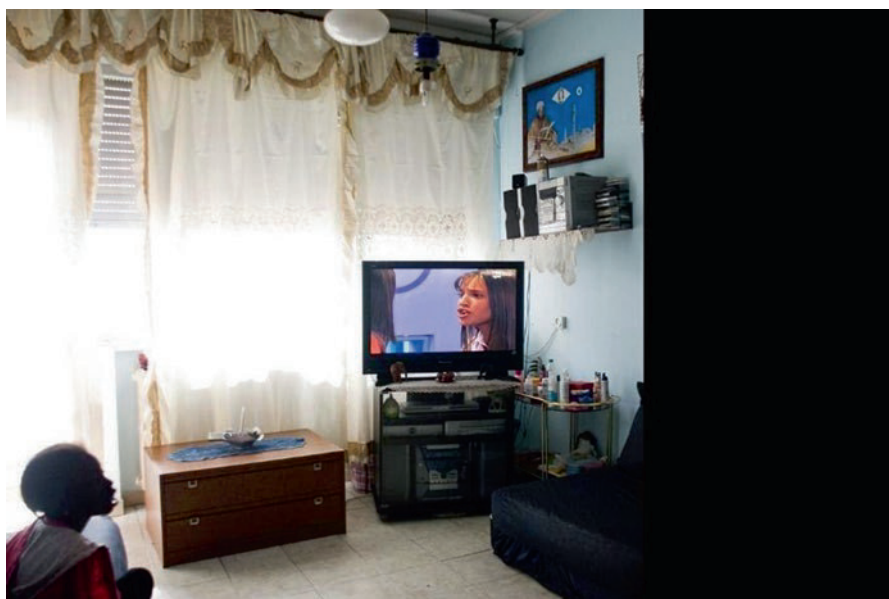

Fig. 2.3 The "landscape" of the living room of another Senegalese family. (Picture by Francesca Pieroni)

stop for lunch and I leave Fatou's flat. A few steps down the hall and I knock on the door of Abbas' flat. He opens it and immediately I hear the music and smell the Indian chapatis that are cooking. The room is full of his paintings: many are portraits, many others are of Pakistani or Italian landscapes. Abbas is a talented painter and complements his salary as a kitchen assistant in a restaurant by selling paintings. You can see this is a room of first generation immigrants without a family taking care of the house. There is a certain disorder but nevertheless the atmosphere that is recreated within the domestic space is strongly recognisable. The music of Bollywood movies mixed with the smells, colours and everyday practices create a sensory landscape that reminds me of Pakistan. I don't stay for long because I want to go to greet Nader, who by this time should be back from work. I take the elevator and in no time at all I am at the front door of his house. As soon as he opens it, I do not even have time to say hello before I'm listening to the Arabic language of Tunisian TV channels and smelling the couscous that is almost ready. On the walls and shelves there are the photos and the objects that tell Nader's stories, his main relationships and his need to feel at home. (Ethnographic diary, 7 March 2006)

This does not mean that all the flats inhabited by migrants living in Hotel House are always characterised by these explicit cultural and biographical traces. On the contrary, there are a number of flats in which the inhabitants do not seem to have made any particular symbolic investment. In some cases, these are the flats hosting people in transit or who are precarious. In other cases, it is probably a 'volitional mode of non-home' (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022), that is, the refusal to attach a sense of home to an (unsatisfactory) dwelling place. For, when it is argued that the process of home-making is an open-ended struggle (Tucker, 1994), that "may also result in the negation of home itself" (Boccagni & Miranda-Nieto, 2022: 530).

2.5   Between Private, Community and Public: The Ambivalence of Homemaking Practices

Entering the homes (of migrants) also means analysing, from a privileged position, the continual negotiation between the public, community and private realms (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017). Indeed, the domestic spaces at Hotel House are not only spaces of family relations but are spaces of a series of fundamental collective and semi-public relations and rituals. If we take the example of the apartments in which some Senegalese people live, which I was able to observe with more continuity, we could say that they are inserted in very relevant and continually (re)produced social, economic and cultural practices. These Senegalese people spend a large part of their spare time in Hotel House's flats. They gather with relatives and friends to chat for hours on end, drinking mint tea or a *toufam* (a mix of yoghurt and sugared water), braiding hair, watching new Senegalese films, or videos of weddings, baptisms or other feasts in Senegal and they prepare collective meals in which individuals sit together in a circle around a big plate, generally of rice. These Senegalese people living in Hotel House have not only reorganised and appropriated their home interiors, marking them with elements of their personal and collective identities, they have also transformed their flats into 'parochial spaces' for social and

community practices (Lofland, 1998). Their daily behaviours often seem reminiscent of Simmel's (1949) concept of 'sociability', that is the art of talking for the pleasure of staying together. These movements happen in a sort of small 'circulatory territory' (Tarrius, 2010) in which the nodes are the different flats. The doors in this path are usually open, as a Senegalese woman confirmed:

> We don't have cooking times like the Italians, who have breakfast, lunch and dinner, no. Someone is always coming to visit. It could be that the person who visits is tired and sleeps here. I could go to their house. In any event, this is how it's done, there's no difference. One person was on furlough and he was here for three months. He was in Loreto amongst the Italians, he left his house and came here. Or, as for the computer, I don't know how to use it, there is no network, I go to someone else's place. (Binda, 29, Senegalese woman, Hotel House resident)

These social and homemaking practices also have an ambivalent 'nature'. Some Senegalese residents have highlighted that using domestic spaces in this way increases tension between community and individual needs:

> We do the same as in Africa. The room's door is always open. It's only closed before sleeping. But it began to bother me. When I go to Africa they say to me that I have become white! Did you see Aminata this morning? She came in on the phone, without greeting anyone, and she went to the bathroom. It could seem funny to you but if she was European, she wouldn't have done that. It's a civilisation question, because maybe I was doing something private! (Fatou, 41, Senegalese woman, Hotel House resident)

This social density can favour strong forms of social control, as witnessed by Modou, a Senegalese man who confessed feeling restricted by this network: *Staying here is like living in Senegal. It's even difficult to learn the Italian language!* (Modou, 29, Senegalese man, Hotel House resident). Thus, some young people leave Hotel House just to escape from these bonding communitarian ties and this social control: *Why did I leave Hotel House? Because there are too many people that don't mind their own business!* (Ndiaga, 23, Senegalese man, Hotel House ex-resident). The risk of this homemaking process is to discourage innovative behaviours and to favour conservative practices and representations. This dynamic risks weakening the role played by the Hotel House as a space for homemaking and capability and even risks creating a kind of double closure. In fact, as well as these forms of control from the inside, as outlined above, Hotel House's residents find the 'outside' an alienating environment in which their dignity is usually denied and their voices and possibilities of making and taking place are largely restricted (Phillips, 2008). The ambivalence of the conditions of the residents of Hotel House is therefore very significant: on the one hand the building allows for continuous homemaking processes; and, on the other, it facilitates forms of control from both inside and outside. As we will see in the next paragraph, if we widen our gaze beyond the domestic spaces of the condominium, this ambivalence becomes even stronger.

2.6   The Multiscalarity of Homemaking

Entering Hotel House also means discovering the multiscalarity of the practices of homemaking that can emerge outside of the boundaries of domestic spaces (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020; Brun, 2020). As Kusenbach emphasises (2020: 31), "home is not located *in* a building or other physical place yet refers to particular emotional bonds and practices that connect people *with* certain places". At Hotel House homemaking is often extended to the entire condominium, that is a sort of 'condominium-refuge'. Hotel House in fact represents the possibility for migrants to have a territory in which they can construct communitarian and identitarian places, in which to generate material and symbolic resources. One example is the network of mutual aid that holds together many of the Senegalese people. This becomes particularly evident during the summer, when some of them work all day on the beach as street vendors. In this period some of the Senegalese women cook for hours every day to prepare 40–50 meals that are taken to and distributed at three or four points along the coast where small groups of street vendors meet. A clear confirmation of the Hotel House's social networks can also be heard in the words of a Tunisian resident:

> Here for some things it's much better. Here even if you leave a woman at home in the evening, or you have a sick child, you go down to the reception and you call an ambulance; whereas if you go to Porto Recanati no one knows you, and they definitely won't help you! Here wherever you go, you go, even if someone doesn't know you it's enough that you go and knock at their door, you say that you have a sick person at home… here people help each other… yes, yes, there are people who were really surprised when they came here and they saw how people help each other even if they don't know each other… even if they're not of the same race, but they help each other… that is also a positive thing. (Taoufik, 40, Tunisian, resident)

Homemaking practices in the Hotel House involve public and collective spaces at the ground floor of the big condominium, in particular in the four small squares created by the intersection of the two rectangular boxes that constitute the building. This area was originally designed for hosting many small shops. However, until the end of the 1990s, it was nearly empty with only a pizzeria, a hairdresser and a supermarket that were all managed by Italian people. In 2003, it was closed to vehicular traffic and filled with benches, which resulted in the opening of small enterprises. In a few years, the ground floor was transformed into a lively commercial area with a dozen small shops which have changed frequently over the years (e.g. minimarkets, phone centres, a *halal* butchers and barber's shops). The shops, managed by people from many different countries (almost all men), are not only commercial spaces but have also become social spaces for meeting people, chatting and getting information.

The most important space situated in the ground floor is the so-called mosque, created in 2003 by the transformation of three different small shops into an Islamic prayer room. Considering that the large majority (approximately 80%) of the residents practice the Islamic faith, the condominium's mosque has become a fundamental place (also for many Muslims living nearby), to share a religious identity and to confront their stigmatisation as a result of the world's growing Islamophobia

(for the Italian situation, see Saint-Blancat & Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005). The meaningful role played by the mosque is clearly explained by Saber, the condominium's handyman:

> It's beautiful in the Mosque; we are like a family. I don't say this because we are Muslims, but we are all equal, all workers, all far from our country. Otherwise it's home and work, home and work. It would be better to dig a grave and throw yourself inside! (Saber, 42, Hotel House handyman and resident)

The cumulative experience of a place in which you can find physical and symbolic resources can create a relationship with it, resulting in a sense of continuity and order (De Martino, 1977). Thanks to a job market with low unemployment and the wide availability of bank loans, a large majority of migrants bought the flats they lived in. Residential stability and flat ownership contributed to material and symbolic homemaking (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Sampson et al., 2002). Indeed, the increasing territorial settlement of migrant families seemed to mean that they started taking more responsibility for their homes, as Saber, a young father of two children, attested:

> You become more serious when you have a family. Before marrying, when you were alone, nothing mattered. With a family you care, because you think about your children's future. I don't think about me, I don't care, I don't need to protect myself, I am a warrior. But now I have to protect my children, for their future. (Saber, 42, Tunisian man, Hotel House handyman and resident)

For many residents the high-rise has become a part of their personal history, creating a cognitive, physical and affective connection. There is a sort of biographical relationship with the condominium as we can see from Rasul's words:

> I have been here since 1992. I was one of the youngest in 1992. Hotel House was quiet, everything worked, and there was a porter 24 hours a day. Now we have created a committee made up of Senegalese, Bangladeshi and Pakistani people: everybody is involved. We formed a group to control the ground floor and the entire condominium. We started to talk with the municipality. We want to totally change Hotel House. We will succeed. If I listen to bullshit related to the condominium I get angry. I have been here almost twenty years and I will not allow anybody to ruin it: twenty years is a history! (Rasul, 29, Senegalese man, Hotel House resident)

This process largely differentiates Hotel House from other similar places in Italy, which are mostly places in which residents are in a 'transitory' space-time and where there are poor homemaking processes (Zorbaugh, 1929; Vianello, 2006). This functions as a temporary refuge required in particularly difficult situations is also a fundamental function of Hotel House, but during my time on the field it played a limited role.

The capacity of places like Hotel House to give rise to homemaking does not apply only to migrants. Italians who live in the condominium provided various testimonies that recognised the importance of this place for the networks of solidarity and mutual aid that have been generated there over time:

> I am happier now that five years have passed from when I bought it than I was before I arrived. Because the years pass and I see the use of it more. If I had been alone in a house I

would have always been anxious, afraid of old age…[…] here you never feel alone, here you are not isolated as perhaps you could be living in a beautiful villa in an isolated place. (Mario, 70, Italian man, Hotel House resident)

A sign of these new intercultural identifications based on the same living place is in the creation of a residents' committee composed of residents coming from different countries, with the aim of protecting the condominium against institutional abandonment and stigmatisation. This process is emphasised well by Antonio, a Hotel House resident for more than thirty years:

For too many years Hotel House was not considered a place to be defended, that's the truth. Maybe the authorities thought that considering that there were some criminals, it would be better to attract others to this place. But now we are paying for that, because some of them have established their presence and it's not easy to uproot them. Now we have to be determined, because otherwise it would be like shouting but not solving the problems. We cannot do a lot of things, but we have to speak up about that. The authorities have to listen to our voice. (Antonio, 65, Italian man, Hotel House resident)

As mentioned above, I often came across these intercultural mobilisations during my time in the field, confirming that places like Hotel House, far from being immutable territories of invariable marginality, are instead processual fields rich with endogenous potentialities and resources that intertwine and daily come into confrontation with external resources and constraints.

2.7 The Reproduction of Gender Boundaries as the Dark Side of *Home*

The multiscalar homemaking experiences of Hotel House's residents vary strongly across different ages, ethnicities and, above all, genders. Indeed, the ground floor is largely a space of sociability for men. For a significant percentage of women they are sites of exclusion rather than places of symbolic and material resources (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). The number of women and girls living in Hotel House is increasing, but they are still largely a minority. Women's presence in the collective spaces on the ground floor is even more limited, and the majority of them do not have their own spaces other than their flats. The rich homemaking practices analyzed above are largely men's practices. Even if the situation is very different for some Senegalese and Nigerian women who are more present in the condominium's public spaces, we could say that women's local condition reveals the 'dark side' of these homemaking practices. For example, these are the words of two male residents in Hotel House:

A woman… doesn't go into a bar where there is alcohol, the normal North African woman doesn't go into a bar where there is alcohol. For example, in Tunisia a woman absolutely doesn't go into bars where there is alcohol, neither with or without her husband. (Hamed, 28, Tunisian man, Hotel House resident)

Most of the women from Bangladesh are rarely seen, you almost never see them, actually you don't even know if they exist! Also those from Pakistan, some people you see one day

and then you see them again a month later. Some you see only when they are taking their child out. (Michele, 44, Italian man, Hotel House porter and resident)

Most of the women who live in Hotel House spend their days segregated in houses taking care of the housework and the children. Many of them never go out alone and are always accompanied by their husband or one or more other women, generally from the same nationality. We are faced with the "traditional" double spatial partition between private- domestic/female spaces and public-work/male spaces (Rose, 1993; Massey 1994; Strüver, 2004). Therefore, unlike what happens in many of the apartments occupied by Senegalese people that were analysed above, in lots of other cases domestic spaces are a sort of more or less gilded "cage" that is protected from the outside: places that are difficult to get out of and which it is not easy to enter into. This is evidenced in the testimony of Saber:

> At a Bangladeshi person's home, if I have to go in to fix a leak or for another job, if there is only a woman at home she won't let me in! Her husband has to be there. Or she is authorised by her husband who says: "At a certain time this guy is coming, so open the door!". Even in this case she opens the door but then runs away immediately and shuts herself in her room. You can't even ask: "Madam, what is this? What do I have to do?" Nothing! Bangladeshi women just run away! (Saber, 42, Tunisian man, Hotel House handyman and resident)

Living in a stigmatised and marginalised context, as outlined above, poses an even greater risk of a double closure for the women in Hotel House. They experience further stigmatization by both race and gender, which creates stronger geometries of oppression in their everyday life (Valentine, 2007). This has been effectively highlighted under the rubric of intersectionality, to describe the interconnections and interdependence between race and other categories (Crenshaw, 1993; Mason, 2013). As Valentine argues (2007: 19), intersectionality is a situated accomplishment: "in particular spaces there are dominant spatial orderings that produce moments of exclusion for particular social groups". This is manifested for instance in the difficulty of reaching the centre not only due to the lack of a pedestrian walkway, but also because many women from the condominium that walk there are considered by those from Porto Recanati as potential prostitutes, as explained by Antonio:

> Hotel House's women go to Porto Recanati to learn the language, but on the way there they sometimes meet people that come here hoping to have sex. And women are angry about it! Probably it was even true that there were sex workers before and that some people from the city were used to coming here to find someone. But when they look at these people who are totally different types of people, also in traditional dress, they should be able to see the difference! (Antonio, 65, Italian man, Hotel House resident)

This account clearly shows how the relation with the outside plays a fundamental role in structuring a spatial ordering that reinforces the entrapment of some of the women within the domestic spaces of the condominium.

2.8   Conclusion

This study, which began from the interior spaces of the multi-ethnic condominium of Hotel House, allowed for the emergence of the whole heuristic power of focusing on the processes of homemaking and, in particular, of entering into the domestic spaces of migrants as a research tool. Entering migrants' homes entails highly significant ethical negotiations involving trust-building, reciprocal gazes and recognition mechanisms. These processes open up interesting reflections on both field access and the researcher's positionality, which call for ever greater research efforts.

Entering domestic spaces means radicalising the ethnographic intuition of doing research by sharing the spaces of the everyday lives of the subjects being studied, i.e. from within and from below. Primarily it gives centrality to material domestic cultures, that is, to the 'traces' left in domestic spaces (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). The migrants at Hotel House have created familiar multi-sensory atmospheres and landscapes to support a sense of cultural continuity between pre-migratory and post-migratory life. The research has cast light on the variety and creativity with which people recreate home and reconstruct community, intimacy and familiarity. It could be said that reflections about home lie at the centre of the emotional and affective turn that has characterised the humanities and social sciences since the mid-1990s (Thrift, 2004; Davidson et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Entering migrants' homes means having a privileged point of view on the daily tension between structure and agency. Indeed, homemaking is not a subjective process but is powerfully intersubjective, political and social. This is even more the case for migrant populations who suffer heavy discrimination in their access to housing because they are often indiscriminately considered undesirable tenants (Dion, 2001; Van der Bracht et al., 2015) and therefore often have to "cope with quickly shifting and often unfamiliar environments" (Boccagni et al., 2020: 137). Entering their homes makes the vulnerability and harsh living conditions of migrants visible, but at the same time prevents us from forcing or locking them into a victim status. At Hotel House we found an extremely rich and daily construction of spaces of sociality, identity and mutual aid: a wealth of homemaking practices that bring *publicness* into domestic spaces and *home* into the traditionally public spaces of the condominium (such as those on the ground floor). Homemaking turned out to be a multiscalar process that can "move 'up' (from a dwelling to a street, a neighbourhood, a city, a nation) or 'down' (to a room, a bed place, or maybe just one's body)" (Boccagni et al., 2020: 139). The multiscalarity of homemaking, and in particular the case study of Hotel House, also reveals that the process of homemaking can produce new intercultural identifications based on the same living place. The constitution of the committee was an interesting dynamic which demonstrated that being subjected to the same exclusion processes can create a common living experience that can be used to rally people together in a collective 'homely' identification and mobilisation (Baumann, 1996). This reveals 'the threshold-crossing capacity of home to extend and connect people and places' (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011: 518). Homemaking practices can evidently play a role in empowering and connecting different subjectivities. Through this

struggle over space, the local residents have tried to 'be subjects not objects' and to defend a place where they can restore the 'dignity denied [to them] on the outside in the public world' (Hooks, 1981: 42). Spivak (1988) talked of 'strategic essentialism': although always at risk, home can be a place through which to connect people and try to rebuild power.

Last but not least, entering migrants' homes allows us to better see the dark sides of homemaking processes. Spaces of sociality are also spaces of tight and restrictive community ties, in particular for a significant portion of the women in Hotel House who experience the domestic spaces of Hotel House as a "cage" protected from the outside world. The process of self-exclusion and enclavism is strongly reinforced if the 'outside' is an alienating environment in which their voices and the possibility of making and taking place are largely restricted (Phillips, 2008; Cancellieri, 2013, 2017). There is a risk of a double closure: from inside and from outside. This shows the interconnection between instances of homemaking and structural vulnerability and the necessity of analysing the construction of 'home' in relation to the outside. Entering (migrants') homes appears therefore as a powerful research tool that allows us to analyse this plural and conflictual field of action from a privileged position, as invisible and taken for granted as it is constitutive of ordinary existence (Boccagni and Bonfanti, Chap. 1).

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