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Research article

Interactional and convivial possibilities at war: Ukrainian students' home-making on a multicultural campus

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Abstract

This article examines Ukrainian students' home-making at London's multilingual and multicultural universities, contrasting the ways in which students' idea of themselves and their sense of belonging developed after their arrival in London, and the ways in which this experience was altered by the outbreak of war on 24 February 2022. For international students in the UK, making themselves at home on a university campus is a relational process in which cultural, linguistic and political ideas and practices, brought together from the students' former homes, are negotiated and transcended in newly established social networks. In this article, we explore the ways in which students' networks, old and new, are altered as a result of their experience of war. Our findings indicate that when imagined personal life trajectories are disrupted as a result of the social and political

crisis that accompanies the war, the possibilities of articulating the individual experience and the social interactions that provide such affordances are existential processes, which allow (or not) individuals to (re-)engage in home-making and to find new meaning in their emplacement and sense of self.

Keywords homemaking; conviviality; war and trauma; locality and belonging; emplacement; intersubjectivity; participatory research

Introduction

This participatory study explores the ways in which Ukrainian students' idea of themselves, their networks, and their sense of belonging developed in the context of London's multilingual and multicultural higher education, which, for them, was marked by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Noddings (2006: 64) postulates home-making as part of critical education about everyday life: its relevance to all humans as praxis is highlighted by the metaphoric richness of the words associated with parts of houses and construction, as well as by the complex intellectual history underlying the physics and aesthetics of building. The primal quality of houses and their parts is underlined by children's instinctive interest in creating primitive shelters. In exploring these themes, Noddings's (2006) focus is on the potential for self-understanding which the exploration of home-making provides.

Similar to Noddings, Lefort (2022: 287) proposes home-making as an analytical alternative to the 'identity question' in the study of diasporas, migrants and returning migrant youth, defining it as 'a continual effort in which people perpetually revisit the close relationship between their emplacement and sense of self'. While Noddings (2006) uses the materialities, histories and forms of language as starting points in her approach to home-making, Lefort's (2022) focus is on the 'double relative' location in which his research participants position themselves both subjectively and intersubjectively in their environment. In his analysis the two dimensions correspond to a diachronic versus synchronic dichotomy, with the former reflecting the relationship between his participants' new location and their projected life trajectory (the subjective dimension), and the latter the participants' understanding of self in relation to others (the intersubjective dimension).

By elucidating home-making as a relational process in the experience of the Ukrainian student participants, we focus our attention on what Hymes (1977: 206) calls the 'Liberté, Égalité, [and] Fraternité of speech', which is achieved in social life and in the practice of speaking, rather than postulated as an outcome of speaking (see Rampton et al., 2022). Our enquiry into the research participants' evolving sense of belonging after relocating to London, and the subsequent outbreak of war, sheds light on home-making as a situated practice which is shaped by the possibility of articulating the self against the out-of-the-ordinary experience of the war. Our findings align with studies which scrutinise the reification of identity thinking (for example, Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Jackson, 2019), underlying even concepts such as hybridity (see Bahry, 2021; Young, 1995), and encourage reflection on a broader plain about the human experience of home and shelter, and the challenges to home-making and convivial possibilities (Back and Sinha, 2016; Gilroy, 2006; Ohnmacht and Yildiz, 2021) in times of war.

We investigated home-making through the eyes of higher education students affiliated to a London-based Ukrainian Student Society (UkrSoc) by asking them to pin down their developing sense of belonging in London to particular locations and events which they first associated with home in the city. We proceeded from the concrete and specific moments and materialities of home-making to abstracting from this experience the participants' reflections on themselves, both in terms of individual life trajectories and in terms of past and present intersubjectivities. The methods and scope of research were reviewed following preliminary discussions with participants, including the co-author of this article, who is an active member of the UkrSoc. We first elaborate a theoretical framework which brings together insights from the literature on home-making and conviviality. Second, we look at the research design and the ways in which it was informed by participatory approaches and abductive reasoning. We posit the UkrSoc as a micro-public which provided its members with a forum for gaining interpretative control over the events that unfolded after the start of the full-scale invasion.

According to its website, the UkrSoc featuring in our study was founded in 2019, but due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, its activities were put on hold during 2020. The UkrSoc resumed its activities in 2021 and pursued two goals: (1) to gather Ukrainian students and provide them with a feeling of a 'home away from home'; and (2) to open the doors to non-Ukrainian students interested in the region and 'explain' to them what Ukraine is. 'Explaining Ukraine' felt important, since there had been an ongoing war in Ukraine prior to the events of 2022: Russia's war in Ukraine started in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea, which was a part of Ukraine. The UkrSoc organised film screenings, talks, lectures and meetings to promote Ukrainian culture and raise awareness of Ukraine. After 24 February 2022, the UkrSoc's activities focused mostly on the war in Ukraine: it joined different volunteer initiatives, spread information about the ongoing Russian aggression and looked for ways to help Ukrainian students in the UK, their families back home, and the Ukrainian army. The full-scale invasion brought members of the community closer to each other: being part of the UkrSoc helped them to cope with the trauma caused by the war. After some time, the UkrSoc gradually returned to its main activity – cultural diplomacy. At the time of writing (February 2023), it had about 80 members, and almost half were non-Ukrainians.

Our analysis of ethnographic group interviews with members of the UkrSoc reveals the importance of the narratability of experience in synchronic and past intersubjectivities and expounds on the possibilities of making life convivial, as a form of home-making, in a shelter-like existence.

Theoretical considerations: finding roots or routes in homes-turned-shelters

The two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, immediately preceding the outbreak of the war, saw a construction and home-making boom of a personal kind: old family cottages were repurposed as holiday homes, houses and flats underwent long-awaited renovation, garden sheds turned into home-office spaces with much creativity and innovation, and – at the very least – new storage units were installed for excess stocks of long-life products. Spaces that had been left empty or uncared for were suddenly filled with practical meaning and function. The homes thus reinvented became shelters from an invisible enemy lingering right outside our front doors. The participants of the group interviews started studying in London during this period of relative isolation, instead of experiencing life on a vibrant university campus.

The world was far from recovering from the pandemic when, in the early morning of 24 February 2022, Ukrainian households found themselves face to face with an enemy of a different kind: an enemy immediately visible in the traces of Russian missile attacks and convoys of armoured vehicles and infantry divisions moving towards the centre of the country. The images of the first blasts and the seemingly endless convoys, advancing at a threateningly slow pace, are possibly imprinted on every adult's mind in Europe and beyond. The destruction caused to urban sites of symbolic and practical significance is a well-documented process of warfare (see Coward, 2006). What came to replace the necessity-driven construction and home-making boom of the previous two years was the destruction of homes and primary infrastructure, including the symbolic erasure of Europe's largest steel plant and of the last remaining tropes of Ukrainian–Russian conviviality. Amelina's (2023) posthumously published essay painfully testifies that despite the long history of (in)securitised relationships, many Ukrainians needed to see the physical destruction of their homes to let go of their fellow-feeling towards Russians and to revisit the notoriously ambiguous question of where their symbolic home, its centre and frontiers, lie.

The word *shelter* was also recontextualised by the invasion, with a different part of its meaning coming to prominence compared to the year before: places of relative safety, but the precise opposite of one's recrafted home, shelters in this new context were not places where one stays for safety, but where one goes. Associations of warmth and comfort were replaced by those of cold, dark, damp and crowded places. According to Noddings (2006: 64), a 'home is more than a shelter from the elements, but it is at least that ... Most of us take shelter for granted, and we rarely think about the built-places in which we live and work. What would we do if we had to build our own shelter?' The impossibility of making a shelter one's own place bears the danger of devaluing the self (Noddings, 2006) by creating a sense of perpetual homelessness and inability to establish a future life path. Time spent at the shelter not only aggravates one's sense of loss and grief, but it may also serve as a hopeful place because of its transience: while at the shelter, there might be hope to return home.

After the outbreak of the war, an ambiguity in the meaning of the multilingual and international university campus emerged for students from Ukraine, reshuffling it from a potential home to a shelter.

Noddings (2006: 71) notes that a home can be of any make and size, even a series of temporary dwellings, 'so long as the inhabitants have sufficient control to mark the place as their own'. The global university campus is a place for home-making away from home, where students develop a new sense of themselves as they negotiate their presence in the here and now with reference to both their own life trajectories and others they encounter (Lefort, 2022) in an immersive international and transcultural exploit. Homes can be found in schools, churches, libraries and sports clubs, in the continuity of persons and customs, in a region or set of natural features, rather than in a house (Noddings, 2006). As part of life at university, features of home-making can occur in all these settings and varieties of ways, as students' new sense of belonging emerges from their attempts to make sense of their presence in the micro-publics (societies, study groups, neighbourhoods) in which they are involved (see Back and Sinha, 2016; Ohnmacht and Yildiz, 2021). The students participating in this study, albeit away from the trenches, were faced with the disruption of their home-making at university as their student life in London became a shelter. This experience provides a particular place for the exploration of home-making in situations of acute (in)security.

The ambiguity of the meaning of home in post-colonial, post-migrant and diasporic contexts (for example, Anzaldúa, 1987; Rapport and Dawson, 1998; Yelenevskaya and Protassova, 2023; Yildiz, 2019), as well as among international students and returning migrants (Holton and Riley, 2016; Lefort, 2022), is a rich area of research in which the case of Ukrainian students is comparable to ex-Yugoslav migrants and diasporas (for example, Jansen, 1998; Ugrešić, 1999). In London's universities, micro-publics are characterised by national, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, which unavoidably prompts students to transcend national groupings as the sole foundation of their belonging: while one might be a member of a student society that promotes the national, religious or ethnic culture associated with one's place of origin, in other student societies – say, a choir, drama or sports society – and in classrooms and halls of residence, one inevitably encounters students of different linguistic and national backgrounds from one's own. These encounters, although seldom addressed in higher education curricula, point to the negotiation between home as sensory everyday practices, characterised by discoveries of sameness-across-difference, and home as a place of origin (see Spangler, 2022), which, for Central and East European students, is often associated with monolingual and monocultural nationally engineered attitudes. The ambivalence of multilingual and multicultural university sites is shown in the way they encourage intercultural interaction while displaying ethnic, financial and individual limitations to it (for example, Schweisfurth and Gu, 2009). Personal spaces and objects, such as student bedrooms and their contents, are important sites of home-making, where the significance of objects may be ephemeral (Holton and Riley, 2016), but may shape both individual identities and shared subjectivities within the micro-publics of student accommodation.

Another, reflective, layer of ambiguity emerges from the relationship between locality and belonging: the in-betweenness of being simultaneously in two places in the diasporic experience. The latter challenges sedentary meanings of home as stasis or fixity, in favour of home as motion, relocating people's sense of belonging into a continual questioning of the self's embeddedness in dwelling places and their interpersonal networks. Lefort (2022: 275), following Ricoeur (1992), brings this dichotomy to bear on the intersubjective foundations of identity, in which *ipse* is 'an ever-changing reflective identity ... defined by alterity', as opposed to *idem*, a stable and permanent projection of identity contained within the boundaries of unisonant, hegemonic national and cultural discourses. Home-making in multicultural urban settings exposes the fallacy of fixed identity categories and reveals the unruly, fuzzy and ambiguous mode of being-in-the-world which characterises the ability to live together with others despite, and across, differences.

In his espousal of conviviality, Gilroy (2006) argues that the version of multiculturalism which seeks to cater for the perceived cultural particularity of each group to gain their political loyalty has failed. Conviviality is a social pattern in which racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious particularities do not imply discontinuities of experience or breakdown of communication (of which heightened surveillance, suspicion and insecurity is an outcome; see Heltai, 2023). Similarly to ipseity on the identity plane, conviviality involves an understanding of culture that focuses on what people do every day, rather than on what they are in terms of their assumed cultural, ethnic and racial origins (Back and Sinha, 2016). Thus, conviviality underlines non-sedentary meanings of home, inasmuch as home-making happens in relation to others in emplaced encounters, as well as in relation to the direction people attribute to their life trajectory. Hence, Lefort (2022: 267) theorises home-making as 'dwelling with others in the world and going somewhere in our lives'. Convivial culture is the type of cohabitation which can be characterised

by an unsuspecting but not indifferent posture towards others, in which 'letting our guards down' is not tantamount to risking escalation of conflict (see Gilroy, 2004; 2006: 40). But conviviality is also proximate to its negation, insofar as it maintains a degree of differentiation, combined with 'a large measure of overlapping' (Gilroy, 2006: 40). A starting point of our study was to establish whether the war experience with its bipolar vocabularies of friends and foes can accommodate such unruly and ambiguous forms of identity and cohabitation, or whether individuals inevitably resort to *idem*-type, essentialist identities. The affective poignancy of securitised and wartime events challenges individuals' convivial capabilities (see Phipps, 2014) and capacities for home-making.

The simultaneity of two places, two imagined sites of meaning making and two corresponding life-worlds in the diasporic experience is relevant to the Ukrainian students' experience in three ways: (1) in their understanding of home, which was about to expand to include, alongside their roots in Ukraine, routes into forms of convivial life at a multicultural university in the UK (see Clifford, 1994); (2) their experience of a not-yet-home, London, becoming a shelter, which asserts the idea of home by never becoming one; and (3) the image of their former home drifting away from the fixity and stasis that home usually means, as parts of the physical environment were being erased, resulting in a loss of continuity of personal networks, either because of loss of life or because of the incommensurability of experience with those who witnessed the attacks and annihilation of their living space first hand.

In view of the above outline of ideas, this article seeks to answer the following questions: Is home-making on a university campus possible in wartime, and, if so, what form does it take? If making life convivial is a form of home-making, can it be practised in a shelter-like existence, and, if so, what is its purpose, if shelters are transient, lacking the qualities of attachment and direction along which home is conceptualised? Finally, what does the examination of home-making tell us about the experience of enduring the war, even if away from the trenches?

Methods

The three authors of this article brought different individual experiences of the devastation of war to this project: one of the authors, a postgraduate student at the time of writing, comes from Ukraine; another lived and worked as an interpreter in wartime Yugoslavia; and another took part in receiving displaced people from Ukraine in Hungary in 2022. Our initial conversations about the scope of the study, and the effects of the ongoing war on the students, suggested that our methods should be based on reflexivity and participatory approaches, in which the researchers (two of them were also teachers at the same university from which all but one of the participants were recruited) are willing to place themselves 'as subjects of the same process alongside those with whom they are working' (Kina, 2012: 205).

In the early stages of the development of the study, the research-active authors participated in sharing their lived experience of war and loss to establish 'profound and equitable forms of interaction' (Olko, 2018: 3). The purpose of this was to create a context in which all participants had the agency to shape the study design and the analysis and to decide which segments of interview data would be included in the study. This decision was underpinned by an ethics of care, according to which it is imperative to safeguard participants' privacy and integrity, but in a way which is rooted in affective aspirations lodged in relationships rather than abstract principles (see Bussu et al., 2021; Schaefer and Narimani, 2021). The three authors discussed notes and articles on sociolinguistic-ethnographic approaches, such as linguistic citizenship, semiotic landscapes and the role of narratability in overcoming trauma. Question prompts for the group interviews were based on the outcome of these discussions.

After the initial consultations, we identified ways to recruit further participants. An email was sent to members of the UkrSoc and to Ukrainians in their broader student networks. We explained who we were and the background of the project, and we asked them to take part in the study. We initially received responses from six students and conducted semi-structured group interviews with five participants, three female and two male. All participants were from the University of London, from two different colleges. The group interviews were conducted online and in English to provide an interactive third space across the linguistic repertoires of the student participants (all speakers of Ukrainian, Russian and English) and the lecturer-researchers (who know Russian, but only understand some Ukrainian). English is also the neutral named language of social interaction on university campuses in London, particularly in settings involving speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds, where no other named-language component of individual repertoires overlaps. Students were made aware that they

were taking part in sociolinguistic research concerning their home-making practices in London and the impact of the war on their understanding of home and their language practices.

The design of the study was guided by the students' decisions about whom to include in the discussions. The inclusion of Russian students remained beyond the scope of the project because of highly (in)securitised feelings among participants. Students also decided their own level of involvement. Following students' critical reflections on the aims of the study and the research questions, we rephrased the initial title of this article and the abstract to represent the context of their home-making and lived experience more accurately.

The group interview format, in which participants were asked to reflect on a set of question prompts, was chosen to allow the blurring of boundaries between interviewers and interviewees. In the planning and analysis of the interviews, we adhered to similar steps to those described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), with the important distinction that we avoided interrupting the students for in-situ clarification of what they meant (see Brinkmann and Kvale's Step 3). We conceived of the interviews as orally produced, coherent, individual ethnographic texts, rather than as self-correcting interviews requiring on-the-line interpretation. This approach was key to our commitment to collaborative research because of the emotional poignancy of the questions we studied jointly. To allow space for our research collaborators from the UkrSoc to explore their life-worlds following the traumatising events of the war, we deliberately bypassed the possibility of immediate and, in this situation, possibly distracting, interpretations. Our attitude as interviewers was that of the conversation partner who practises active listening and brings in personal reflections and discussion prompts to enable further engagement with the topic at hand. This was based on methodologies which focus on empowering research participants (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005; Ross, 2017), as these seem particularly apt in revealing the participants' sense of agency in gaining interpretative control over the events they experienced.

Collaborative interpretation of the text of the interviews was part of the study design: the students who participated shaped the way in which we conducted the interviews, and they provided their critical observations on our initial interpretation of the interviews as texts. After two meetings with all the participants, the two research-active members of the collaboration transcribed and thematically coded the interview data, providing also an initial theoretical and interpretative framing. Student participants were then offered the opportunity to share their reflections on the material thus produced.

In the analysis of the text of the interviews, we used methods similar to close reading, applying a dominantly abductive approach in our interpretation. Abductive reasoning has recently gained ground in the social sciences (Blaikie, 2019; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018), and in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics (Rampton and Van de Putte, 2023; Rose et al., 2020); its relevance to analysis in participatory and ethnographic work has been shown (for example, Tarsoly et al., 2023). Abductive analysis was intentionally chosen for its suitability to capture the intricate specificities of individual experience, without trying to verify theory in the data (as in deductive logic) or to formulate a new theory ground-up from the comprehensive analysis of a data set (as in induction and grounded theory). Abduction in the Peircean sense is an inferential process, which can be employed in situations when the experienced or observed phenomenon seems unusual and out of the ordinary. The unexpected phenomena which the research-active members encountered while reading the text of the interviews were marked up and grouped. Connections were sought between the unusual phenomena reported by various students, as well as between these and other aspects of the students' experience which they shared during the group interviews. These connections served as the basis of our tentative explanations for the exceptional phenomena, and our way of testing these was to engage students in a reflexive discussion about our inferences (see Gabbay and Woods, 2005).

The initial write-up of these materials, in which students' names were pseudonymised, was sent to all participants. We subsequently arranged a focus group discussion with three participants, who were asked to reflect orally on the way the team of three authors summarised their contributions. Participants were invited to comment on the analysis and interpretation of their personal contributions and on the significance of the project to them. Amendments in the discussion part of the article were made accordingly, and some of the observations were included in the summary of our interactions.

Discussion

London as a home away from home

The students' trajectories to, and through, London have been different. Some arrived in relative financial safety, thanks to a scholarship scheme. They encountered a community of university friends who had arrived from Ukraine to London by a similar route. Others, without scholarships, faced financial difficulties while trying to find the means to study in one of the most expensive cities in the world. They arrived emotionally exhausted to a post-pandemic university environment which felt unwelcoming. Much of the teaching continued to be online, without fellow students switching their cameras on. The processes of transitioning and engaging with others across differences in linguistic and cultural practices are characterised by the newly arrived students' search for similarities with their home environment, both in the city and on campus, as well as by an urge to explore the social networks which are available for them to rely on.

The early stages of the encounter with London are characterised by the impressions of the city as an unusual, weird and even inhumane and alienating place, suggesting a sharp contrast between everyday occurrences and practices at home and in the new environment, where the process of home-making is yet to begin. In the students' narratives, London is a place which newcomers have to come to terms with. Gradually, students start articulating 'home' (Prazeres, 2018) as they create spaces for themselves in the city. An oft-reported strategy they employed to evoke feelings of home in London was to create associations between visual prompts located in the space that surrounds them 'here' and 'there', 'then' and 'now', 'home' and 'away', in London and Ukraine, respectively. Example 1 below illustrates students' 'constantly evoking "home"' through elements of the landscape which they conceive of as 'the same' as home (Waters and Leung, 2013: 607):

One thing in the urban environment around me that reminds me of home this time of the year are chestnuts. So, this is a very, like, this symbol of Kyiv, where I'm from, it is chestnuts. So, today, when I walked to [university], I saw chestnuts, and I was like, oh, just like at home ... only I didn't see many, just any conkers on the pavement. We have plenty of them in Kyiv. It's just nobody moves them, so you can just walk on them. (Example 1, Andriy)

Nature and landscapes evoking environments familiar from home played a part in identifying the city as home in various ways. In Example 1, Andriy describes a difference in practice: pavements in London are meticulously cleared of chestnuts, fallen leaves and other elements of nature seen as potential health hazards in the way of passers-by. In Kyiv, they stay on the pavement, and people can even walk over them. A sense of home emerged from sighting something which is similar, but it prompted reflection on a difference in practice, revealing alterity behind the sameness of the object.

Another strategy students used to articulate their belonging in their new here and now was to recall childhood memories of places and artefacts. This happened in two different but complementary ways. In Example 2, elements of the built environment and decor reminded a student of images that they associated with England while growing up in Ukraine:

And there was a shop, Laura Ashley, in Ukraine, and my mom, she really liked that shop, and ... from time to time, we were going there to choose some clothes, and the atmosphere in that shop was like the way they decorate. And this house [where she lives] looks like a Laura Ashley house a bit ... And when I was little, I dreamt to live in the room that will be decorated, like, in Laura Ashley style ... But maybe this similarity to Laura Ashley somehow makes me feel like I am home. (Example 2, Anna)

Another example of childhood memories conjuring up a sense of familiarity is a short stay in another Eastern European migrant's home, which reverberates with childhood visits to a relative in Poland:

It was the thing that made me feel at home, because she is an immigrant as well. She moved from Poland, around 20 years back now. At the same time, her home, 'erm, doesn't feel like a London home. Her home feels like a Polish home, like something that I used to go to with my grandma when I was a kid ... So yes, my relative's home was really helpful in adapting, I would say. (Example 3, Marharyta)

The students' home environments in London are rich in transitional objects evocative of their home in Ukraine: hand-made pottery, Ukrainian flags and maps, family photographs on a wardrobe, a perfume bottle placed under the pillow: a leaving present from a friend. However, social interaction, through which international students create a belonging in, rather than to, the environment (see Gomes, 2020), had primacy over artefacts and other non-linguistic practices of meaning making. While describing objects which made him feel at home, Andriy said:

I had brought a cup from home with some Ukrainian identity. I have my flag with me. I have, I think, the Ukrainian identity in the cup. It's just traditional Ukrainian decorations like flowers, uh, it's the *chashka* [Ukrainian for cup], like pottery, anyways. Yeah. I was considering those different objects ... But, I'm thinking that most of the home-making experience is about who you talk to. It's about the social part of it ... You cannot see it around you. But if you talk Ukrainian all day with your friends and you read Ukrainian ... I'm going out to Uni and listening to the Ukrainian podcast in the bus ... I feel like I'm in London but at home at the same time.

(Example 4)

Andriy used a word from his Ukrainian resources (*chashka*) to evoke a painted cup which he described as a receptacle holding Ukrainian identity. At this point in the discussion, Andriy briefly turned to his peers while searching for an adequate rendition in English for a culturally specific term. He chose to rely on his Ukrainian peers in conveying meaning for these outsiders. The reliance on each other in meaning making which requires no words, no additional interpretation, played a part in organising students' relationships after the Russian invasion started. In Example 4, Andriy comments on the linguistic landscape and soundscape that surrounds him: it is a way of speaking (Ukrainian), rather than sights, which are evocative of a sense of home (see Hock (2020) on the emotional and mental engagement with sounds in shelters). In evoking home, students move not only between associated spaces, but also across time: while visual prompts associate 'there' with 'here', sounds render the 'then' present in the 'now'.

It is by bringing the past into the present, memories of a life in Ukraine to London, that home-making for most students occurred. Interacting and bonding with fellow Ukrainians played a crucial part in this transfer for most students, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine started. We return to the salience of social interaction in home-making practices in the section 'Interaction patterns and home-making'.

First experience at the university campus and its rearticulation after the war

The university campus experience was surprising for Ukrainian students, and not always in a pleasant way. A student described the university campus as a maze, a 'grandiose' place, where it was hard to find one's way around. It was almost too grand to feel like home because of the many new buildings, which felt 'intimidating', alienating and impressive at the same time. Another student compared the London-based university with 'a spaceship', which offered endless resources: 'Everything is there for you to take.' The all-glass Student Centre, opened only two years before the participants arrived in London, left a particularly imposing impression on everyone. The use of old buildings, Victorian town houses, as teaching spaces was perceived by several students as 'weird'. They reported that at the beginning everything seemed somehow dysfunctional or unfit for purpose. Initially, students could not find their way to 'random buildings' allocated to their classes. But finding one's way around turned out to be a bonding opportunity and a convivial experience for students:

The front entrance for some reason wasn't open, so we had to manoeuvre our way all the way through the campus, looking for the actual entrance. It was quite, you know, welcoming, I would say, experience in a way, because we were all equally lost ... (Example 5, Marharyta)

Marharyta employs a similar home-making strategy on campus to what we saw in Examples 1 to 3, with regard to London in general: slightly understated spaces, fewer computers, at least some books, which in 'grand' spaces and modern libraries can no longer be taken for granted on academic premises, are identifiable to her as materialities attached to university life from her university in Ukraine.

With the outbreak of war, the personal significance of specific localities was reconfigured. The new experience singled out particular places and meeting points as locations where something significant related to the war happened in students' experience. The personal meanings attached to these spaces

set the students apart from the expected 'London student experience', in which even distressing occurrences bear the possibility of bonding with empathetic co-participants in the (often unpleasant) campus experience. The personal meaning of places established at the beginning of the academic year was suspended and reinterpreted in light of the war. In Example 6, the library appears as a refuge, offering symbolic shelter from an everyday life, which, after 24 February 2022, became awash with media reports about the war and the destruction caused by the invasion:

I wanted to be in the library because I couldn't study at home. I would just fall in the reading news trap, and I would not study at all, because it was just not the atmosphere. But I just knew that I wanted to be somewhere more private, because I never knew what I might read on the news ... I didn't know, kind of, how alone I would want to be, like, when everything unfolds. (Example 6, Yohanna)

The constant influx of news reports about the war in Ukraine brought the students' home closer to them in their London environment. The transfer of a past sense of home into the present, discussed in the previous section, was also coupled with a reconfiguration of space around the students. This was an entirely different world from students' strategies of home-making through transitional objects, childhood memories and reminders of home in the natural landscape or built environment. Finding their way in the perceived messiness or dysfunctionality of the campus, or the 'surprises in sensation' that London represented, were no longer what students recalled from the period after the outbreak of the war. Their Ukrainian home felt ever-present after the invasion started, due to the continuous public and private engagement with the events in Ukraine in the media and in private conversations (see Andriy's contribution, cited in Example 4). As a result, a parallel Ukrainian home-like space was created in London (Dwyer et al., 2021).

The sudden proximity of a war-stricken home reordered the experience of making oneself at home in London and on campus by evoking a notion of home as fixity: a place of origin instead of a new place which needs to be articulated as home. In students' social interactions, this meant not only an increasing intensity and frequency of spending time with Ukrainians, but also an opportunity to strengthen bonds with 'international friends', if the relationship was maintained after the start of the invasion. For Ihor, a self-funded postgraduate student who found that his social interactions in London prior to the invasion lacked depth ('you come and go, you come and go, and that's my association with London. This flow, like in the tube ... we're just moving, moving, but no time to stop, no time to go deep'), the opportunity to share reveals his needs after the start of the invasion rendered communication more personal than it was before:

I have a feeling, like, now I have people whom I can ask for something. Who can do me a favour. I just feel something warm, you know. So, that's the main thing in the sense of home-making. I think that's the strongest feeling I have. (Example 7, Ihor)

Students discovered and embraced a home-like feeling in convivial forms of interaction and practices which enhanced their sense of agency, either on a personal level (as in Example 7) or in broader social campaigns and protests against the invasion. The starting point for increasing personal or social involvement was often the university campus, with 'international' friendships forged there, and in the UkrSoc: two forums for the (re)emplacement of the self in the synchronic intersubjectivities unfolding in these micro-publics.

The protests against the invasion brought Ukrainians and empathetic non-Ukrainians together (Yohanna mentioned Romanians and Moldovans, among others). The 'energy' at the protests was fuelled not merely by a fellow feeling between Ukrainian co-nationals, but also by the ability to share their experience, in personal conversation or in political action, and to speak freely about the events in Ukraine. Speaking freely also involved the possibility that one could remain silent, too, without further explanation, and be understood. Students favoured, and relied on, interactions which did not make them feel 'out of line' when there was no energy left for face-work, to use Goffman's (1955) terms. For situations characterised by extreme worry and unexpected threat, such as the events in Ukraine, which were ever-present in Ukrainian students' lives in London, too, there are no pre-established models for action and interaction. As interpretative control over such unexpected and paralysing situations is all but immediate (see Pillen (2016) on the silence of survivors of trauma), it takes time for new interaction rituals to emerge. Relationships which are supportive of the emergent new order are possible to maintain,

while others, which are stuck in pre-existing role-appropriations and expectations, may be discontinued. Whether a particular interaction was helpful in establishing interpretative control, and in laying the foundations of a new interaction ritual, was decisive in students' home-making after the outbreak of war.

Interaction patterns and home-making

With regard to their linguistic practices, students' answers clustered around two main themes, corresponding to two trends they experienced in their interactions after the start of the invasion. The first theme is the increasing, and in some cases exclusive, use of Ukrainian with family members and friends, both in the UK and in Ukraine, which is partly spontaneous and partly a conscious manipulation on the part of individuals of their own linguistic resources. The second theme concerns the changing patterns of interaction overall, regardless of the named language in which the interaction occurs. This involves some or all of the following factors: (1) a change in the number or type of interaction partners; (2) the possibilities of narrating the war experience; and (3) the altered perspective of the speaker's own or their (potential) interaction partner's position.

Change in the number or type of interaction partners

Students reported that the few months after the invasion 'completely changed everything', which included, in most cases, everyday practices in their life in London, attachments to culturally significant materialities and people, and, most prominently, their language practices. Almost all students reported at least a temporary gap in interactions with 'international friends' or 'new people' who could not relate to the topic of the war, and an increase in the frequency and intensity of interactions with Ukrainians in London:

after the war I started having much more Ukrainian friends, I started going to different events of Ukrainian society ... And for me, it was just how it was supposed to be because with the Ukrainians I could connect on a different level. They would understand kind of what I was going through, why I was less socially active. Why I was acting the way I was, why I wasn't eating, why I wasn't sleeping ... I didn't have to explain myself, and there were no kind of further questions asked. (Example 8, Yohanna)

We found references to experiences similar to Yohanna's in other students' narratives, which signals that for all of them, becoming involved with the UkrSoc was intensely felt as 'being at home' (Ahmed, 1999). For Yohanna, the immediate access to the student's 'home-like' relationships with fellow Ukrainians provided the opportunity for the dehumanising experience of war to be shared, formulated linguistically and empathised with (Pillen, 2016).

The possibilities of narrating the war experience

Yohanna's contribution reinforces, and provides a potential explanation for, what another student, Andriy, sensed as a reduced exposure to his 'international friends' and abandoning 'the London experience'. Far from a straightforward essentialist bonding along national or ethnic lines, the key in the shift of interaction partners was the kind of interaction that was possible with a particular partner. Yohanna also told us that her international friends were 'amazingly supportive', asking her about her feelings, and if she needed anything.

An essential feature of interactions in Example 8 is the possibility to be understood without having to explain or 'put into words' how one feels or why one acts the way one does. The lack of need to narrate or to impose 'interpretative control' on her situation made Yohanna feel comfortable with people in her environment. She told us that there were 'also some friends that were lost along the way', but that 'there was no blame on them', because 'it is hard to connect with the person when *this* is happening'.

The altered perspective of the speaker's own or their (potential) interaction partner's position

Anna further elaborated on the topic raised in Example 8:

I feel like they are from a different planet from mine. Because I understand that they don't have this. They don't think about this war. Not in the way that I do. They live their normal life that it was like even before February, they have the same problems. (Example 9, Anna)

What is decisive for Anna in her ability to bond with others is whether, and how, their world was altered as a result of the war. This makes it difficult to bond with new people with whom the rules for interaction about the war have not been established, and who may not be able to talk in a way which is inclusive of the war experience. The war becomes a point of reference in the way that it prompts those affected by it to redefine their positions vis-à-vis others, and towards the space they inhabit. This repositioning concerns all relationships, not only in London, but also in Ukraine. In Example 10, Marharyta expresses concern about the sameness of experience with members of her personal network in Ukraine, whose experience of the war is more immediate than that of students in London:

from the 24th February, and until now, ... I feel like I want to go home. At the same time, 'erm, one of the first things that I thought about was, 'Oh my god, me and my friends are going to have a different trauma ... How are we going to work it out?' Uh, because, you know, my trauma from being here while there's war there is nowhere comparable to what some of my friends have gone through. (Example 10, Marharyta)

While being Ukrainian, and being with Ukrainians, was imperative for all the students we spoke to, as their home in Ukraine became part of their London existence in a sharp and decisive way because of the violence experienced there by their friends and family, the examples cited above illustrate that positioning themselves on the same platform with either a caring but less involved circle of friends in London or with those who experience the violence first hand back home was equally problematic.

Concluding remarks

This article has addressed the following questions: (1) What form does home-making on an international university campus take in wartime, if it is possible at all? (2) Can conviviality be found in a shelter-like existence which lacks the qualities of attachment and direction along which 'home' is built? (3) What does the examination of home-making tell us about the experience of war? The concluding remarks address these questions in turn, while allowing for overlaps in the answers to them.

Migration involves a spatial and temporal dislocation: 'the past' becomes associated with a home that is impossible to inhabit, or be inhabited by, in the present (Ahmed, 1999). At the same time, a new sense of home emerges as migrants, including students on the move, engage with their environment in the here and now, developing practices and participating in interactions which encapsulate convivial possibilities. The outbreak of war, although anticipated, was a moment of disruption to both senses of home, altering interpretations of the past-as-homeplace and the present as a locus of home-making, and blurring images of the future. The strategy of Ukrainian students to address the difficulty in coming to terms with the events after the start of the Russian invasion was to become similar to the chestnuts in Andriy's narrative (Example 1): bodies associated with Ukraine, with a symbolic civic core whose attachment to Ukraine was strengthened as a result of the war, but functionally and perceptively also different from Ukrainians back home. The immediacy of the latter's experience of the war and violence was incommensurable with experiencing it from a distance. Home-making as everyday practice, in the multicultural environment of the international campus, came to be of little importance compared to the far more burning question of how relatable the war experience was in particular relationships. Students were able to develop a sense of conviviality and home-like experience exclusively in interactions and auditory experiences, which provided a forum for engaging with the war, narrating events of the war, and acting upon the war. Even from a distance, or perhaps precisely because of it, the war experience thematised all interactions, relationships and engagements for Ukrainian students.

In the students' shelter-like existence, the war put a stop to the feeling of being one with the outside world, both in the students' home as place of origin and in the sensory experience of home as everyday practice in university life in London. This implied a rupture in students' imagined life trajectories, captured in answers to questions such as 'Where do I come from? Where am I going?', as well as in their synchronic relationships and interactions through which one interprets their presence in a particular place at a particular time. Some students reported a separation from their earlier selves, which was grounded in a sense of normality and the corresponding desire to move forward. For them, moving forward would have meant to return to normal; so, they delayed that moment. Others, such as Anna and Yohanna, reported a separation from former university acquaintances who were unable to relate to the war experience with fellow feeling. The immediate access to home-like relationships provided the opportunity for the dehumanising experience of war to be shared, formulated linguistically (see Pillen, 2016), and acted on in protest: as Ihor put it, 'the war, you know, it became something binding'. The UkrSoc was instrumental in overcoming the helplessness of grief in a shelter-like London environment. Both a concrete and symbolic location for activism, civic action and resistance, and a space for bonding for Ukrainian students and their non-Ukrainian supporters, it assisted the students in gaining a sense of agency and interpretative control over their experience.

Our findings suggest that the study of home-making in wartime provides important insights into the identity practices, interaction patterns and interpretative possibilities (or lack thereof) which characterise the entire war experience. The investigation of concrete shelters in war zones is extended in this article to the reflexive study of spaces which are far from shelter-like at first sight, but which, in the face of violence experienced directly or indirectly by the people who inhabit these spaces, come to function as shelters. Such micro-publics are transient places of belonging, which remind one of home by providing a space in which the ever-changing, reflective *ipseity* can be reintegrated with *idem*, a permanent projection of identity. Shelters, by their temporality, condense and challenge both dimensions of identity processes, that is, identity both as life-trajectory, or routes (Clifford, 1994), and as groundedness in origin, or roots. They reconfigure personal explanations about why one is present in a particular space at a particular time by providing an immediate, although temporary, sense of purpose, as in protests against the Russian invasion, and community: in the companionship of those with whom the interactions were appropriate for the members of the UkrSoc to iterate their feelings about the war.

Convivial social interactions in the micro setting of an international university campus in wartime occurred both through the intersubjective experience of being with others in protests or meetings, and through identity building where students' routes into forms of convivial life drifted towards embracing home in one's roots in national culture. The war rearranged the outcomes for students' identities, which are expected to be shaped by the synergies and contradictions of *ipseity* as a result of the multicultural campus experience. Identities fixed in the discourses of national lingua-cultures, and particularly in bipolar wartime vocabularies, fly in the face of Gilroy's (2006: 43) understanding of successful multicultural 'as a sort of "Open Source" co-production'. This is reminiscent of Phipps's (2014) critique of the intercultural dialogue paradigm, namely that intercultural interactions function differently in contexts of stability and situations of conflict. In the latter, direct access is lost to familiar 'spaces ... where multiple identities and frames can be held together' due to the acute sense of danger, fear and terror (Phipps, 2014: 119).

What this study shows is that in the out-of-the-ordinary situation of war – and a violated home to which attachment becomes as intense as it is problematic – the future-oriented interpretation of the presence of the self in the here and now might still be possible. This possibility also provides an affordance for conviviality: with the students' intercultural transition and home-making interrupted because of the war, the sedentarised notion of home, fixed in place and time, came to prominence. Convivial possibilities, however, remained available, due to the intersubjectivities in which the possibility of articulating the entire war experience emerged.

Dedication

During the unusually long gestation of this article, two prominent European writers passed away: the Yugoslav Dubravka Ugrešić (1949, Kutina, SFR Yugoslavia, now Croatia–2023, Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and the Ukrainian Victoria Amelina (1986, Lviv, Ukraine–2023, Dnipro, Ukraine). The latter lost her life on 1 July 2023 in the Russian shelling of a restaurant, while accompanying Colombian

journalists to document war crimes near the frontline in Kramatorsk. They have both written extensively on the layered meaning and difficulty of home. This article is dedicated to their memory.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors declare that research ethics approval for this article was provided by UCL SSEES Research ethics board.

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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