(Un)Belonging and The Quest for Home in Carla Maliandi's *The German Room*

* Mouna Kohil

École Nationale Supérieure de Technologie et d'Ingénierie -Annaba (Algeria)
University of Lausanne (Switzerland)
m.kohil@ensti-annaba.dz/ mouna.kohil@unil.ch

Abstract:
The article interests itself with the journey of Carla Maliandi's unknown female protagonist from Argentina to Germany to find her roots and eventually her home. Relying on close reading and place-attachment theory, the research negotiates the multifarious dimensions of the concept of home and addresses its meaning in relation with the notions of solidarity and community. In addition, it sheds light on Heidelberg as a geographical domain that enforces group solidarity and a sense of attachment among immigrants. The research gathers perspectives from social and immigration studies to provide an understanding of the complexities of bridging the gap between two cultures and the ensuing struggles to integrate and belong. The findings of this research demonstrate the power of literature to address the multiple effects of mobility and exile and how authors navigate themes of alienation and belonging as consequential outcomes of displacement.
Keywords: alienation, belonging, home, identity, immigration

---

1. Introduction

The surge in migration and homelessness has had a deep influence on social and cultural understanding of home and belonging. In fact, the rapid flow and frequency of human mobility across the globe is thought to be entrenched in every aspect of contemporary life. New studies have approached home from an innovative angle that defied the conventional views of home as a fixed place and how the sense of home grounds and gathers individuals in a specific space (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518). This perception is inspired by place-attachment concept which refers to the bond

---

* Mouna Kohil. m.kohil@ensti-annaba.dz

that an individual forms with a specific place. Place attachment has multiple labels such as rootedness, sense of place, and urban attachment (Inalhan et al., 2021, p. 181). Interestingly, the understanding of home as a sedentary and an enclosed space motivated by place-attachment argument is challenged by the new research strand that focuses on the "threshold-crossing capacity of home to extend and connect people and places across time and space" (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518). The present research ignores the theoretical disaccord that surrounds the nature of home and focuses on the construction of home in mobility and the emotions of attachments that immigrants develop for their new location. In the light of the above mentioned, the article addresses the multidimensional connotations of home in Carla Maliandi's debut novel *The German Room* (2018). Premium is placed on how characters, and more importantly, her unnamed female protagonist, journey to Heidelberg in an attempt 'to feel at home'. The unknown protagonist is depicted as a depressed individual who is burdened by life crisis which prompted her to flee Buenos Aires impulsively. Additionally, the narrative depicts the migration journeys of other characters namely, the parents of the main protagonist, Shanice, Mario, and Miguel Javier. Their movement and the quest to understand its dynamics and dimensions form the corpus of immigration and social studies which provide a framework for understanding the (im) migration as the act of moving from one place to another either voluntarily or involuntarily. The intent of moving and the status of the moved individual in the narrative are addressed relying on immigration scholarship which provides a clear categorization of the migrant as: an immigrant, asylum seeker, or a refugee (Bayram, 2022, p. 866). Interestingly, and in relation to *The German Room*, Miguel Javier is depicted as an immigrant, Mario as an asylum seeker and the protagonist's parents are considered as refugees. The main protagonist on the other hand, encapsulates all the categories. Additionally, the author emphasizes the role of Heidelberg as a meeting place wherein her characters meet and zooms on the feelings of attachment and solidarity that are developed within the walls of the city. Despite the variety of meanings and interpretations, the significance of people-place attachment in numerous social research studies indicates its relevance in contemporary scholarship. Therefore, the present critical investigation engages with the concept of home and its relationship with identity and belonging. It strives to answer the questions of: to what extent can immigration impact an individual's perception of what home is believed to be? How can a group of immigrants establish a bond with their new environment? What is the relationship between home and solidarity? Close reading, contextual analysis, and place-

attachment theory are relied on in order to answer the research questions and to achieve the research aims.

2. Towards an Understanding of Home

The concept of home and its connotation(s) are subject to diverse views. A conventional definition of home is found in *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* as follows: "the place where one lives; the fixed residence of a family or household" (Tulloch, 1995, p. 714). Home, therefore, is a place where one resides in alone or with other family members. Home or the feeling of 'being at home' are often associated with emotional responses of comfort and security. On this note, in their article "Belonging and Home," Lähdesmäki et al., (2022) conclude that the sensation of 'being at home' is often accompanied by feelings of safety, familiarity and emotional attachment, and is a personal and communal feature of the sense of belonging (p. 99). It is worth noting that one can dwell in a house and not feel at home. In culture, house and home are different concepts. The former refers to a physical structure made of concrete or other structural materials. The latter has a more personal meaning; it answers the questions: where does one come from? And where does one return to? In this regard, John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000) contends that the notion of home plays a pivotal role in human life. It grants a sense of orientation by affording us a sense of our position in life, or in his words: "it tells us where we originated from and where we belong" (p. 210). In addition to the origins, home encapsulates a wide range of places; or as Martin Mühlheim points out in his book *Fictions of Home*: "Home, as we try to explain it to others, can denote small-scale places of shelter – a house, for instance, or a tent – but also neighborhoods, nations, entire planets: 'Earth. Home' (2018, p. 13). Hence, home's real connotation lies in its emotional ability to instigate a sense of safety regardless of its spatial localization. Home is a sanctuary. In their study of the Māori perceptions of home, Boulton et al. (2022), noted that participants have identified home as a place of belonging, connection and safety (47). They viewed home as a setting for connecting with people and groups rather than a physical location. Thus, the label of home embodies safety and belonging; it is a space where one returns to in order to seek reprieve after a long day of work, or a trip. It is also a space of emotional refuge that one shares with or returns to after a separation to indulge in feelings of nostalgia and belonging.

17

3. Heidelberg: 'The Home'

The German Room is Carla Maliandi's debut novel which was first published in Spanish in 2017 and was then translated into English by Frances Riddle in 2018. Maliandi was born in Venezuela in 1976 to a family of philosophers who were forced to flee their country during the years of military dictatorship (1976-1883) that took control over Argentina. The author, throughout her tale, translated her family's history and their discontentment with the political instabilities in their home country. The story opens with an account by her unnamed protagonist who reminiscences over her blissful life in Heidelberg wherein she had spent the first years of her childhood. On multiple occasions, the protagonist divulges details about her house in Buenos Aires in a tone that communicates her misappreciation of that place and the negative feelings that accompanied her memories. Conversely, she speaks fondly about her house in Heidelberg and how it hosted Latin-American and German intellectuals who quarreled passionately about philosophy. The cohort exchanged opinions around a fire and other guests ended the night by singing. The narrator tells how: "The Chilean philosopher played the guitar and began to sing in a gravelly voice 'Gracias a la vida' by Violetta Parra; and all around him the group of enthusiastic, friendly, drunk Germans sang the chorus with ridiculous accents" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 6). The choice of song 'Thanks to Life' reflects the protagonists' appreciation of their comfortable life in Heidelberg. Interestingly, these scenes among others detailed by the protagonists enforce the perception that Heidelberg constituted a sanctuary and a haven for immigrants who left their countries of origin to pursue and to some extent enjoy the opportunities offered by the city. The protagonist's parents, for instance, escaped their country and sought refuge in Germany after the horrendous crimes committed by the Argentinian military which resulted in the death and disappearance of 30,000 people before it reached its end in 1983. Equally, on several occasions, the narrator hints that Heidelberg was a destination for escape and refuge for many protagonists; namely Mario and Shanice. Mario escaped Argentina because he was persecuted and Shanice "decided to leave Japan after two of her university class committed suicide" (14). Thus, Heidelberg is depicted as a sanctuary for those who escaped tragic conditions in their native homes. In fact, and with the surge of migration, a new view on migrant cities has emerged. Cities which attracted migrants have gained new labels such as sanctuary cities, solidarity cities, refuge cities, and welcoming cities (Bazurly & Kaufmann, 2023, p. 971). Although these labels were developed in the

18

context of migrants' rights activism within social studies, the overall meaning attached to them mirrors the perception of migration cities as gates or portals where people land in after their migration journey. Equally, these cities became an anchor or a meeting point where groups from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds become more manifest (Pisarevskaya & Scholten, 2022, p. 249). In the light of this statement, Heidelberg is portrayed as a meeting point that gathers immigrants from various backgrounds and who share feelings of safety within the walls of the city.

The narrative sways back and forth between the main protagonists while zooming on the pivotal role that the city plays in their lives. The city/home affords Mario a asylum from persecution in Argentina. The protagonist gives brief details on Marios's struggle in the following account: "I recognise the professor. It's Mario, my father's old student who lived for a while at our house here in Heidelberg. He'd fled Argentina after they raided his house and he was here learning the language and finishing his degree" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 36). For other protagonists like Shanice and Mario, Heidelberg is a sanctuary and a shelter wherein they could bury their past and start anew. Shanice for instance, in the narrator's words: "is pretty much the only person I speak to. I realise her stay here is also an escape, but a better organised one" (pp. 13-14).

In Heidlberg, Mario was able to establish a new life as an esteemed professor at the university. During his conversation with the protagonist, he confessed that he adjusted to his life in the city perfectly and "he decided never to return to Buenos Aires…He says all this without barely any emotion, as if he were explaining some natural phenomenon" (p. 38). This statement is aligned with new research trends that view home as "messy, mobile, blurred and confused" (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011. p. 519) in the sense that one can establish a home in mobility and grounds his/her life in new locations and creates a sense of attachment. It also sheds light on the conditions of legal migration that enables migrants to adjust themselves to their new home in a smooth manner. In this regard, the city has offered Mario job opportunities and good life quality.

In the same vein, in social studies, researchers started to link the notion of migration with the concept of the search for a better way of life or what is known as the 'lifestyle migration'. This social phenomenon denotes the relocation of individuals to search for a more fulfilling life and better life conditions unavailable for them in their home countries. Notably, Mario

19

adapted to his life in Germany and acclimated to the changes with a remarkable ease. Considering his condition, he was able to assimilate to the new culture and assume a role in society. In fact, he embodies the definition of trans-culturalism in the sense that he reinvented himself for the new common culture by interacting and integrating himself in the community. An important fact arises from Mario's ability to integrate into the German culture is that he negated his origins and refused to preserve his Argentinian roots. Due to the traumatic events that he endured in Argentina, he does not reminisce about going back; in fact, he does not celebrate his heritage and has relinquished any thoughts of connecting to his roots. Marios's identity in this sense is fragmented yet he was able to establish an attachment with Heidelberg and has acclimated successfully to his life there.

In regard to the bond between home and an individual, the protagonist, her family and other characters, appear to have established strong emotional bonds with the city. On this note, the main protagonist recalls an instance with her mother charged with grief and sadness over their departure from Heidelberg. She narrates:

> I don't know if she cried because she missed home, or just the opposite, if she was sad because we'd be going back soon and the house on Entre Rios street was really ugly… a place that made her sad. Later, always, she'd remember our time in Germany as one of the happiest periods of her life. A happy exile, an exile you don't want to return from, isn't and exile. (Maliandi, 2018, p. 25)

The above quotation offers a view on the multi-dimensional significance of Heidelberg as a physical space. First, it has been established above that the city is depicted as a refuge and an asylum for the protagonist's family and other characters. Second, for the protagonist's mother, it is considered as home with which she has formed a strong emotional bond. Home in this sense is attached to feelings of security and safety. On this note, the protagonist notes her mother's uneasiness when recalling her memories in Buenos Aires in what follows:

> We would sit here and my mum would tell me about Buenos Aires, about the old house on the corner of Entre Rios 15 de Noviembre where my grandparents were waiting for us and sometimes her face would be very serious and she'd quickly turn her gaze to the window

and order me to finish the food on my plate so I wouldn't see her crying. (p. 25)

What arises from this account, and considering the political events that painted the author as well as the protagonist's history, is that the mother does not feel safe in her home country, and her above confession that her memories of Heidelberg were one of her happiest, leads to the recognition that she has strong attachment to the city which is associated with feelings of security and comfort. Conversely, being detached from the city, according to place-attachment concept, would induce "a state of distress caused by the absence, remoteness or inaccessibility of the object" (Giuliani, 1991, p. 134). Third, Heidelberg is described by the author on multiple occasions as an exile. However, she opposes the negative connotations of exile cultivated in immigration, diaspora and postcolonial studies that view it as a 'painful' and an 'unjust' condition (Barbour, 2007, p. 293) and conceptualizes exile as a chosen condition rather than an imposed one. The conventional definition of exile according to Barbour is banishment from one's country and "a dwelling of space with the constant awareness that one is not home" (p. 293). However, the author sways between the labels refugee and exiled and draws attention to the notion of belonging and its relationship with the above-mentioned conditions. She acknowledges that Heidelberg has multiple facets; it is a refuge, a haven and a sanctuary, it is a space and a spatial dimension with which her family formed strong bonds and it is a space for self-exile which is different from an imposed one where one does not feel that one belongs in that space. Heidelberg, for the mother, is a chosen spatial area that she has developed links of comfort and belonging with. Her agony over leaving the city resonates with the view expressed in place-attachment theory that acknowledges that the individual who forms an attachment to a place experiences pleasure in being within that space and regret or sadness if the individual has to leave that place (Purwanto & Rochma, 2020, p. 1).

On the same note, for the unknown protagonist, Heidelberg could be interpreted as home; that space which is thought to exert a positive influence on her mental health. The story details vaguely how she impulsively decided to fly to Heidelberg:

Going down with the plane with my life in shambles, without having told anyone in Buenos Aires what I was doing. The prospect of dying on the flight was less terrifying than the thought of riding the surge of impulse to my final destination, without enough money in a desperate

21

attempt to find peace. And a long-lost happiness, loss and buried forever along with my father. (Maliandi, 2018, p. 7)

The conditions of the protagonist, although not divulged in details, allow the reader to view her voyage to Heidelberg as an escape from certain events that were not cherished by the protagonist; mainly her quarrels with her boyfriend and her depression and lack of enthusiasm towards her job. These events are personal struggles that paint modern life and urge individuals to develop a sense of dissatisfaction with the world. In fact, and with the increasing globalization and mobility, the idea of migrating towards a new place might offer reprieve for anxious individuals who seek to establish a better lifestyle. However, for the protagonist, the escape to Germany was prompted by her desire to find her home and to belong. In addition, throughout the narrative, she expresses her struggles to find peace and respite in Argentina. The narrator details the following condition she experienced in Buenos Aires: "How many sleepless nights had I spent in the past months?" (p. 7). However, and upon her arrival in Germany, she registered the following change: "I think I'm going to be able to sleep in this place, in this bed… I am here to sleep, to get well, and to find a bench in the Marktplatz where I can sit and think calmly and eat a pretzel (p. 7). This description that links spatial setting with positive emotional responses draws the analysis towards the etymology of the word home. In his extended analysis of the use of the term home in Western languages, J. Hollander (1991) contends that the Germanic words of home, *Heim, Ham, heem* emanated from the Indo-European *Kei* meaning lying down, a bed or couch, and something beloved i.e., it denotes a place to rest one's head (p. 44).

More importantly, as a home, the city operates as a space that gathers individuals from similar backgrounds and nourishes a sense of community and belonging. An instance of this occurs after Shanice's suicide which has perturbed the protagonist and left her in a state of terror and dread. In order to appease her anxiety, she sought comfort in the presence of her compatriot. She asserts: "I'm upset and my heart is racing, I wish the Tucumáno would get back from class soon, so I can tell him what's happened. I need to talk to someone, I need to process this and try to understand it. I feel like I'm on some kind of drug" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 27). According to this statement, the reader is able to frame the relationship that these two immigrants have developed in a foreign country. In fact, the need to connect and consolidate social relationships through the group is vital for human survival. More

22

importantly, and referring to the notion that home incites a feeling of safety and security, the Tucumáno being a national of Argentina, and therefore sharing the same origin with the protagonist, embodies home. Hence, the protagonist sought refuge in his familiarity and his presence. On this note, McLeod contends that in order for an individual to feel at home, and particularly to feel comfortable, one needs to be in a location where one can be with people that are very much like him/herself (2000, p. 210). Accordingly, and referring to the notion of home as an orientation for the individual to recognise his/her space in the world, the protagonist claims that she needs to understand the situation and to some extent she needs to find her anchor in order to make sense of her environment. Consequently, she seeks the comfort in her compatriot to feel safe. The relationship between Miguel Javier and the protagonist is an example of how individuals offer aid and assistance to those who are considered as a member of their group and community. This is also known as solidarity.

In its broader sense, solidarity denotes "a mutual attachment between individuals, encompassing two levels: a factual level of actual common ground between the individuals and a normative level of mutual obligations to aid each other, as and when should be necessary" (Bayertz, 1999, p. 3). According to this statement, solidarity is an interaction between individuals that rests upon sympathy, unity, cohesion, interdependence, trust, group identification and social justice. Undeniably, throughout the narrative, the author places figures like Mario and Miguel Javier at the center of her discourse on solidarity among immigrants. The protagonist, as discussed above, has arrived in Heidelberg impulsively. Her stay at the students' residence was threatened by her inability to provide an enrollment certificate. Additionally, her economic condition does not allow her to take care of herself and her unborn child. Upon her reunion with Mario, she expressed her struggles and sought his aid immediately, and without hesitation, Mario offered her his help to resolve her issues with the residence. Mario's gesture, undeniably, was a noble one yet it would not probably be offered to someone other than the protagonist. Due to their relationship; being expatriates from the same country who bonded in Heidelberg, has encouraged Mario to aid her. On this note, the research advances the claim that solidarity among immigrants is enforced by the sense of belonging between members of the same group. Solidarity is also cultivated by the emotional principle that compels an individual to aid a member of his 'group'. 'National solidarity' among immigrants is a "progressive resource" (Bauböck & Scholten, 2016, p.

2) that aids in the integration of immigrants. On a personal level, solidarity nurtures feelings of confidence and power and the author insists on the pivotal role played by solidarity in creating a sense of community and kinship among her characters. After her encounter with Mario, the protagonist narrates: "Mario promises that he'll take care of the enrolment certificate today and we smile at each other, both feeling a little less alone and a little stronger" (p. 38). These feelings were made possible by the "emotional identification with compatriots" (Sandelind & Hjerm, 2022, p. 137) which advanced the welfare of a member of the group over one's self interest. The concept of national identity in this sense cultivated bonds among Argentinian protagonists in the story who nurtured and aided the protagonist throughout her struggles. An example is found in the following quote by the protagonist who tells about a night in the residence wherein she was advanced by a fellow resident. Miguel Javier has called upon her to prevent her from being harassed by the man. She narrates: "The Tucumáno is lying on the floor with the microphone in his hand…He stands and wobbles as he tries to talk to me. 'Be careful with that Yugoslav guy. hesathirdategypsywanker'" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 21). Miguel Javier expresses his worries about the safety of the protagonist and has attempted to protect her from a dangerous situation. Retorting back to the idea of national solidarity, Miguel Javier has developed a sense of responsibility to aid and assist his compatriot.

4. Unbelonging: The Journey to 'No/where'

In *The German Room*, Maliandi draws skillfully an image of a disoriented female protagonist that grappled with unknown crises in Argentina and was not able to find her identity even after travelling to her childhood town. A series of unexplained events had led the protagonist to escape from Buenos Aires to Heidelberg; a city wherein she had lived with her parents during her early childhood before coming back to Argentina. The narrative is engulfed with mystery and ambiguity from start to end. Many view the story as a non-coming-of age tale due to its protagonist's failure to advance toward self-accomplishment and self-actualization. Unsurprisingly, the plot spans across the lives of multiple characters who suffer from depression and melancholy and who fled their home countries to find refuge in Heidelberg. The latter is depicted as a haven that would relieve the protagonist from her burdens and which would eventually allow her to find peace after her ordeals in Buenos Aires. In the opening chapters of the story, the protagonist hints about her

condition and the motives that had driven her to flee her hometown in what follows:

> I count out enough coins to pay for breakfast. Seven Euros. Seven euros is a whole lot with my travel budget. I wonder how many calls I will be able to make with the rest of the coins. I wonder whether I'll be able to placate my mother, who's still upset over my break up and isn't going to like the idea of me being far away. Whether I'll be able to apologise to everyone at work, I job I was about to lose for arriving late almost everyday for the last month. Whether I'll be able to dial the number of the place that until very recently was my home. (Maliandi, 2028, p. 9)

Upon examining this confession, one could assume that Buenos Aires seized to be home for the protagonist. In fact, her journey to Heidelberg was an expression and a move towards realizing her aim to feel at home. On several instances, she expressed how she feels comfortable in the city and how she is able to sleep soundly (p. 7). Accordingly, the author attempts to establish a *home* for her character in Heidelberg since as McLeod notes, the idea of home denotes security, comfort, refuge and stability (2000, p. 99). However, as the narrative progresses, the protagonist appears to be grappling with feelings of non-belonging and displacement. On this note, she confesses the following: "Even if I crossed the whole world looking for a place to feel at home, I wouldn't belong anywhere" (p. 22). The research sets about conceptualizing the journey of the protagonist as a voyage to *nowhere*. The inability to achieve peace and find home resonates with the author's choice to not attribute a name to her main protagonist. Without a name and a home, an individual is lost. On the topic of names, an individual, upon his birth, is given a first name and a family name and thus he/she is given an identity within the group. However, the author accentuates the notion of identity crisis by leaving her protagonist nameless. Her journey to find her roots is filled with mishaps and confusion. She appears to be struggling with her own identity and satirizes her situation in the following account: "After showering and cutting my hair, I feel exhausted. I fall onto the bed fit for an exiled princess, a fake student, a solitary tourist, a refugee" (p. 11). The latter label is commonly attributed to, as Greg Mullins notes in his article "Seeking Asylum", "anyone who seeks protection from danger by moving to a safe jurisdiction" (Mullins, 2003, p. 147). Thus, the protagonist, as a refugee, appears to be fleeing from an impending danger in Buenos Aires; however,

no details are provided. Her above statement exhibits how she assumes multiple identities and mirrors her struggle to self-identify.

The setting in *The German Room* is of paramount importance. The author deliberately chose Heidelberg due to political and historical circumstances. In this regard, the narrator notes: "Heidelberg is like something out of a fairy tale, unreal, one of the German cities that wasn't bombarded" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 8). Hence, and considering the cultural background of the author, the latter placed her protagonist in a city that was not affected by the atrocities of the war. However, this assumption is subject to contestation and other motives may arise. What is important is the motives that drew the protagonist towards the city and how this latter influenced her perception of herself. Heidelberg, for the protagonist, haunted her happiest memories and this reverberates in her interaction with Miguel Javier wherein she notes the following: "he asks me if I want to visit the castle with him tomorrow. I tell him sure, that it's a beautiful walk and going there is one of my happiest childhood memories" (p. 10). Undeniably, Heidelberg, for the protagonist, has a deep significance and a pivotal impact on her life. Her struggles and her depression in Buenos Aires prompted her to escape to her childhood city in order to relieve and resurrect the happiest moments of her life. In psychology, autobiographical recall can evoke emotions related to the original experience and the positive retrieval of these memories could evoke pleasant feelings (Speer & Delgado, 2017, p. 2). Accordingly, the author has emphasized the positive emotions induced by the protagonist's memories of Heidelberg as the catalyst for her escape towards the city.

Throughout the narrative, the protagonist is depicted as an individual who attempts to flee the present and to negate her older self. In Heidelberg, she strived to metamorphosize into a new person and she confesses: "I came to Germany to sleep soundly, I smell clean sheets, I imagine that I'm another person, someone who only cares about what they are going to do tomorrow" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 11). On a similar note, her idea of assuming a new self was accompanied by a change in her style and attire. The narrator notes: "I think about how I'm going to cut my hair, First I'll cut the ends and then I'll keep going up with the scissors as far as I dare. It doesn't matter if it looks bad, no one knows me here" (p .10). As per the aforementioned statements, the protagonist sought to create a new personality for herself; one which is not physically and emotionally troubled by the burdens of her past life. However, her unexpected pregnancy has enforced her link with the past and

hindered her plans for the future. On this note, she confesses bitterly: "It angers me to have to relive the things that I came all this way to rid of" (p. 13). In fact, the protagonist has tried to conceive with her partner in Buenos Aires but their attempts were not fruitful. Their unstable relationship and their disaccord have led her to relinquish her desire to become a mother. A significant turn of events occurred following her pregnancy; the dream of escaping and establishing a new identity was hurdled by her new identity as a mother. Heidelberg no longer became a home as she was grappling with her disadvantageous economic situation in the midst of students. In this regard, she confesses: "I really don't know what I'm doing in this place, in this residence where I don't belong, in this conservative storybook city, in this repulsively perfect country" (p. 17). Accordingly, the protagonist's fragmented self does not align with the perfection of the residence and the city in general. She felt forcibly displaced which ultimately led to problems of adaptation and mental stress.

Notably, the protagonist experienced a sense of estrangement and *unbelonging*; as she no longer feels at home or safe. Her condition and inability to form social bonds are attributed to her depression which accompanied her from her hometown. Her trauma hindered her from settling and integrating into the German society and forbade her from connecting with her past in Heidelberg. On this note, she confesses: "It all seems ridiculous. No matter where I go I'm still broken" (p. 9). In her study of the issue of unbelonging and displacement among illegal migrants, Bendixsen (2020) claims that irregular migrants "struggle to find meaningful ways of being-in-the-world due to restrictive and inhospitable laws and these conditions hinder their process of belonging and entitlement (p. 480). The social conditions of the character as well as her new identity as a mother impeded her from integrating into the German society and assuming a new identity. However, her feeling of estrangement has been further enforced by what is referred to by Marjorie Faulstich Orellana in her article "Solidarity" as the 'process of the familiar becoming stranger' in a transcultural context. She contends that childhood memories play a pivotal role in shaping present experiences. In a study with a fellow researcher, she notes how one re-interprets past events in relation to present experiences. In other words, and in the light of the narrative under study, the protagonist attempted to associate her positive feelings during her childhood in Heidelberg with her bleak present condition as a destitute impostor in the city. According to Orellana, reflecting on personal changes may prompt new transcultural abilities as "we come to see

social processes in new ways as we gain fresh reference points. The familiar, this, becomes strange, as we reconsider, reinterpret, and reconstruct our own stories" (2017, p. 214). In her new journey, the protagonist experiences Heidelberg in a new light; her perception of the place has evolved and she is therefore unable to connect her past memory of the place to the new one. This is apparent in her exchange with Mario who enquires about why she moved to Heidelberg and she notes the following: "I don't know, maybe all my life I've idealised my childhood here, maybe I remembered this city as a place where time passed in a different way. Here we hoped that everything would get better so that we could go back, and in the meantime, we were in limbo, far away, happy" (Maliandi, 2018, p. 42).

Tying these lines of thought together, it becomes apparent that the socio-economic conditions as well as the protagonist's unplanned pregnancy dismantled her perception of Heidelberg as *home*. The closing lines of the story depicted how she has followed Shanice's mother to the outskirts of the city. Exhausted and cold, she narrates the following: "I wished I could stand up and find my way home. But I didn't have the strength yet. I lay on the ground for a while longer, looking up. The sky was completely clear and it began to fill with stars" (p. 104). According to this statement, the reader is left pondering about the future of the protagonist who is struggling with her feeling of unbelonging and alienation. By leaving her narrative open-ended, Maliandi denies her readers the closure that is expected at the end of a reading experience. The closing scene robs the reader of "feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered" (Caroll, 2007, p. 1). In doing so, Maliandi heightens the tension evoked by her narrative and refuses to address the issues of displacement and disconnection in a way that would offer her readers a pleasurable sense of completeness (p. 3).

5. Conclusion

The present paper has sought to shed light on the multi-dimensional meanings of home. The latter evokes in individuals a sense of comfort, safety and security. It has been proven that home is not sedentary, and the feeling of being at home is not contingent upon a fixed location. Home, as symbolized by Heidelberg, is mobile and its effects span over time and space. Feelings of belonging and community are attached to individual perceptions and emotional attachment. In addition, the research has proven that illegal migration hinders individuals from establishing links of assimilation and

28

integration which would lead to feelings of alienation and exclusion. More importantly, it has been shown that immigrants establish a strong sense of solidarity wherein an individual advances the interest of the group over self-interest. The present work is the first critical analysis of Carla Maliandi's *The German Room* and could offer invaluable insights for researchers interested in the notion of belonging and solidarity in contemporary literature of immigration.

6. Bibliography

1-Barbour, J. D. (2007). Edward Said and The Space Of Exile. *Literature and Theology, 21*(3), 293-301.

2-Bauböck, R., & Scholten, P. (2016). Introduction to the special issue: "Solidarity in diverse societies: beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and welfare chauvinism". *Comparative Migration Studies, 4*(4), 3-7.

3-Bayertz, K. (1999). Four uses of solidarity. In K. Bayertz, *Solidarity* (pp. 3-28). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

4-Bayram, H. (2022). Examining social studies education in the context of migration and asylum: A study based on teachers' views. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 9(Special Issue), 866-881.

5-Bazurly, R., & Kaufmann, D. (2023). Insurgent Asylum Policies in European Cities: A Multi-Level Governance Perspective. *Urban Affairs Review, 59*(4), 1129-1159.

6-Bendixsen, S. (2020). Existential Displacement: Health Care and Embodied Un/Belonging of Irregular Migrants in Norway. *Cult Med Psychiatry, 44*, 479-500.

7-Giuliani, M. V. (1991). Towards an Analysis of Mental Representations of Attachment to the Home. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, 8*(2), 133–146.

8-Inalhan, G., Yang, E., & Weber, C. (2021). Place Attachement . In R. Appel-Meulenbroek, & V. Danivska, *A Handbook of Theories on Designing Alignment between People and the Office Environment* (pp. 81-194). Routledge .

9-Lähdesmäki, T. e. (2022). Belonging and Home. In T. e. Lähdesmäki, *Learning Cultural Literacy through Creative Practices in Schools* (pp. 99-115). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

10-Maliandi, C. (2018). *The German Room.* Charco Press.

11-Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature. *The Sociological Review, 52*(1), 62-89.

12-McLeod, J. (2000). *Beginning Postcolonialism.* Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press.

13-Mühlheim, M. (2018). *Fictions of Home:Narrative of Alienation and Belonging,1850-2000.* Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto.

14-Mullins, G. A. (2003). Seeking Asylum: Literary Reflections on Sexuality, Ethnicity, and Human Rights. *MELUS, 28*(1), 145-171.

15-Orellana, M. F. (2017). Solidarity, Transculturality, Educational Anthropology, and (the Modest Goal of) Transforming the World. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly , 48*(3), 210-220.

16-Pisarevskaya, A., & Scholten, P. (2022). Cities of Migration. In P. Scholten, *Introduction to Migration Studies* (pp. 249-262). Cham: Springer.

17-Purwanto, E., & Rochma, A. H. (2020). Understanding the place attachment and place identity in public space through the ability of community mental map. *IOP Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science , 402*(1), 1-10.

18-Ralph, D., & Staeheli, L. (2011). Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belonging and Identities. *Geography Compass, 5*(7), 517-530.

19-Sandelind, C., & Hjerm, M. (2022). Perceptions of Immigrant Belonging and Support for Redistribution. *Scandinavian Political Studies, 45*(2), 135-155.

20-Speer, M. E., & Delgado, M. R. (2017). Reminiscing about ositive memories buffers acute stress responses. *Nature human behaviour, 1*(5), 1-9.

21-Tulloch, S. (1995). *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.