Sense of Home and Belonging in Forced Migration:

A Case of Farsi-Speaking Youth in Malaysia

by

Rashin Lamouchi

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We acknowledge with respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This qualitative study sought insights into forced migrant youths' sense of belonging. The study was part of the Youth Migration Project, an ongoing investigation of how young forced migrants construct their identities, sense of belonging, and future aspirations while perched on the edge of mainstream society – without normative entitlements or a voice in decision-making about their futures. Through purposive and snowball recruitment methods, the project gathered narratives of 52 forced migrant youth aged 11 to 17 who were born in conflict areas of Asia and Africa, primarily in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Iran, and Somalia. In the present study, I focused on the experiences of eight forced migrant female participants living in prolonged displacement in Malaysia. My guiding research question was: How do the processes and experiences of forced migration shape migrant youths' sense of belonging? Through a mixed-method approach, including a novel, arts-based peer-mediated storyboard narrative method, now known as Storyboard Peers, and follow-up interviews, youth shared their migration narratives, the challenges they faced while living in Malaysia, and their expectations and aspirations for their futures. The theme of safety figured prominently in the girls' accounts and I constructed the themes of physical safety and social safety to represent the data the girls contributed. The girls' sense of belonging and feeling at home had a direct relationship with feeling safe, valued, and loved. I also found that their physical and social environments informed their sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is neither a static nor a fixed concept; rather it is a flexible, everchanging, and reconstructed with ongoing, everyday experiences, reflections on the past, and anticipations of what the future could hold. The girls' accounts conveyed that feelings of "belongingness" and "at home"

shifted from tangible places and familiar faces to abstract concepts such as love, peace, and family. Overall, feeling safe and “at home” were rooted in basic needs being met. My findings lead me to call for governments and nongovernmental organizations to significantly reduce the length of time that youth spend in transit, promote safety, combat discrimination, fulfill basic needs, and ensure access to education and healthcare.

Keywords: forced migrant youth, sense of self, social safety, physical safety, home, belonging, prolonged displacement, life in transit

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List of Abbreviations

CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

DSQ: Demographic and social questionnaire

MSRI: Malaysian Social Research Institute

NEM: New Economic Model

PMSN: Peer-Mediated Storyboard Narrative method

RTA: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

RWDN: Rohingya Women's Development Network

TA: Thematic analysis

UN: United Nations

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

YMP: Youth Migration Project

Glossary

Refugee convention: In this thesis, the term *refugee convention* refers specifically to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its related 1967 protocol.

Youth: For the purposes of this study, *youth* are individuals between 12 and 18 years old.

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Dedications

I dedicate this thesis to all of the forced migrant youth across the world and the forced migrant youth who participated in the Youth Migration Project from the Malaysian Social Research Institute and Rohingya Women's Development Network. This work is especially dedicated to the girls of group 4 whose stories informed this thesis. Thank you for teaching me to listen and learn "the experience of every refugee in the world is different." I hope that this work helps the basic human rights of all forced migrant children and youth to be upheld; your voice is heard and you are involved in making decisions that impact your life the most.

Chapter One: Introduction

The end of 2021 marked a record high of 82.4 million forced migrants globally, representing the displacement of one out of every 10 people in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021a). This number does not include the 5.6 million Ukrainian refugees who have fled homes since the early 2022 (UNHCR, 2022a). Of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced persons, 20.7 million are refugees within the UNHCR's mandate and 26.4 million of the total number are youth under 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2021a). It is estimated that 86% of refugees are hosted in developing countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand, Turkey, and Malaysia (UNHCR, 2021a). This thesis discusses forced migrant youth in Malaysia and the impact of forced migration on their sense of home and belonging.

The Malaysian government reported that at the end of 2020 the country hosted 1.4 to 2 million documented migrants. The International Organization for Migration estimated a record high of 1.2 to 3.5 million additional unofficial migrants (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). Among these, as of March 2022, about 182,120 refugees and asylum seekers were registered by UNHCR, of which 45,800 are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2022a). Points of departure are mostly conflict-ridden countries in Asia and Africa, including Myanmar, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia. After being pushed out of their home countries, forced migrants may have to temporarily reside in multiple transit countries, seeking asylum to be protected from potential threats and execution. There are many issues that significantly impact the lives of forced migrant youth in transit countries.

One of the main problems is that most of the transit countries did not sign the United Nations (UN) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its 1967 protocol, referred to throughout this thesis as *the refugee convention* (UN, 1951, 1967; UNHCR, n.d.). Therefore, these countries do not acknowledge the refugees' rights. Their governments consider refugees illegal and depict them as criminals rather than individuals seeking protection. This hostility often results in limited and stereotyped portrayals of forced migrant youth, making them vulnerable and marginalized.

Another issue is hegemonic Euro-Western perceptions and "best practices" that portray forced migrant youth as passive victims, allowing few opportunities for them to express their opinions, experiences, and views on their displacement (Ball & Moselle, 2015). About 85 percent of internationally displaced people live in transit countries, which often are the poor, inhospitable developing countries. Such displacements impact refugees' sense of belonging and impedes the possibility of reconstructing a productive and fulfilling life (Bhabha, 2018).

Forced migrant youth are spending a formative period of their lives in precarious situations, often without access to basic rights such as healthcare and education. Exclusion from school and opportunities to make friends strip them away from feeling they belong in the transit country. There is a wealth of literature on the determinants of belonging as factors in migration outcomes (Liu et al., 2019). Belonging is crucial to youths' development and physical and mental health (Arslan et al., 2020; Batra, 2013; Erikson, 1978). However, little is known about forced migrant youth, their views on migration and their sense of belonging while temporarily living in a country of refuge. The purpose of this study was to explore how forced migration impacts youths' sense of

belonging in Malaysia. Definitions of *youth* vary, and in this study, I am referring youth to individuals between the ages of 12 and 18 (UN, 1989).

1.1 Study Context

As noted above, most refugees live in transit countries and of interest to this study, many forced migrant youth are in Malaysia, a country that is not a signatory to the refugee convention. In the following sections, I describe Malaysia and the refugee convention in more detail.

Malaysia

Malaysia is a country in Southeast Asia, located just north of the equator. It is composed of two separate regions: Malaysia Barat (which includes Peninsular Malaysia and West Malaysia) and Malaysia Timur (East Malaysia, located on the island of Borneo; Britannica, n.d.). Malaysia's capital is Kuala Lumpur in the western part of the peninsula, 40 km from the administrative centre, Putrajaya. The population is over 32 million people: a mosaic of 61.7% Bumiputra (indigenous), 20.8% Chinese, 6.2% Indian, and 11.3% others. The forced migrants, refugees, asylum seekers. and worker migrants comprise the "others" section. The official language is Bahasa Malaysia and the official religion is Islam (Britannica, n.d.).

Recorded history of Malaysia dates back to 1400 AD, from the time of the Sultanate Malacca (now Melaka). Before colonization, Malacca had a glorious and strong government and economy. Due to its resources, free trade policy, and strategic location, the port Malacca was the main meeting point between Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, allowing Malacca to emerge as a major trading centre. These

same factors have made Malaysia a major destination for migrants from across the world in recent centuries.

Malaysia was colonized a number of times. It was first colonized by the Portuguese in 1511, by the Dutch in 1641, and by the British in 1824, finally being captured by the Japanese between 1941 and 1945. To combat the Japanese invasion, Malaysia once again fell into British hands. Years of colonization and intrusion left more than half of the country's population in extreme poverty (Government of Malaysia, n.d.). The Federation of Malaysia gained independence from Britain in 1957, and since independence, it has engaged in multiple programs to boost its economy, such as the New Economic Model (NEM; Government of Malaysia, n.d).

Malaysia started its engagement with sustainable development and modernization in 1970 in an effort to eradicate extreme poverty and restructure societal imbalance. Malaysia's economic development strategy, the NEM, pursues sustainable development with high income, inclusivity, and sustainability. NEM aligns with the United Nation's 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which led Malaysia to ratify a commitment to support and implement the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 goals in 2015. These goals include the right to education for all, reducing inequality within and among Malaysian states, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies where nationals are not discriminated against. However, forced migrant youth residing in Malaysia are excluded from these development goals. In addition, Malaysia's exclusionary migration policies disregard refugee protection as a global problem, delegating the responsibility for forced migrants and refugees to the UNHCR. Viewing the refugee phenomenon as an UNHCR problem rather than as a domestic issue makes

the living conditions hostile and unwelcoming for forced migrants and asylum seekers in Malaysia (Parthiban & Hooi, 2019).

The UNHCR and the Refugee Convention

The UNHCR was established in December 1950 by the UN General Assembly to provide international protection to refugees and other persons of concern such as asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2022a). The refugee convention focuses on three long-term solutions for individual refugees: local integration in a host country, voluntary return to the refugee's country of origin, or permanent cross-border resettlement in a third country like the United States (Chen, 2021). Cambodia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste are the only Southeast Asian countries that have ratified the refugee convention. The UNHCR applies the convention mandate to support refugees with their migration process and resettlement, but this can negatively impact the situation of forced migrants as described below.

Most importantly, children are not included in the refugee convention. The convention is the foundation of international refugee law and, through the UNHCR and national governments, it provides informed practiced and guidance for the state members (Arnold, 2017). Yet, "the refugee convention provides very little guidance on the qualification of refugees. Furthermore, the refugee convention does not explicitly mention children in Article 1A(2), which details those who may qualify as refugees" (Arnold, 2017, p. 91).

Overlooking children in the refugee convention not only resulted in a delay in creating child refugee laws until many years later, it also fostered the view that refugee children are passive recipients rather than people with autonomy. "Despite the fact that

some commentators and the literature argue that children are now primarily subjects of law, however, in practice the categorization of children as objects of law is still dominant in international law, including refugee law" (Arnold, 2017, p. 93).

Even development in refugee laws for children – such as the right to be protected from torture, abuse, and trafficking – created the perception of refugee children as vulnerable and in need of protection rather than whole children, entitled to the full range of human rights. As such, children are often not considered eligible to access civil and political rights (Arnold, 2017).

The 1951 Refugee Convention was designed for different people, in a different era. Although the convention-based asylum system worked well for Western countries until the end of the Cold War, it may not be as effective for today's refugee flows as the push factors differ from those the mandate initially addressed (Millbank, 2000; Moretti, 2021). Since 1985, the majority of refugee and asylum seekers come from low-income countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, and their displacement is often due to civil war, ethnic, tribal, and religious conflicts. The outdated and limited criteria of the refugee convention can hinder the safety of refugees in transit countries. For example, it puts no responsibility on countries not to persecute or uproot their citizens (Millbank, 2000). The mandate confers no right of assistance to refugees unless they reach a signatory country. As a result, the government of Malaysia is not held responsible for the living conditions of the hundreds of thousands of refugees there.

The refugee convention imposes no requirement for burden sharing between states, with the responsibility of protecting refugees falling squarely on host states. In nonsignatory states such as Malaysia, the UNHCR relies on financial assistance and

donations from Western countries and nonprofit organizations. As a result, limited funding is available to the temporary and nonformal education programs for the forced migrant youths who live there. Moreover, the UNHCR cannot prevent forced migrants from being viewed as illegal, nor can it require the Malaysian government to allow forced migrant youths to access public social, educational, and healthcare services. The hardship created by Malaysia's exclusionary practices can lead to the forced migrants feeling trapped and looking forward to resettlement in other countries (Millbank, 2000).

UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) is rooted in the 1924 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, also known as the Geneva Declaration. The UNCRC contains 54 articles and two optional protocols; it is an international treaty that outlines the basic human rights of children across the world. The UNCRC defines a child as a person between birth and 18 years old and grants children the full range of human rights. Participating countries have agreed, in principle, to take positive actions towards fulfilling the commitments outlined in the convention.

Malaysia first acceded to the convention in 1994, ratifying it in 1995 with 12 reservations. Reservations are statements allowing states to remain a party to the convention with exemptions for parts of it that are incompatible with the states' interests. Thus, reservations allow parties to either put a limit on a right or cut out a right altogether. To date, Malaysia's reservations on the UNCRC have declined from 12 to five (Azmi & Basir, 2019). The government, however, maintained its reservations to five core articles, key to the healthy growth of asylum-seeker, refugee, and forced migrant

children. Malaysia excluded Articles 2, 7, 14, 28(1)(a), and 37[1]. Thus, being a signatory to the UNCRC does not grant refugee children fulfillment of basic human rights because parts of Malaysia's national laws are incompatible with the UNCRC. For example, lacking a legal framework or administrative protections for refugee and asylum-seeking youth exposes them to detention and refoulement (Nordin et al., 2020). As of October 2020, 756 children were being held in Malaysian immigration detention centres across the country.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW; United Nations, 1979) was adopted by the UN in 1979. The CEDAW is built upon the fundamental principles that all human beings are equal in dignity and worth, and that women and men are equal persons in all respects (UN, 1979). The participating countries agree to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of women as outlined in the convention. The CEDAW sets out the clear duty of governments to ensure women's equality and to ensure "the full development and advancement of women" (UN, 1979, Article 3).

The CEDAW consists of 30 articles covering "a wide range of social, economic,

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[1] Article 2 – Principle of nondiscrimination.
Article 7 – Right to be registered at birth and to a name at birth, right to acquire nationality, the right to be cared for by his/her parents. The State Party obligation to ensure the implementation of these rights, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.
Article 14 – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
Article 28(1)(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all.
Article 37 – The prohibition of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, life imprisonment/capital punishment, arbitrary detention. Any child deprived of his/her liberty must be treated with humanity, dignity and afforded the right to prompt legal access, right to a fair trial etc.

civil, and political rights, including the right to legal protections and remedies when rights are violated, to equality in employment, equal pay for work of equal value, child care facilities, paid maternity leave, and equality in marriage, politics, and economic and social life" (Feminist Alliance for International Action, n.d., para. 3). The CEDAW defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (Suhakam, 2017, p. 4).

Malaysia ratified the CEDAW in 1995 while maintaining its reservation to Articles 9(2)[2], 16(1)(a), 16(1)(c), 16(1)(f), and 16(1)(g)[3]. The reservations on these articles are considered to be in conflict with the Malaysia's federal constitution and Islamic law (known as Shari'a; Women's Aid Organisation & Joint Action Group for Gender Equality, 2019). Although Malaysia has taken considerable steps towards improving women's social, economic, civil, and political rights, those rights are only granted to citizens of Malaysia, leaving behind migrant workers, asylum seekers,

[2] Article 9(2) – "States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children" (Suhakam, 2017, p. 3).

[3]Article 16(1) – States Parties to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women" (United Nations, 1979).
Article 16(1)(a) – The same right to enter into marriage;
Article 16(1)(c) – The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
Article 16(1)(f) – The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
Article 16(1)(g) – The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation" (Suhakam, 2017, p. 3).

refugees, and stateless women. These exclusions further expose non-Malaysian women and girls to having their rights denied and abused. In addition, not addressing the rights of such marginalized groups means denying equal access to "formal educations, healthcare and employment, as well as right to live in a decent life free from poverty and discrimination" (Suhakam, 2017, p. 31).

1.2 Significance of the Study

The current study sheds light on the growing problem of the long-term displacement of young people due to armed conflict or persecution, and in particular how these youth construct a sense of belonging while living temporarily in the margins of the transit countries. The study contributes to the fields of migration and refugee studies and child and youth care by providing the perspectives of refugee youth participants residing in Southeast Asia. The lived experiences of these refugee youth may offer useful insights about developmentally appropriate practice in integration and inclusion of the youth in the host societies. It also contributes to my own self-understanding as a Farsi-speaking refugee woman from Iran (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Woods, 2019).

1.3 The Rationale for the Study

Research on child forced migration is not new. There is a trail of more than 30 years of academic research in the field of migration and children's rights exploring the plight of unaccompanied, refugee, and asylum-seeking children and attempting to link children's rights considerations with international refugee law. Most scholarly works on child migration have focused on migration towards Europe and included the principles of the best interests of the child and the right to be heard. Although this has increased the visibility and recognition of children's rights in the context of migration, there are still

gaps in the research that need to be addressed. Most research was limited to studying a subset of children, such as unaccompanied children; a subset of rights, such as economic, social and cultural rights; or a subset of pathways of migration, such as economic migration; so the research has missed many perspectives. Another issue is that refugee and migrant children are often studied as a single group, overlooking the internal diversity among these children.

The lack of research on accompanied minors reduces attention to the rights and interests of displaced children and youth who flee with their parents or guardians. Overlooking forced migrant children and youth when they are not "alone" reflects the fact that children are rendered invisible in migration processes. As a result, the specific challenges they are facing in a forced migration situation and their distinct experiences and interests are ignored (Bhabha, 2014).

1.4 Study Framework

The current study, which is a substudy within a larger program of research (Ball, 2020; Youth Migration Project [YMP], n.d.), focused on the migration experiences of eight Farsi-speaking girls from Iran and Afghanistan living temporarily in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Political and religious conflict are the main push factors forcing nondominant ethnolinguistic groups in Iran and Afghanistan to leave their home countries. Religious conflict is also a major push factor for nondominant religious groups fleeing from Afghanistan. Most of the Afghan girls in the current study are Hazara, an ethnicity that is heavily persecuted because most Hazara practice the Shia branch of Islam whereas the Taliban, their persecutors, are Sunni.

The small-*N* case study method was chosen to enable close examination of the impacts of migration on the sense of belonging in youth who shared a common geo-cultural origin, religion, first language, and gender, thereby supporting exploration of commonalities and differences among their experiences. Seven were from Afghanistan and one was from Iran. The girls lived in close proximity to one another in Kuala Lumpur, had preexisting close relationships, and elected to be in the same group for the data collection procedure described in the subsequent chapter on research design.

In addition, as one of the primary data collectors on site, I shared proficiency in the Farsi language with the participants. As data collection proceeded, it became apparent they were willing to talk more if they could share their stories in Farsi. The alignment of my own experiences with the participants' and related effects on the research are explored in the following section.

1.5 Relationship to Research

The focus of this research is exploring a sense of home and belonging among displaced youth in transit. I am a first-generation migrant woman who came to Canada as a refugee in 2011. I still struggle to feel a sense of belonging in Canada, to find my place in Canadian society, and to define myself as an Iranian-Canadian. I have been unable to feel at home in Canada even after becoming a Canadian citizen 3 years ago. These unsettled feelings inspired me to join the YMP in order to qualitatively investigate migrant youths' sense of home and belonging after displacement. Specifically, my research will investigate identity, sense of home, belonging, and future aspirations of migrant youth as part of the larger YMP. This research may also give me perspective on

my own positionality as a migrant in Canada, provide insight to my work as a child and youth care practitioner, and lay the foundations for future studies.

I speak Farsi and I am part of the Iranian diaspora. I came to Canada in 2011 as a refugee woman using forged identity documents. I bring a critical lens to research that is informed by anticolonial, poststructural, transnational feminism and critical race theory. This lens allowed me to take an intersectional approach in understanding youths' sense of home and belonging in Malaysia. My research framework was rooted in my life-long struggle with various forms of oppression. Like many refugees, I am a visible minority from the Middle East.

As a researcher, I was an insider to this community. Research suggests that when the researchers share similar salient characteristics with the participants, participants become more comfortable with self-disclosure than with researchers not sharing these characteristics (Unluer, 2012). When participants may be more confident in the researcher's ability to represent their story, they are more willing to share and provide more data (Unluer, 2012; Woods, 2019). There is a richness that can best be conveyed in a person's first language or her language of choice (Unluer, 2012). In the larger YMP in general, this opportunity was not available due to lack of multiple language proficiency of the staff. As such, most youth participants needed to share their experiences in English, which was their second or third language. The Farsi-speaking participants and I benefitted from having a common language and a shared understanding of life and challenges as forced migrants. Other benefits of being an insider to this group were understanding the youths' value systems, taboos, and the patriarchal power structure in their homes (Unluer, 2012). Also, in the peer-mediated storytelling procedure described

in the research design chapter, the eight Farsi-speaking adolescents were able to encourage, probe, and challenge one another because they shared a common language and similar experiences as mentioned above.

However, being an insider has its disadvantages. Being an insider to the group runs the risk of struggling between a role as a group member and a role as a researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I had to be vigilant not to create an assumption among the participants that I was too much of an insider because they might have left things unsaid, expecting me to know and finish their thoughts. Thus, less information might have been disclosed if I were seen as an insider (Hellawell, 2006; Woods, 2019). Another disadvantage of being an insider was my own biases, including the struggles of being a forced migrant. As such, I had to approach the research as a learner: This group of youth was part of a subculture in Malaysia that I was not familiar with. Therefore, it was important for me to give space for the participants' story to be told in their own words (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

I find myself asking whose voice my research represents. How can I be sure that my research serves and benefits forced migrant youth in Malaysia? The research tools used in this journey are not limited to particular methods of data collection and analysis but "the methodologies that frame these methods, and their epistemological and ontological foundations" (Strega, 2005, p. 199). Critical and antioppressive approaches allow me to regard research as an emancipatory commitment, and work towards establishing a position of resistance. In doing so, a critical paradigm provides common ground for resistance and struggle by which marginalized and oppressed groups come to voice their concerns.

1.6 Chapter Summary

Forced migrant youth are spending a formative period of their lives in precarious situations, often without access to basic child and human rights including healthcare and education. There is a wealth of literature on the determinants of belonging as factors in migration outcomes (Caxaj & Gill, 2017; Liu et al., 2019). It is understood that belonging is crucial to youths' development and physical and mental health (Arslan et al., 2020; Erikson, 1978). However, little is known about forced migrant youth, their views on migration and their sense of belonging while temporarily living in a country of refuge. The purpose of this study was to explore how forced migration impacts youth (defined as aged 12 to 18, UNCRC, 1982) in Malaysia.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of literature that is relevant to forced migrant youth who temporarily reside in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I review definitions of and relationships between a sense of safety, belonging, and home. The chapter ends with a conceptual framework of belonging that was used to guide the study. This literature review consists of academic peer-reviewed journals, books, and international reports. I consulted the academic databases: Wiley, ERIC, Jostar, Taylor & Francis Online, Sage, and Sigma.

2.1 Belonging and Safety

In child and youth care, belonging is defined as "a sense of ease, a sense of being not the other, and a place within which one has achieved a sense of mastery of the routines" (Snow, 2013, p. 383). Belonging is viewed as a survival necessity and a universal "longing" related to human attachment (Bowlby, 1982; Bronfenbrenner, 1981; Snow, 2013). In education, sense of belonging is described as the need for relatedness, and in psychology it is referred to as social support, community, and social capital (Hagerty et al., 1992). For forced migrant youth, social and physical supports are among the fundamental needs of safety.

2.1.1. Sense of Belonging

In 1954, Maslow argued that there is little known about "the belongingness need, although this is a common theme in novels, autobiographies, poems, and plays" (p. 43). Belonging was identified as a fundamental human need in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, ranked after physiological and safety needs (Hagerty et al., 1993). Over the past 40 years, Hagerty et al. (1992) employed content analysis to define the concept of belonging.

In their analysis, Hagerty et al. (1992) explained belonging as the "experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment. A system can be a relationship or organization, and an environment can be natural or cultural" (p. 143). In addition, Baumeister and Leary (1995) defined belonging as a basic human need that motivates people to create social bonds and improve their well-being. According to these authors, the four components of belonging are (a) valued involvement, (b) fit, (c) frequency of affectively pleasant interactions, and (d) stability of relationship (Hagerty et al., 1992; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Migration scholars have found that migrants often feel a sense of belonging to a community that has experienced a collective trauma or loss (Burck & Hughes, 2018). The sense of belonging among forced migrant youth needs further investigation, in line with Hogarth's (2011) argument that individuals' lived experiences – trauma, loss, and displacement – have long-lasting impacts on belonging.

Building and maintaining relatedness to others is an important concern of human beings. Sense of belonging has also been constructed as a component of relatedness to self, others, social groups, and places (Berlin & Johnson, 1989; Birtchnell, 1987; Gilligan, 2003; Hagerty et al., 1993). From an interactional standpoint, Anant (1966) defined belonging as a "sense of personal involvement in a social system so that persons feel themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system" (p. 21). This empirical and evaluative perspective on belonging draws attention to the relationship between belonging, anxiety, and self-sufficiency. In a study on relatedness, Hagerty et al. (1993) posited belonging is a person's involvement with a system (relationship or organization) or environment (natural or cultural) in a way that a person views

themselves as an essential part of the system or environment. They describe two attributes of belonging:

> The person experiences being valued, needed, or regarded as important by other people, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions; and the person experiences a fit or congruence with other people, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions through shared or complementary characteristics. (Hagerty et al., 1993, p. 174; see also Allerton, 2018; Allsopp & Chase, 2019; Katartzi, 2018; Popyk et al., 2019)

2.1.2 Sense of Safety

Childhood experiences strongly influence the future of the child (Crouch et al., 2019; Merrick et al., 2017). Forced displacement can negatively affect growth and development because the safety and protection of displaced youth is seriously compromised when they are uprooted and on the move. Asylum-seeking children face many stressors from their lack of physical and psychosocial safety. Not only the traumatic, sudden events before migration, but also limited legal, safe migration pathways and experiences in transit countries can significantly influence the physical and mental health of children.

Supaat (2015) contended that when forced migrant youth arrive in a transit country, they have complex needs. Their experiences in their home countries, the living situations during flight, and how they are treated by the host countries will affect their needs. “Refugee children are particularly in need of immigration documents, nutrition and immunization, health and healthcare, psychology and mental support and care, education, financial support, family support and reunification, childcare and social

relationships and provision of social services" (Supaat, 2015, p. 2). These needs are interrelated. Good health and nutrition, for instance, are crucial for a child's social and psychosocial development (Inan, 2018; Supaat, 2015). Access to safe playgrounds and sport spaces are crucial for youth's mental health.

Vaghri et al. (2019) drew on Article 22 of the UNCRC to argue for the rights owed to forced migrant children and youth. "Refugee and asylum-seeking children, similarly to all other children, are entitled to their rights under the CRC and do not forgo any right by virtue of moving between borders. The hosting governments, as state parties to the CRC, are the primary duty bearers to fulfill these rights for the children entering their country" (Vaghri et al., 2019, p. 1). Failure to fulfill responsibilities for refugee and asylum-seeking children exposes children to discriminatory treatments. "Such discrimination can not only adversely impact children's health and development, but also violate their human rights under the CRC" (Vaghri et al., 2019, p. 2).

For children to feel they belong, first they need to feel safe. An editorial in *The Lancet* (2016) argues that safe living conditions are a foundational dimension to the health and well-being of refugee children. Safe living conditions includes safe environments, access to healthcare, education, and any special psychosocial considerations. Many forced migrant children have faced war and persecution prior to their flight. Being uprooted most often results in becoming immersed in different cultural environments which are often not welcoming of those forced migrant youth and their families (The Lancet, 2016). Feeling excluded, not being part of the social fabric and denied rights to education and healthcare exposes forced migrant youth to dangerous and exploitative experiences such as child labour, child marriage, sexual exploitation, and

trafficking (Chen, 2021; Sheng, 2004).

In their "Guidelines on Determining the Best Interest of the Child" (UNHCR, 2008), the UNHCR pinpoints safety as one of the main priorities in a child's life. Drawing on Articles 19, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 38 of the CRC, the guidelines emphasize upholding the safety of forced migrant youth. These articles include "protection from physical and mental violence, abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, harmful traditional practices, trafficking and abduction, child labour and protection from threats posed by armed conflict to children's lives, such as underage recruitment" (UNHCR, 2008, p. 69). The guidelines outline best practices in determining the health of the child. They include resettlement of forced migrant youth, upholding the non-refoulment principle, no decision that could cause even more distress to the child, and nurturing the development needs of the child (UNHCR, 2008).

The UNHCR guidelines also stipulate nurturing the development needs of the child as a primary determinant to the child's health and the foundation of belonging. These health determinants include "the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development of the child, in a manner compatible with human dignity" (UNHCR, 2008, p. 74). Children need to feel valued and this need grows into a need to belong to social groups and have a place in society (UNHCR, 2008). "Continuity of contact with external surroundings, including people and places, has an extremely important psychological effect on the child's development and inner sense of stability" (UNHCR, 2008, p. 74).

In research with Karenni forced migrant youth in Thailand, Dudley (2011) stated that physical safety has a significant impact on children's and youth's well-being. For "displaced and non-displaced peoples alike, an important part of feeling 'at home' is the

cultivation of a sense of spatiotemporal continuity of place and of emplacement" (Dudley, 2011, p. 742). Similarly, Guo et al. (2019) argued that, for forced migrant youth, feeling socially safe is an indicator of feeling they belong in their new country. Social bonding, feeling welcomed and valued by locals are key factors for forced migrant youth to feel at home. Such safety supports the youth's "feeling at home" and accelerates feelings of belonging and flourishing in their new host country (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Guo et al., 2019).

2.2. Social Construction of Migrant Youth and Children

There are significant gaps in the knowledge about youth who migrate. The lack of research on youth migration flows and youth experiences of migration has been attributed to the hegemonic Westernised adult-centric constructions of migration (White et al., 2011). Constructions of migrant youth only as passive, vulnerable, and needy family members silences youths' accounts of their experiences and renders invisible certain youth migrants such as youth labourers, forced migrants and unaccompanied youth. White et al. (2011) argued in favour of a shift towards viewing the children's experiences in a multiplicity of migratory contexts with a multitude of drivers.

Most recently, a gap has arisen between humanitarian representations of child and youth migrants as powerless and vulnerable and migration researchers' accounts of migrant young people as "resourceful agents situated in challenging situations" (Tyrrell et.al, 2013, p. 134). O'Connell Davidson (2011) argued that the term "child migrant" brings together two different cultural categories – child and migrant. These two terms do not cohere in the public imaginary (Tyrrell et al., 2013). The dominant modern discourse views childhood "as weakness itself" (Christensen, 2000, p. 42) and constructs the child

as “a passive and unknowing dependant” (Jenks, 1996, p. 124). On the other hand, migrants – specifically asylum seekers, illegal or irregular immigrants – are portrayed as having agency and cunning (O'Connell Davidson, 2011; Orellana, 2015). This dichotomy, Tyrrell et al. (2012) argued, creates a challenge for those working with migrant youth in different contexts. The authors framed youth migration as rather “an issue of experience and representation” (Tyrrell et al., 2012, p. 134) and encouraged further research with migrant youth to better understand the impacts of particular migration regimes on children, such as forced migration or those youth who migrate alone.

Ní Laoire et al. (2010) defined different, yet also dominant western ideology of childhood involving polarized constructions of the child: the construction of the child as “uncivilized, disorderly and dangerous” (p. 136) on one hand, and an assumption that childhood is a state of innocence, purity, and stability on the other hand. Both of these constructs create an assumption that children need stability and security and the best place for children is the home (Holloway & Valentine, 2000) made available by their families in domestic and familial environments. This assumption about what children and youth must have as necessary conditions for optimal development has provided impetus for extensive research and policy that associates ideal childhoods with residential fixity and domestication, and this assumption is often reflected in moral panic around the presence of displaced, unaccompanied, homeless, and street entrenched children (Fass, 2005; Tyrrell et al., 2013).

To understand the ways in which migrant children and youth experience belonging, Ní Laoire et al. (2010) suggested conducting child- or youth-centred research with children who migrate or those who live mobile and transnational lives, with

identities being shaped while they are on the move. To destabilize the ideas of childhood as fixed and stable, Ní Laoire et al. (2010) argued that "children perform multiple and intersecting identities, which are variously gendered, racialized, localized and commodified, and that these are contingent on context" (p. 157).

In Anthias's (2006) discussion, belonging was defined both as a subjective feeling experienced by individuals as well as a socially defined concept. The subjective side is often interpreted as place and identity. Anthias discussed migrants' descriptions of fitting in "at home" (2006, p. 12) often including their sense of place. The social element that is considered to impact home and identity does not concern identification and familiarity, it rather addresses the experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In other words, belonging is not entirely about migrants' subjective feelings of fitting in or not. It also depends on how others – the powerful majority – define who belongs to home according to their specific norms and expectations. Thus, while youth migrants might feel as though they belong in a particular place or places, for these feelings to gain legitimacy is dependent on being recognized and validated by others. As a result, belonging emerges out of intertwined social processes of inclusion and exclusion that are both self-defined and other-defined (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

In a discussion of home, migration, identity and belonging, Ralph and Staeheli (2011) challenged the concept of home as fixed and bounded and instead suggested home as "messy, mobile, blurred and confused" (p. 518). They problematized the early work on transnationalism which extensively promulgated the assimilation paradigm, and therefore failed to acknowledge the day-to-day struggles of migrants while they are in transit and when they resettle in new homes. Conceptualizing home as being "accordion-like"

(Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518), they contended that home is mobile and can stretch outward to connect migrants to far away places but can also be sedentary and embed the individuals in their close and immediate locales. The authors encouraged more studies that explore how migrants understand and experience home and belonging both in the place in transit and in the place of resettlement (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

2.3. Impacts of Migration Status on Sense of Belonging

Migration status can affect young people's sense of belonging. Allerton (2018) discussed child illegality/legality as a form of social exclusion/inclusion that can impact young people's sense of belonging. Child illegality is an underdeveloped topic in the migrant literature, which Allerton (2018) suggested is due to the assumption that the intended subject – forcibly displaced or refugee migrants – is an adult, or that often adult migrant experiences have been explored. There has been little attention paid to how children and youth are impacted by their status as illegal subjects, or by being born across borders. Migration research, reviewed by Orellana (2015) has treated children not as agents and actors, but as "baggage, to be brought or left behind" (p. 5). Although more recent research explored children's involvement with migration (Gardner, 2012), research on the consequences of this unauthorized status for children, or the "illegal children" (Allerton, 2018, p. 1084), is still underdeveloped. Allerton's (2018) research with 384 illegal youth migrants who were born to refugee parents in Sabah, Malaysia shed light on the persisting impacts of precarious migration status such as being a refugee or asylum seeker.

Literature on migrant illegality has constructed the "illegal aliens" (De Genova, 2002, p. 420) in opposition to the concept of the citizen. However, if the subject under

discussion is a child, then that opposition would not be as clear-cut (Allerton, 2018). Because children's status is frequently considered to be dependent on that of their parents, citizen children are also "not meaningfully protected from deportation like their adult counterparts" (Bhabha, 2003, p. 54). In other words, even citizen children may be at risk of being "constructively deportable" (Bhabha, 2014, p. 80) with their undocumented parents or caregivers. Even though research shows that children's unauthorized status has negative psychological and developmental implications (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011), there is little research into children's own experiences of their illegal status (Allerton, 2018).

In the second part of her article on illegality and exclusion among children of migrants in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, East Malaysia, Allerton (2018) focused on youths' sense of belonging to Sabah. She reported that youths' experiences of illegality were different from those of their parents and similarly, the youths' experiences of belonging were also different from those of the adults. The illegal migrant youth, known as "impossible children," knew well that they should not exist in Malaysia. The research participants shared stories of exclusion, such as midnight-checking raids by police officers and the frequent occurrence of checking of identity cards by migration officials. Yet, those youth expressed belonging to Sabah in various ways: They mostly spoke Malay even though their parents spoke to them in their home language and asked them to speak in their mother tongues. Furthermore, the youth born in Kota Kinabalu were children of the city and impacted by an urban life, which youth reported to be very different from their parents' rural origins. In other words, "shared humour, trips to malls and the liminal legality that allows a young child to travel on a bus demonstrate certain

forms of tenuous and temporary inclusion" (Allerton, 2018, p. 1092). Similar to adults, youth experienced work as a powerful form of belonging. Some participants reported planning to leave their learning centre to take up work even though their parents wanted them to study (Allerton, 2018). Children in this study reported that their mobility was restricted, and that they became "paranoid" about police and other uniformed officials. They shared a sense of resignation towards their vulnerability to detention and deportation due to their migration status. Allerton (2018) explicated that undocumented children between 12 and 18 are triply vulnerable in Malaysia. This is particularly the case for boys, as girls' mobility is more curtailed. Youth are often targeted during "checking" procedures in malls because their lack of citizenship has become clearer to the authorities. They are not allowed to get an official foreign workers' visa, as those visas are only issued to youth who are 18 or over. Finally, the few learning centres sponsored by the Malaysian state are not available to youth older than 12, meaning "the liminal legality afforded by basic learning centres becomes less available for older children" (Allerton, 2018, p. 1091).

2.4. Impacts of Host Communities on Sense of Belonging

In the context of relations between host communities and asylum seekers, refugees, and other forced migrants who temporarily live in Southeast Asian countries, Abraham (2020) analyzed the situation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand, the largest refugee-hosting or producing countries in the region. He argued that the refugee environment in those countries was marked by significant legal, temporal, spatial, and cultural diversities. Considering that hosting refugees is not a new phenomenon in Southeast Asia, Abraham (2020) called for further explorations of the role the non-state

actors play in such relations. Although Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand have been “temporary-transit” (Abraham, 2020, p. 184) spaces for decades, this situation is no longer tenable.

The rise of a nationalistic sentiment and the refusal of Global North countries to resettle significant numbers of refugees – as part of their legal obligations – makes the temporary presence of forced and illegal migrants in those countries a permanent phenomenon. This reality has resulted in hosting multiple generations of refugees from different origins who have distinct relationships towards the host communities and towards each other (Abraham, 2020). None of the countries listed in the previous paragraph have signed the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) nor have they created domestic legislation on refugees, displaced peoples, and asylum seekers, leading to the appearance of “informal protection” (Abraham, 2020, p. 183). Informal protection, however, does not protect illegal migrants from deportation and also can be lost at any moment. This informality has also led to a mismatch between policy and experience, which in turn has created a distance between state (in)actions and social reality (Abraham, 2020). Such dichotomous practices, Abraham (2020) recommended, call for the academic and the policy research community to produce the evidence and analysis needed to introduce innovative and sustainable responses to refugee movements.

In their 2018 article, Chakraborty and Thambiah considered migrant youths’ emotions and felt experiences of migration within a contemporary globalizing South and Southeast Asian migration context. The authors argued that positioning adolescence and young people as “children in homes, communities and in the nation further side-line children’s emotive experiences” (Chakraborty & Thambiah, 2018, p. 583). Given that the

youths' unique experiences of migration have been studied seriously only in the last two decades in Asia, the authors suggested such studies need further contextualized explorations.

In their introduction to a special issue of the *Children's Geographies* journal on children and young people's emotions of migration across Asia, Chakraborty & Thambiah (2018) discussed youths' diverse and complex range of feelings that are expressed and managed in different ways in migration, "a range of contrasting and highly personalized set of emotions which is tied deeply to cultural, social, gender and religious expectations of them as children" (Chakraborty & Thambiah, 2018, p. 588). The authors explained how children "feel and make sense of their and their family member's movements, mobility and identity" (Chakraborty & Thambiah, 2018, p. 587), and how some children and youth negotiate their feelings and build new networks and friendship and form different social systems than previously experienced (Chakraborty & Thambiah, 2018). By focusing on South and Southeast Asia, we can diverge from the dominant "diasporic" and "receiving countries" literature concerning migration from Asia and add to theories of migration which have not focused enough on children's experiences as migrants and or on migrants in the Global South (Chakraborty & Thambiah, 2018).

2.5. Representation of Forced Migrant Youth in Media

In exploring the representation of childhood and forced migration in media, Singer et al. (2019) looked at the intersections of childhood, borders, and belonging by analyzing European screen content for and about children in Europe. They found that the "ideas of borders and belonging are constructed and deconstructed in a selection of films

and television programs that feature children with an immigration background" (p. 202) that subsequently stabilize the borders between "us" and "them" (Singer et al., 2019, p. 206). This depiction is rooted in a "politics of pity" (Boltanski, 1999, p. 5), showing forced migrant children as fundamentally different from White European children. The way that humanitarian organizations often construct "border subjects" (Singer et al., 2019, p. 206) by showing "children's toys and shoes discarded on European shores" (Singer et al., 2019, p. 206) aims to evoke sympathy in a European audience (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2017; Singer et al., 2019). Such representations of forced migrant children reduce the displaced youth to fetishized bodies, symbols of innocence, and in need of humanitarian aid because of their vulnerability (Chouliaraki, 2017; Singer et al., 2019).

The treatment of forcibly displaced youth by authorities and in court is inherently problematic because these children's bodies have become a "site of moral compassion" (van Wichelen, 2015, p. 552) instead of people who have rights in law. They are not seen as powerful in terms of documentation of the "complex, material geopolitical circumstances of each individual child" (McLaughlin, 2018, p. 1760), but are rather shown as icons which are allowed to be understood as "suffering Third World children, whose right to a 'proper' childhood forms the basis of countless humanitarian campaigns" (McLaughlin, 2018, p. 1760).

Singer et al. (2019) argued that, in the context of public media, the portrayal of forced migrant people based on a politics of pity divides the media subjects (displaced youth) and the producers/audiences. Such depictions in turn contribute to stereotyping racially marginalized groups as the unfortunate "other" and strip the displaced youth from

belonging to the nation state (regardless of whether they have temporary or permanent residence). This divide draws a border between "those who suffer and those who do not" (Singer et al., 2019, p. 206) and it creates a performance of suffering, allowing unfortunate people being observed by those "who are not impacted by this suffering and thus maybe perceived as fortunate or lucky people" (Singer et al., 2019, p. 206).

Singer et al. (2019) also analyzed screen media that disrupt borders of "us" and "the other" by showing both similarities and differences between European children from migrant backgrounds and White European-born children. The authors argued that these representations "destabilize narratives of borders and otherness, suggesting that children with a family history of immigration "belong" to European societies in the same ways as White European-born children" (Singer et al., 2019, p. 202).

2.6 Private/Official Belonging Versus National/Ethnic Belonging

Fenster (2005) proposed that belonging is both private and official. Private belonging is a personal and intimate sense of belonging which is created and derived out of everyday practice. On the other hand, official belonging is a public and formal membership in a collective such as citizenship (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Antonsich (2010) defined belonging as a process of *becoming* rather than *being*. Similarly, Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2008) viewed belonging as dynamic and situational, a state of being that can "shift and change over time, be contested and plural" (Spaaij, 2015, p. 305).

While extensive literature highlighted the relationships between ethnic and national affiliation and belonging (Wood & Waite, 2011), Anthias (2006) argued that factors such as gender are a crucial element in constructing the boundaries that determine

whether one feels that they belong or do not belong. Yuval-Davis (2006) cautioned that belonging is not exclusively limited to ethnic or racial groups; rather she viewed belonging through an intersectional lens which encompasses different categories of social location such as religion, class and nation, affiliation, and ability (Spaaij, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Similar to Yuval-Davis, my research framework is also informed by an intersectional lens.

In addition to understanding the inclusion/exclusion experiences that allow or hinder an individual's sense of belonging, it is important to note the ways processes of "seeking" and "granting" play into an individual's ability to belong (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Furthermore, the politics of belonging creates an interplay between discourse and practice that constructs a boundary notion of "us" versus "them." This is an ongoing negotiation between a side that claims belonging and a side that often has the power to grant belonging (Antonsich, 2010; Spaaij, 2015). The power of granting belonging is referred to as "governmental belonging" (c, 1998, p. 46) and is often exercised by those who have the power to lead the silenced groups who are often viewed as the others. This ongoing process involves a "constant and ongoing co-construction and reformulation" (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2008, p. 101) by including some and excluding others (Spaaij, 2015).

Belonging is a complex, highly contingent concept that has both a subjective, psychological aspect and one or more objective, governmental aspects. The current study explores the more psychological aspect such as one's subjective, personal sense of belonging. Nevertheless, as Jones & Krzyzanowski (2011) stated, "There is *something* about one's personal belonging that is comparable to one's perception of the aims,

constitution or values of a given collective" (p. 44). This formulation allows belonging to be understood not as a fixed, objective membership in a group, but as a fluid, subjective state where other forms of attachment and solidarities can be formed. The theoretical framework of belonging discussed by Jones & Krzyzanowski (2011) can be applied in understanding forced migrants' sense of belonging. In the context of migration, the concept of belonging must include elective attachments; meaning that at some point individuals situate themselves in relation to a collective, forming attachments of varying strengths. As Teun van Dijk (1984) stated, attachments are vital in constructing attitudes – negative or positive ones – and fundamental in formation of a sense of belonging.

Jones and Krzyzanowski's (2011) model posited belonging as an internal(ised) process that can also exist outside the self. For example, denial of citizenship that is bound with a denial of one's passport is a reality that can significantly impact how an individual understands their personal identity, as well as how they associate this personal identity to a collective. Thus, individuals with similar situations, backgrounds, and conditions could develop a completely different sense of belonging. In other words, "belonging is a way of describing how individuals interpret a huge range of imagined and lived attachments and memberships" (Jones & Krzyzanowski, 2011, p. 50). One might ask where a sense of "home" falls in this huge range of attachments.

2.7. Sense of Home

How do forced migrant youth, who are in transit and often grow up in places other than their home country, experience a sense of home, to the extent that the construct of home is relevant to them at all? In the case of migrant youth, one might ask where the feeling of being at home comes from and if it is entirely or partially distinctive from a

sense of belonging? How are these psychological dimensions of one's self understood and expressed in everyday social practice? The focus of the current study is to understand the forced migrant youths' sense of belonging and to explore the link between sense of belonging and sense of home – to what extent they are synonymous or distinctive, how they are constituted, and how do physical and social safety affect the ongoing negotiation of a sense of belonging and sense of home.

In the literature, various meanings are ascribed to home as a place, with conflicting universalist and particularist perspectives (Duyvendak, 2011a). Most universalists argue that increased mobility impedes people's ability to develop "thick attachment to places" (Duyvendak, 2011a, p. 9), leading to places becoming more generic and interchangeable (Duyvendak, 2011b). Of relevance to this study, Said (1979) ascribed the "generalized condition of homelessness" (p. 18) to forced migration.

The particularists maintain that place continues to matter as people continue to construct a sense of home in an increasingly changing world (Savage et al., 2005). They posit that home is not necessarily rooted in a certain place; it is the place that is valued by the individuals who choose to live there. They view this elective belonging as a victory of choice, which has become attainable by mobility. Elective belonging is seen as lifestyle choice, a choice of home "where one would like to live in order to eat the foods one likes, go to the places one wants, have the shops one enjoys" (Duyvendak, 2011a, p. 11). My research provides perspectives on how elective belonging operates in the case of forced migrant youths. Given the situation of millions of migrants who must forcibly leave their country of origin and often enter places where they are not welcome, how does choice factor in?

Does one need a physical place to feel at home? To further map out what it means to feel at home, I explored literature considering home as an imagined immaterial notion. As discussed, the particularist and universalist perspectives relate home to tangible, substantive places. There is limited literature discussing home in a purely nonterritorialized manner. Mallet (2004) proposed that people can feel at home in the virtual space of the internet or their computers and Manzo (2003) related the feeling of home within a sacred structure such as a mosque. Blunt and Dowling (2006) viewed home as merely an imaginary spatial concept, that is, "a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, [which]... are related to context, and... construct places, extend across spaces... and connect places" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p. 2). Are youth who may have limited experience of home able to imagine that sense?

2.8 Home as a Feeling

Other social scientists suggest that home is not always imagined. They propose that nonmaterial home is often intertwined with "concrete manifestations of home in the past or present, or … a projection of a concrete home in the future" (Duyvendak, 2011d, p. 10). Easthope (2004) postulated that it is not only the geographical location that is home; feelings and meanings are also needed to be attached as well. Jackson (1995) similarly discussed that "home is grounded less in a place and more in the activity that occurs in the place" (p. 148). These claims suggest that home is rather a product of home-making than the effects of home itself. Physical places do not inherently have the characteristics of home; indeed, the feelings of home are constructed over time (Duyvendak, 2011d; Jackson, 1995).

Considering home as a subjective, dynamic and layered concept that continually changes, it is important to examine what it means to feel at home. Further, what is the link between feeling at home and having a sense of belonging? Are these the same or distinct experiences? Rybczynski (1986) suggested a number of things that make a place feel like home: “intimacy and privacy, domesticity, commodity and delight, ease, light and air, efficiency, style and substance, austerity and comfort and well-being” (p.209).

Regardless of the material aspects, in their book *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home*, Porteous and Smith (2014) gathered and summarized the possible meanings of home. They offered their findings in three parts: familiarity, haven, and heaven. *Familiarity* refers to a sense of knowing the place, which is often a necessary but not sufficient element required to feel at home (Duyvendak, 2011d; Porteous & Smith, 2014). *Home as haven* refers to a safe, comfortable, private, and exclusive setting. In other words, a place where one can experience physical safety and that is predictable and a place for relaxation, intimacy and domesticity. *Home as heaven* is based on public identity and exclusivity. This understanding refers to a public place where one can collectively be, express, and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent. Home here embodies shared histories, a material and/or symbolic place with one’s own people and activities (Duyvendak, 2011c, 2011d; Porteous & Smith, 2014).

These findings are consistent with those of Dudley (2011) in which he investigated the feelings of being at home for Karenni refugees living in refugee camps. He reported that for Karenni refugees, an important part of feeling at home was “the cultivation of a sense of spatiotemporal continuity of place and of emplacement. Yet real, physical continuity of place is impossible for refugees” (Dudley, 2011, p. 742). The camp

was never intended to be a permanent place for retreat. Yet many forced migrants in refugee camps in Thailand have lived there for over 20 years, and the camps are sprawling communities which makes displacement a rather permanent experience. This thesis explores the varied concepts of home from the literature through the real-world experiences of forced migrant youth. Do they sense home as a place, as a feeling, or both?

2.9 Belonging

The present study attempted to understand the underlying factors that impact the forced migrant girls' sense of belonging as "feeling at home". Three predominant definitions of belonging are evident in the literature. I will briefly discuss these definitions and then discuss the one I have chosen for this research and why.

Belonging as "Fitting In"

A review of 21 articles on belonging by Mahar and colleagues showed that belonging is conceptualized or referred to as a "personal feeling or perception of an individual as they related to or interacted with others, a group, or a system that was separate from an individual's actions, behaviour or social participation. Feeling needed, important, integral, valued, respected or feeling in harmony with the group or system, characterized most definitions of belonging" (Mahar et al., 2013, p. 1029). Moreover, personal meanings of sense of belonging identified belonging as "feeling valued and respected, and the influence of opinions and interactions of an individual with the group" (Mahar et al., 2013, p. 1029), Further, a sense of reciprocity – exchange of feelings – and being accepted by the group were identified as integral to a sense of belonging (Mahar et al., 2013). Here I ask whether needing to fit in or feeling valued, accepted, and respected

are sufficient for a sense of belonging? And whether the feelings of belonging are limited to a particular relationship or affiliation outside of oneself?

Belonging as an Ontological State

The second definition defines belonging as an ontological state. It is beyond fitting in and "more fundamental to who and what we are" (Miller, 2006, p. 251). It constitutes our identity whether we have this feeling or not (Miller, 2006). Miller (2006, p. 242) distinguishes belonging into two senses: first "a sense of ease or accord with who we are in ourselves"; and second, "a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out" (2006, p. 220). This ontological definition identifies belonging as something we do through "our connection to the world; our connection to other people, a particular community, or society, to our tradition or past, to a specific place, dwelling, or physical environment" (Mahmud, 2021, p. 10). Thus, belonging is understood via connectivity between the self and the social, historical, and geographical worlds (Mahmud, 2021, Miller, 2006).

Belonging as Feeling at Home

The third definition of belonging is feeling at home (Mahmud, 2021). Yuval-Davis (2006) introduced two different dimensions of belonging: *belonging* and *politics of belonging*, which other approaches often confuse or conflate. *Belonging* as a personal, emotional, or intimate dimension is defined as feeling at home or place-belongingness (Antonsich, 2010). Home in this sense is "a symbolic place of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 646). *Politics of belonging*, on the other hand, entails "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being

constructed by these projects in very particular ways" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). In other words, Yuval-Davis discusses belonging as emotional attachment: feeling at home and feeling safe. The politics of belonging is viewed as the construction of belonging to particular collectivities (Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 197).

The construction of belonging as an emotional feeling of being at home in a place is the focus of this research. Belonging as feeling at home has not been frequently analyzed by scholars; rather, belonging has often been used as a synonym of collective identity or citizenship (Antonsich, 2010). Evocations of the concept of belonging, such as by Yuval-Davis (2006) and others, overlook the notion of place, "as if feelings, discourses, and practices of belonging exist in a geographical vacuum" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 647). Yet consideration of the geographical situation of the participants in this study is imperative if only because they had, as forced migrants, been rejected and/or ejected from their homes. As youth in transit, they were not fixed in their geographical locale, and yet many had been in prolonged displacement and may have found ways to reconstruct a sense of being at home at least temporarily.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Two I reviewed the literature related to safety, sense of belonging, and feeling at home in a forced migration context. I began with the concepts of safety and belonging and their interdependency. Next, I discussed childhood as being socially constructed and explored how views of children by media, stakeholders, and Euro-Western culture influence the reality of forced migrant youth. The concluding section explored home as a feeling and what it takes for children to feel at home. I noted that although research often reported on the needs of forced migrant youth, the data was often

collected from scholars, agencies, and migrant-serving organizations. Strikingly little research included children in discussions about the experiences of forced migration, particularly in the context of prolonged displacement in transit countries.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Implementation

3 A Substudy Focus (Small-*N*) on Eight Farsi-Speaking Forced Migrant Youth

The YMP study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Board of the University of Victoria. Data for this present study is collected from the YMP research project in which 52 forced migrant youth explored their sense of belonging, identity and future aspirations (Ball, 2020). The present study explores the sense of home and belonging of eight Farsi-speaking girls aged between 14 and 17 years.

3.1 Research Site, Informed Consent, and Participant Recruitment

The research site was the Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI), with 52 participants selected from this centre. We used a purposive sampling method and inclusion/exclusion criteria to recruit the youth. Inclusion criteria included: age 11–17 years, English language proficiency, and asylum-seeker or refugee status.

Informed consent was obtained from those youth who volunteered to participate and who met the study criteria. Each youth was required to obtain informed consent from a parent or guardian as well as to provide their own consent (see Appendix A). In most cases, youth took home an information page about the project and what was being asked of the youth, along with a consent form for a parent or guardian to sign. Because the participants could read English, they were capable of explaining the text information on these pages to their parent or guardian.

Eight Farsi-speaking girls aged 14 to 17 self-selected to become members of one of five peer groups. A male participant was in the group as well, but he was not part of this small-*N* study because he did not participate in the follow-up group session, so his data set was incomplete.

The eight girls were all friends and had in common their first language (Farsi), gender, age range (spanning 3 years [*M* = 15; range = 14–17]), and religion (Shia Muslim). Seven of them were from Afghanistan and one was from Iran. The length of the youths' formal school attendance ranged from 1 to 8 years, with an average of 4.7 years. Only twin sisters who were members of the group had completed accredited primary education in their home country; the remainder had various nonaccredited primary school education. All the girls were attending nonformal education at the MSRI (*M* = 3.3 years of attendance). They had lived in Kuala Lumpur for an average of 3 years and 8 months (range = 1–7 years). The average number of family members was four excluding the youth (range = 3–6 members). The following information uses pseudonyms and is based on participants' self-reports on the demographic and social questionnaire (DSQ).

Maryam

Maryam was a 14-year-old Afghan girl who was born a refugee in Iran. She migrated to Malaysia at age 10 with her parents, brother, and two sisters in 2015. She received 3 years of primary education in Iran and 4 years of nonformal education at MSRI at the time of data collection. Maryam lived with her parents and three siblings.

Mina

Mina was a 14-year-old from Afghanistan. She migrated to Malaysia in 2014 at age 8 with her mother and her younger sister. They transited from India and after two attempts they were able to reunite with her father in Kuala Lumpur. She attended 2 years of primary education in Afghanistan and 4 years of nonaccredited education in not-for-profit organizations in Malaysia. She lived with her parents and two siblings.

Rosa

Rosa was a 17-year-old Afghan girl who was born a refugee in Iran and came to Malaysia in 2016. She attended Grades 1 to 6 in Iran but did not complete Grade 6. Rosa had been a student at MSRI for 3 years at the time of data collection. Rosa lived with her parents and five siblings.

Tina

Tina was a 16-year-old Afghan girl who was born a refugee in Iran. She received the first 4 years of primary school in Iran and migrated with her family to Malaysia in 2013 at age 10. She had been a student at MSRI for 5 years at the time of data collection. Tina lived with her parents and three siblings.

Ziba

Ziba was a 16-year-old Iranian girl who came to Malaysia in 2012 at age 8 with her parents and her brother. She received 3 years of primary education in Iran and she had been taking nonofficial education at MSRI for the 5 years prior to data collection. Ziba lived with her parents and her brother.

Sahar & Sana

Sahar and Sana were 15-year-old twin sisters from Kabul, Afghanistan who migrated to Malaysia with their family in 2018. The twins were the only participants who completed their primary education in their country of origin. They participated in nonformal education for 1 year in MSRI prior to data collection. They lived with their parents and five siblings.

Akram

Akram was a 16-year-old Afghan girl who was born a refugee in Iran and came to Malaysia in 2013. She received her first 3 years of primary education in Iran and had been studying at the MSRI for the previous 3 years. She lived with her parents and a sibling.

Table 1

Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Years in MY	Number of family members	Years of education: Previous | In MY	Country of origin	Country of birth	Resettlement status with the UNHCR
Maryam	14	4	5	3 | 4	AF	IR	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Mina	14	5	5	2 | 4	AF	AF	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Rosa	17	3	6	6 | 3	AF	IR	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Tina	16	6	6	4 | 5	AF	IR	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Ziba	15	7	3	3 | 5	IR	IR	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Sahar	15	1	5	8 | 1	AF	AF	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Sana	15	1	5	8 | 1	AF	AF	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
Akram	14	3	4	4 | 3.5	AF	IR	Accepted; waiting to be resettled
M =	15	3.8	4	4.7 | 3.3			

Note. Data reported here were collected in 2019. All participants were females with refugee status. MY = Malaysia; AF = Afghanistan; IR = Iran.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

I followed an iterative-inductive approach through an exploratory multi-staged conversational process and with constant reflections by the YMP members and the young people to construct an understanding of their migration experiences and their construction of home and belonging.

First, the YMP team developed a questionnaire (DSQ; Appendix B). With the assistance of the YMP team and MSRI staff, the youth completed the DSQ forms. The DSQ asked for youth's basic demographic, migration, and household information (Ball, 2020; Torok & Ball, 2021)

The next step of data collection was the Peer-Mediated Storyboard Narrative method (PMSN), now known as Storyboard Peers. Details of this innovative method used in the larger YMP are described by Ball (2020). Youth self-selected based on their age, school group, or primary language into five groups, each of which contained four to eight peers. Art supplies (a pencil case, markers, pencil, pencil sharpener, eraser, glue, a pair of scissors, felt, magazines, and a poster board) were provided to each participant to depict their migration story. Each youth was also provided with six open-ended questions to ponder about their migration journey (Appendix C). They were asked to use their poster board to express how their migration journey impacted their sense of self, belonging, and future aspirations. The youth were reminded that no art skills were needed, and they were encouraged to express their displacement experiences however they wished.

Each peer group met weekly for 4 weeks, for approximately 2 hours each time, with a member of the YMP research team facilitating the meetings. The meetings were held before school in an MSRI classroom. The group meetings were an average of 1 hr and 40 min (range: 34–117 min). The group that is the focus of the current study was facilitated by me. The first meeting was used to distribute the art materials and discuss the task. The remaining meetings were used to hear each member's narrative account of their migration experience, using their storyboard as an initial starting place for their story. Presenting storyboards was voluntary, and all youth volunteered without much

hesitation. After a group member shared her narrative account, the facilitator encouraged the other group members to ask questions, make comments, or provide encouragements. This constituted the peer mediation aspect of the PMSN method. Subsequently, the facilitator asked questions and made comments, often encouraging the narrator to clarify or elaborate on their account. All the group meetings were audiotaped and transcribed. To identify the individual contributions in the audio-recorded files, two trained note takers time stamped and typed as much of the oral content as possible in real time.

During the group meeting process, the youths were invited to add to or revise their storyboard narrative. The team initiated the revision opportunity after some youths asked whether they could revise their storyboards and if they could share these ongoing changes. As the project approached the end, some of the youth indicated that they would like to share more of their stories. The team members organized follow-up sessions for the youths who wanted to expand and elaborate on their storyboard narratives. In an iterative-inductive method, the team member's review of the PMSN audiotapes led to some questions for the youths that were asked during the follow-up interviews. (Ball, 2020; Torok & Ball, 2021).

All eight girls expressed that they wanted to participate in the follow-up session to share their stories in more depth, but only seven of the eight girls were able to join. They elected to hold the follow-up interview as together rather than individually or in smaller subgroups. The follow-up session took place in the MSRI library and took nearly two hours. Most of the follow-up session was conducted in English. Although all youth in this study were proficient in English, some experiences that the girls thought they could better

articulate in Farsi were conveyed in Farsi and I translated those parts from Farsi to English and then transcribed all the audio-recorded data.

3.5 Data Analysis

I followed the principles of qualitative research and thematic analysis (TA) to analyze my data. These approaches are not about discovering the truth in the data and the passive emergence of themes; rather, they are about meaning making, interpreting, creating, and telling stories. TA is widely used for analyzing qualitative data across many disciplines in the social, behavioural, and applied sciences (Clarke & Braun, 2018). TA dates back to the 20th century when it was used by music scholars to analyze music scores in the 1930s. In the 1940s, sociologists used TA to analyze mass propaganda, and psychologists began to use it in the 1930s to analyze projective test data.

Braun & Clarke outlined TA in 2006. They later described, in their 2006 paper, a mishmash of methods, theories, and techniques they thought of as TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). They assumed they had written the paper for a particular audience who "got it" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 3) and thus, they "did not explicitly explain the processes engaged in producing the themes they reported." In their 2006 paper, they claimed that TA is theoretically flexible. After the publication of their 2006 paper, their thinking shifted. In 2019, they suggested that TA is a "theoretically informed and constrained methodology" (p. 9). They explained that flexibility is somewhat constrained by "paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions around meaningful knowledge production" (p. 10). In recent years they have developed reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; Braun et al., 2016).

From the three main schools of TA – coding reliability, codebook, and reflexive – in this study, I chose to follow RTA, which was first proposed by Braun et al. in 2016. The RTA procedure resonates with my theoretical understandings because it foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity. RTA fits questions that address construction of meaning, such as: How is race constructed in workplace diversity training? (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2016). According to Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 10) "reflexive TA procedures reflect the values of a qualitative paradigm, centering researcher subjectivity, organic and recursive coding processes, and the importance of deep reflection on, and engagement with, data."

TA can be carried out in different ways to analyze different datasets and address various research questions. TA is a method that uses a set of approaches to identify *patterned meanings* or themes across a dataset. The patterns are identified via rigorous processes including data familiarization, data coding, theme development, and revision. Another characteristic of TA is its theoretical flexibility. It addresses inquiries about people's experiences, views, and perceptions, and asks questions related to their understanding and representation. TA can address how young females understand displacement and allows for analysis that leads to a variety of themes and addresses different types of questions. It is, however, critical that codes and themes are distinguished from each other.

In TA, themes and codes are understood differently. Saldana (2013) defined code as an analytic reflection that a researcher makes to give meaning to a piece of data. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that a code is a feature of the data that will be assessed meaningfully. In contrast, a theme is described as an outcome of a code that

derives from vocabularies and meanings repeated in that code that shows the essence or main concept of the codes (Saldana, 2013). Themes are either inductive, data-driven, or deductive, following a researcher's framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I chose TA for my data analysis because it is more than a method for data description and reduction; it also facilitates identifying themes and patterned meanings in the collected data. Also, as suggested by Clarke and Braun (2018), TA addresses the "So what?" (p. 109) question. The so what question addresses the implications of the research, the socially constructed context of the topic of inquiry, and how the knowledge can be used. The knowledge that I obtain from the stories enables me to attain rich analysis and move away from summarizing data to interpreting it. However, TA is not free of criticism, and rather than being seen as a strength, TA's flexibility has been critiqued for lacking a rigid theoretical framework (Clarke & Braun, 2018). However, I have found TA useful in this qualitative research as it enables me to approach my data without a preconceived framework or theory.

3.5.1 Theoretical Orientation

The main orientation of TA is towards flexibility, meaning it is important as a researcher to identify my particular perspective on the data as well as the implications of this for my analysis. I am aware that my theoretical orientations and the questions I ask of my data define the way I apply this flexibility and this understanding is essential to a high-quality analysis (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). I used RTA as it is a qualitative way to analyze qualitative data. It highlights my "centrality to the end product" (Terry & Hayfield, 2020, p. 430). It means I acknowledge and reflect on the ways that my lived experiences, values, and social location inform this analysis and I recognize their role in

shaping this analytical work. It means themes did not emerge from my data, rather I actively engaged with the dataset in relation to the research question and I constructed, tested, and refined themes over iterative phases (Terry & Hayfield, 2020).

I mostly employed an *inductive* approach to RTA and worked within a *constructivist* epistemology (Kiger & Varpiro, 2020). Even though I completed a literature review on "sense of belonging" and had a deductive definition of belonging in mind, I did not aim to *test* a preexisting theoretical framework or hypothesis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I came to understand that it is impossible to follow a leaner approach to data in RTA because as a researcher, I brought my philosophical metatheoretical assumptions and myself to the analysis, meaning an inductive orientation was grounded in my coding and theme development process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

A constructionist approach is concerned with what people construct and how social constructs develop. Kiger & Varpiro (2020) argue that RTA is more grounded in a constructivist approach and "thematic analyses will search for more latent, deeper themes within the data" (Kiger & Varpiro, 2020, p. 847). The constructivist approach allows me to identify the particular patterns of meaning and linguistic practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 14). It allows me to investigate the implication of language to examine the ways in which "events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81; see also Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this way, language is not a tool to only access information and merely reflect meaning; rather, it is understood as active, symbolic, and creative (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2018).

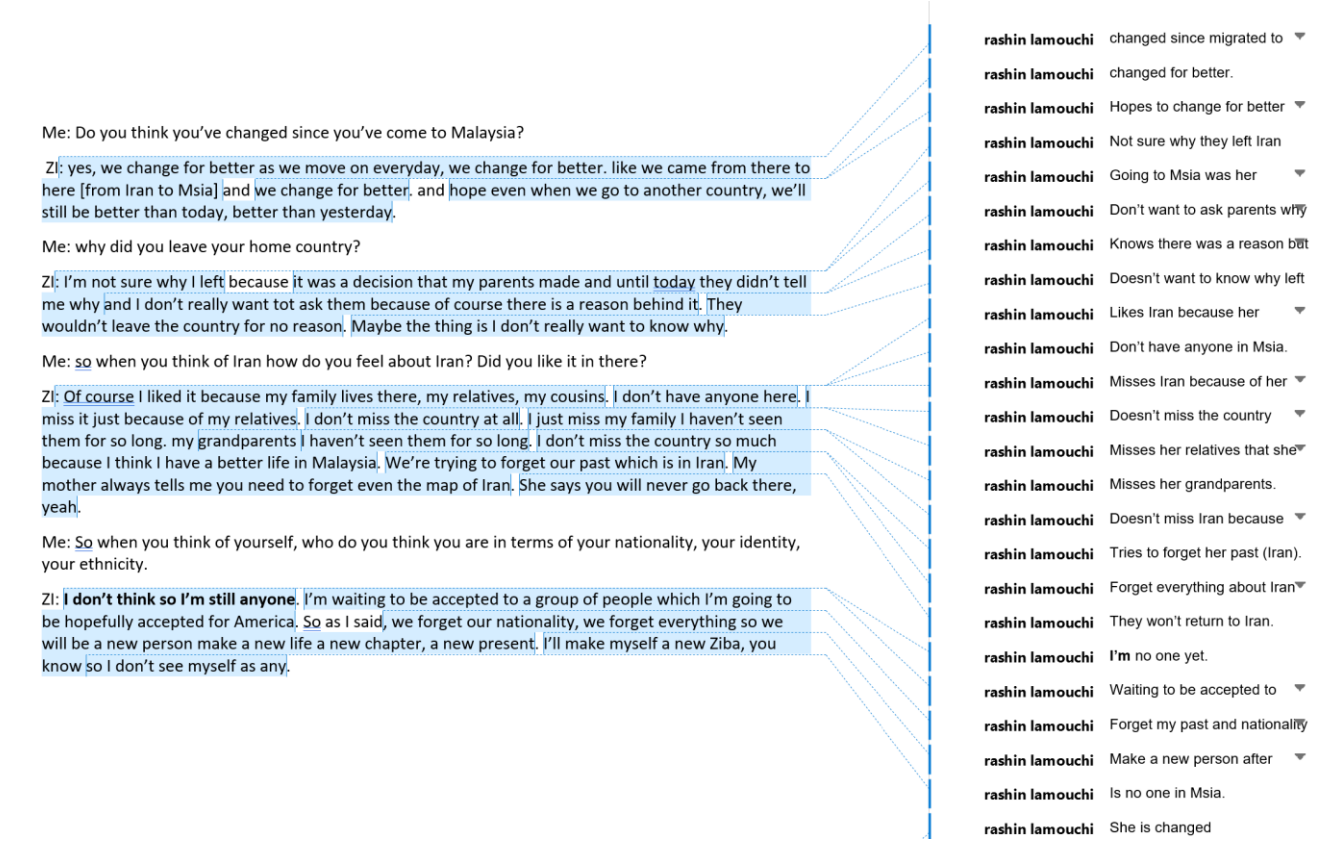
A constructionist approach contains a bidirectional relationship between understanding of language and of experience, viewing language as an implicit factor in producing and reproducing of meaning and experience (Burr, 1995; Byrne, 2021; Schwandt, 1998). An important implication of constructionist epistemology in RTA is valuing not only the recurrence of important information but also meaningfulness in the development and interpretation of codes and themes. Although a theme must be present repeatedly in the data to be considered noteworthy, the meaningfulness of that information remains important as well. In other words, by adopting a constructionist epistemology, I acknowledge the importance of recurrence of bits of data but emphasize meaning and meaningfulness as the central criteria in the coding process (Byrne, 2021).

3.6 Process of Coding

To analyze the collected data in this study, I followed the six-step framework suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019). I first familiarized myself with the collected data by listening to audiotapes (I had collected the interviews myself) and read the interview transcripts. Then I labelled and highlighted parts of the data with important features to be used as my codes. At this stage, I also took notes about individual data items and the whole dataset. Those notes were informed by my research question(s), as well as by "what is going on in the data" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 853). Having identified these features, I generated initial codes relevant to the research questions in this study (see Figure 1 for an example of the first level of coding). This was a systematic and detailed engagement with the data needing focused attention to rigorously make sense of the data, as described by Braun et al. (2019).

Figure 1

Example of Initial Coding



I initially started coding in MAXQDA, but after the initial coding stage I realized that I could not share the coding document with my supervisor with that platform. As a result, I started coding in Microsoft Word. Initially, I coded whole interviews with each participant. This level of coding was guided by my research question, "How do the processes and experiences of forced migration shape migrant youths' sense of belonging?"

Next, I reviewed the codes and refined the coded data in relation to the specific research subquestions that pertained to my research question. There were six subquestions, with five of them pertaining to my data analysis: (a) participants'

experiences in their home country, (b) Why did you leave home? (c) How do you feel about your home country? (d) How do you feel about living in Malaysia? (e) How have you changed due to migration? and (f) What are your future aspirations? Table 2 shows an excerpt of the data pertaining to the question about why the youth left home.

Table 2

Level 2 Coding

Why left home (MA)						
Faced discrimination by the government	Lack of belonging/were rejected by the majority	Unsafe living conditions	Lack of respect, safety, and growth opportunities	Were forced to leave	Search for belonging	To achieve their goals
Don't have a birth certificate. It was like a card showing where i was born and the date. I'm an Afghan. I [was] born in Iran. It means from the time that I started my life I was a migrant.	I'm an Afghan but I was born in Iran so from the time I was born I was as a migrant because in Iran they don't accept migrants as other people. and they don't look at us as humans	If the police catch us there (IR), they would deport us back to Afghanistan. So we didn't have an easy life there (Iran) I was safe in Iran because there was no war and nobody got killed but it was possible to be deported in any minute Here is the same. And not only us, all the Afghans were in danger [in Iran].	when i was at grade two, they took a test from me and i was accepted as a what they call, clever? [gifted student] yeah, and like I could go to a better school like where the students are like better so but I couldn't because I was a migrant and I was an Afghan so when my mother went there, they said oh you're Afghan? so can't come.	If I could, I didn't want anywhere to be war, like stop killing the people.	In Iran when we were at school like some of them, like our teachers come to class and say who is Afghani here? raise your hand? who haven't paid the fees? they were separating us Afghan from Iranian	I want to be a soccer player and maybe a lawyer and a detective also. I wanted my family to be safe and no worries. My brother, I want him to be happy.
	I never seen Afghanistan. (it) is my home country of course but I haven't seen it ever. But I heard a lot and I've seen a lot of videos of the Taliban. Of even people in the mosque praying, they throw a bomb, the schools and any other places like they explode the bombs and they kill the people and the war is in all of the parts [of the country] but specially in Hazarah area, because they are shia, there is more	In Afghanistan we can't live there because there is war. It's been many years and because of the Taliban. They don't like Shia people and Hazarah people. And we are of course Hazarah and they don't like us there. They treat us like animals there. Like they kill people, they explode bombs and those kinds of things there. Especially for women that's not a good situation.	We had a lot of problems in Iran, like we challenge many things there and like we couldn't study. We could study but in school they not counting us as a human because they say oh, you are an Afghan, sometimes separating us from others.		My mother is sick but when we go to hospital, we can't go to some other hospitals that are better hospitals because they say you're a migrant and refugee so we can't accept you here	I want myself get my goals and I wish for other migrants too, to get their goals, and achieve their wishes

As noted by Braun and Clarke (2014), the process of coding is never linear, so it is important to record the evolution of codes and generation of themes (Byrne, 2021). Table 3 is an example of evolution of my codes. It was important to ensure that once the

dataset was fully coded and codes were collated, there was sufficient depth to examine the patterns within the data and the diversity of the perspectives conveyed by participants. It was necessary to ensure that codes pertained to more than one data item (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Table 3

Tracking Code Changes

#	Part	Data item	Iteration 3	Iteration 4
1	SN	We come to Malaysia. We thought we will have a good life; we will be saved in Malaysia. We can improve, we can make our wish [come true] and we came to Malaysia.	Expected to have a good life in Malaysia	Quality life/basic needs
2	SA	you cannot work. We are human and we need food. If my father doesn't go to work, from where we can take food? And then die.	Cannot work in Msia/	Quality life/ Employment
3	MA	Malaysia is good. Like here we are safe, there is no bomb. There is nothing to kill you. But we still have problems.	Msia is good but still have problems	Quality life/enduring challenges
4	AK	Like we have no insurance. Health is very important than anything in a person's life. If you are not healthy you can't do anything. So if you are sick you go to the hospital. Like no matter how much you have to give for medicine, visiting the doctors, you have to give them.is no matter. You don't have insurance you can't go to the hospital	Don't have health insurance	Quality life/health insurance

I then reviewed the collected codes through iteration 3 and 4 to determine a common feature or a significant pattern of meaning to create my first themes. As discussed earlier, themes do not emerge from the data – the construction of themes includes design and engineering of the themes according to the research question(s).

Finally, I revised and defined the collected themes and their significant patterns of meaning. At this stage, I compiled all final codes to identify overlapping themes, then reviewed and edited them a few times to ensure that the data relate to a central organizing

concept. To develop an understanding of how the themes relate to one another I took up the suggestion by Braun et al. (2019) to use thematic maps to visualize how the themes fit together and to tell the overall story of my data, as shown in Figure 2. Samples of the participants' storyboards are included in Figure 3.

Figure 2

Thematic Map

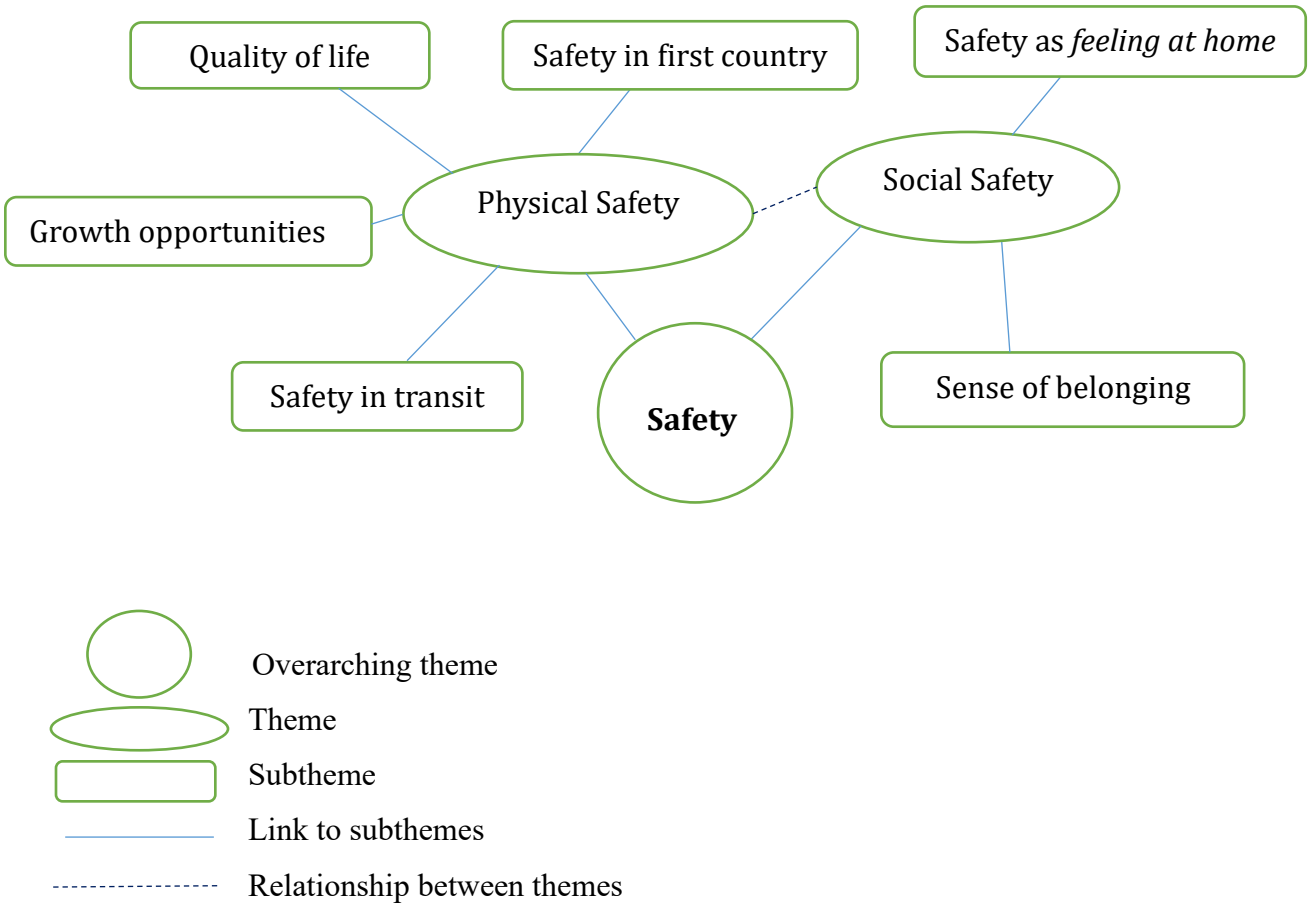


Figure 3

Examples of Completed Storyboards

3.7 Study Limitations

The present study was a small-*N* study of eight Farsi-speaking forced migrant youth. This study only explores data from female participants as the girls self-selected themselves into a group and were all friends and spoke the same language. Although it would have been interesting to compare the experiences of girls compared to boys, there were benefits to having a more homogeneous sample for this exploratory study as I did not want to introduce too many sources of potentially significant variation. Another limitation of the study is that the sample only included Shia Muslims, so that it was not possible to compare the experiences of Shia Muslims to the experiences of Sunni Muslims who were forced migrant youth in Malaysia.

Chapter Four: Results

This study was conducted to capture the meanings of "sense of belonging" and migration experiences from the perspectives of eight forced migrant girls. The findings are presented under one superordinate theme: safety, and two main themes: physical safety and social safety. Physical safety is discussed with four subthemes: safety in the first country[4], quality of life, growth opportunities, and safety in transit. Social safety is explored through the subthemes of feeling at home and sense of belonging.

Analysis of results led to the identification of two distinct groups of girls in this study: Group A, consisting of four girls who came from well-defined and stable backgrounds. They were citizens of the countries they were born in – Afghanistan and Iran – had birth certificates, and left their home countries to achieve certain goals. Group B, on the other hand, consisted of four girls who were born as refugees in Iran and were never granted any basic human rights, such as having a birth certificate, driver license, bank account, healthcare, education, work, or the ability to own property. In other words, Group B migrated to Malaysia to save their lives. In discussing the results, I synthesize the findings with the groups' experiences of their pre- and current migration experiences.

4. Safety

Safety is an indicator of belonging according to all participants. They shared stories of the ways their lives and their understanding of self were radically changed by being born as refugees in Iran or becoming refugees in Malaysia. Such changes influenced the participants' perception of the world and their surroundings. To them, the

[4] *First country* refers to the country in which the participants were born – not citizenship, as half the participants were not citizens of their birth countries.

world was unpredictable, unsafe, “risky, troubling, and unfamiliar” (Terry & Kayes, 2020, p. 2336), with endless waiting. This unsafety was not only via their financial, housing, and family economic statuses but also in social interactions with the outside world, affecting the way they perceived and actualized themselves.

4.1 Physical Safety

Physical safety refers to the actual day-to-day experiences the girls had in their countries of origin, countries of transit, and their current country of residence, Malaysia. This constructed theme speaks directly to safety in the first country, quality of life, growth opportunities, and safety in transit.

4.1.1 Safety in First Country

The girls in this study were born either in Afghanistan or Iran, but not all of them were citizens of those countries. Half of the participants, Group B, were Afghan girls who were born as refugees in Iran. As a result, they had to pay fees to get into the school system and for healthcare. Iranian children registered first, and if any spots were left available, Afghan families could register their children. Group B were never Afghan citizens and they spoke Farsi with an Iranian accent, yet they referred to themselves as being “from Afghanistan.” I discuss Group B first.

Akram was born in Tehran, Iran and said,

> I am from Afghanistan, and I am 14 years old. First, I want to start with Iran, the country I was born in. So, I was born in Iran, and I was studying there for 3 years, and the school was not good to us. When anything happened, they were saying it was Afghan people did the thing. And in the first years in school to register

> ourselves, they would say first Iranian should register and if there is a place you can come and register. In Iran actually, I don't have any good memories.

This quote suggests that Akram was not granted a safe social-physical space in school where she felt she could belong, make friends, and thrive. Group B described similar experiences accessing the healthcare system in Iran. They had to pay high fees to see a doctor and for medication. Due to sanctions and the inflation rate, the cost of living in Iran was already very high, and this influenced the socioeconomic status of those girls further. Their parents were allowed precarious, low-paying jobs, straining the families' emotional and physical health. Maryam's mother was sick in Iran, but they could never get a proper diagnosis because they could not afford doctors or medical tests.

Group A, on the other hand, reported push factors as ongoing civil war and facing discrimination as members of religious or political minority groups. This group reported a relatively higher financial security in their country of origin. Sahar said

> Why do we leave home? Because of war, the Taliban and the terrorists explode bombs everywhere they want. They exploded bombs in schools, we cannot study, at mosques so we cannot pray, at sport clubs, we can't sport, even they explode bombs in a wedding…. they exploded bombs in everywhere but mostly in Hazarah Areas people that they live. In one week, we have once or two times explode bombs, and the people cannot go out. Like we are Shia, and they don't like Shias. We cannot celebrate anything (religious) as people feel scared and they think maybe now Taliban will explode bombs so they cannot go out from their house. When our father leaves for work we have to say goodbye because we don't

> know if he comes back or no. We have to leave the country or we can't live, just like a dead person.

This is consistent with findings of Mahmud (2021) who explored the emotions of Syrian forced migrants in Berlin, Germany after the Syrian revolution. He discussed how life for many participants in Syria before the uprising in 2011 was described as " 'humiliation', 'shame', 'inability', 'injustice', 'cruelty' " (Mahmud, 2021, p. 38). Although for the Syrian participants, demonstrations against the government generated hope and revolutionary motivations, for the girls in this study, living under oppression was not an option. They had to leave in search for a place to feel belonging and safety.

Mina said, "Here [Malaysia], I had a pretty bad life because when in Afghanistan, we were kind of rich. I was spending money like stupid but when I came here it was hard." This financial strain of forced migrant families is also related to multiple moves before getting into the transit country.

> The first time I became a refugee is when I went to India, and I didn't find it that hard, so I thought being a refugee wasn't that hard. We went to other countries too; I was a baby I don't remember. The ones I remember are India and Pakistan. Pakistan was cool too but a bit harder than India. So, I thought that's the hardest a refugee can take. But then I came to Malaysia and I understood the real meaning of being a refugee. It was really really hard. [Mina]

This quote suggests forced migration is not a homogenous experience, and in my view, there can be no accurate preconceived notion or explanation of forced migration drives and experiences. In India, Sahar could afford to take her mother to see a doctor and

pay for her medication. While in Malaysia they could not afford to see a specialist for her mother's illness.

Having the security to participate in day-to-day living activities was identified an indicator of feeling being valued and validated as a human being and having rights to meet their basic needs as citizens. Besides an acceptable socioeconomic status, rights to mobility were not a big concern of girls in Group A. This was not the case for Group B though. One participant in Group B said she could never get a proper diagnosis for her mother's illness in Iran as refugees were not covered by health insurance and the fees were unaffordable.

Minority groups face unsafe situations even in their countries of origin. Cultural, political, and religious practices of the dominant groups can jeopardize the safety of minority groups. Limited chance of education, early marriages for girls, and unsafe living conditions for Shia Muslims in Afghanistan were the main push factors for the girls in Group A. Mina reflected on cultural practices in Afghanistan and how she thought migration saved her from that practice. "In my family there is a tradition that girls should marry before 25, not older. And they don't let you marry the person you like. They chose a husband that they think suits me."

Even though Iran is a relatively safe place for Afghan Shia Muslim families and the pressure to hide their cultural practices is less, refugees are still vulnerable to poor living conditions, detention, and deportation. Even though all the Afghan girls in Group B were born in Iran, they were never granted citizenship rights such as residency, free public education, healthcare, and work. For instance, education in Iran is free and Iran is a signatory to the 1951 refugee convention. However, the refugees and migrants have to

pay high fees for attending school. When asked about access to school in Malaysia, Group B said that the exclusion from school is not surprising to them because this is what they experienced in Iran. Maryam said,

> When I was at Grade 2, they took a test from me and I was accepted as a what they call, clever? [gifted student] yeah, and like I could go to a better school like where the students are like better so, but I couldn't because I was a migrant and I was Afghan so when my mother went there, they said oh you're Afghan? so can't come.

Fear of authorities, repartition of family members, and facing disruption to life routines is not exclusively experienced by refugees. Ziba, who is an Iranian national grew up in a household where her parents were holding different views from the government and that made her day-to-day life risky and troublesome. Research repeatedly shows that inconsistency in children's lives negatively impacts their physical and emotional development (Choi et al., 2020; Finkelhor et al., 2015; Sayyah et al., 2022).

> I only got one brother. They [her parents] tried to not to show their problems. when they were having problems, they just put us in my grandparents' house or my aunties' house so not in our house when we are having a problem so that we don't face any problem in Iran. I used to go to my mother's side and my brother would go to my father's. I was so close to my grandma, we used to go out together with my grandfather, while my mother and father having their problems and solving problems

4.1.2 Quality of Life

Being a forced migrant is an insecure life as forced migrants' status is first and foremost rooted in precarity. As previously described, because Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 refugee convention, forced migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are perceived as being there illegally. Being illegal not only means being denied access to basic human rights but also leads to forced migrants being seen as criminals deserving fines, detention, and deportation. Criminalization of migration was identified as another indicator of precarity in forced migration. Fearing migration officers, detention, deportation, and loss of school due to migration status influenced girls' feelings of belonging and at home in either Iran or Malaysia. Maryam said, "I was safe in Iran because there was no war, and nobody got killed, but it was possible to be deported in any minute. And not only us, all the Afghans were in danger."

Illegality affects the very being of forced migrants in Malaysia. Similar to being in Iran, forced migrants in Malaysia are not allowed to obtain driver's licenses, bank accounts, or regular jobs. Illegality means no access to public resources such as education, training, and healthcare. In Malaysia, informal, nonaccredited temporary education is offered by the UN or other charitable organizations which are already strained due to the large number of refugee and asylum-seeker youth, and they operate in small, not well-functioning buildings. Nonaccredited education means that forced migrants have to go through schooling and the process of getting high school diplomas again after resettlement, regardless of the wait time for resettlement. The education of forced migrant youth is at the behest of individual sponsors or the UN. To access

accredited, quality education, forced migrant girls would have to go to unaffordable private schools. Sana said,

> Also, no school. It's ok that we have school here (the UN school) but… I don't know about others but you know that you cannot got to other schools, Malay schools, international schools. For the [private] school they take money. If you have no money, you can't go there. And the Malay school you can't go because you are a refugee.

Forced migrants do not have free healthcare in Malaysia, and they can only access specific clinics and hospitals that allow refugees and cover some parts of the costs. To seek quality healthcare, forced migrants would have to pay an international rate which again is well beyond what they could afford. Three participants reported that their mothers were ill and that the care they receive from clinics was not sufficient. They felt frustrated that they could not find a clear diagnosis for their mothers' illnesses or access effective medications. Sick family members strain the youths' mental health and make them feel even more vulnerable and weak.

Sahar said "If one person sick in your family, all the family will be sad. Mom is a very important person in the family. If your father or siblings sick, no matter, but when your mom's sick, you feel I'm sick, yeah." Sahar's sister Sana added,

> My mom's sickness. Thinking about her and even the sight of her die bothers me a lot (started crying). Thinking of a life without her destroys me. I know when we go from here, she will be better. She can go to her doctor and get her medication. I have so much anxiety about her and I can't study well. My mom sees me

> worrying about her and everything else and gets even more sick. I don't like studying here."

Restricted movement is another issue faced by forced migrants in Iran and in Malaysia. In Malaysia, forced migrants are not allowed to move out of the province in which they requested asylum. Restricted movement means fewer opportunities available to live a full life in transit. Mina said,

> The only problem I have in Malaysia is that I am stuck in Kuala Lumpur because our UN card only supports us in Kuala Lumpur and we can't go to another place, for example. And since you are a refugee, you can't even travel somewhere else.

Limited rights to mobility mean limited possibilities of wellness. Paired with limited access to affordable quality healthcare, those forced migrants with chronic or undiagnosed illnesses are stuck in a limbo, an unsafe experience for those who struggle with illnesses and need to travel to see a doctor or seek out work opportunities.

The precarious life of forced migrants in transit – rightlessness, illegality, insecurity, and vulnerability – created physically unsafe conditions for the girls. They described an endless fear of migration officers. Fearing not only for themselves, the girls constantly worried whether their parents and sibling were caught because they felt that migration officers were pretty much everywhere all the time. They said the interrogation of forced migrants is often bound with bribes. The officers ask for money and if the forced migrants aren't able to pay right away, they risk jail and deportation. Sana reported

> Not only the Afghan people, all the migrants, their fear is from the police, especially the people who don't have the paper and the token-UN card. They are

> scared when they go out or go to work, that police will stop them and ask for ID card. If you don't have ID card, they will take you to the jail. If you have the paper or the refugee card, the UN can help you go out. If not, UN won't help you get out from there. You have to give money to them (police) and they let you out.

Heavy patrols mean forced migrants are vulnerable in the simple acts of going out, driving, or working. Ziba said, "Here, in Malaysia you can't drive because of the police. If the police caught you, they ask for money. If you don't have money, they will take you to jail. You can't work here". Maryam said "My father works but we get too worried when he goes to work if immigration catch him and deport him back."

The lack of physical safety affected the youths' quality of life at a broader level. Denied access to regular jobs, forced migrants are often hired for precarious, back-breaking jobs with pay often half the regular pay for that job. This creates life threatening situations such as food insecurity for forced migrant families, especially those with large families or ill members. Sahar said, "You cannot work. We are human and we need food. If my father doesn't go to work, from where we can take food? And then die."

Neglect and rejection are further implications of being viewed as illegal. This rejection is experienced in day-to-day life, from Malay citizens and from the UN and the receiving countries in how they process the forced migrants' status. Lack of state protection makes refugee youth vulnerable to hostile treatment by some Malay citizens. There is no policy or regulation to support them while in transit, and Akram said "They ask me why not going back to your country? They bother me everywhere. On the bus. They look at us and ask questions, where are you from, why did you come to Malaysia".

Youth expressed gratitude toward their school and the generosity of the sponsors. However, they reported, they would like to see clear and true representations of forced migrant youth and their lived experiences. Some participants recalled a school field trip to a fundraising event for forced migrant people in Malaysia. The girls felt humiliated and pitied. Sahar said

> There was a woman from Thailand who cried and said things of her experience, but she said them in a way that people thought we have experienced the same challenges. For example, she said they caught us and they took my parents, we lived in a camp and didn't have food to eat and things, there was war where I lived and so on. I was asking myself why would she share her life story? She does this in every meeting she goes to, I've seen her a few times in other events. I understand that there is war in her country but this is not the experience of every refugee in the world. They even didn't know we got to Malaysia by plane, they though we drive or sailed a boat to Kuala Lumpur.

About that field trip, as all the participants said people had looked at them with pity, Mina explained,

> Everyone looked at us with pity. I would never forget that day. We are happy in school all the time. Then people ask us where do you live and a lot of personal questions that we thought it's none of their business! The way they looked at us made me feel there must be something wrong with us. One of the people who was sitting beside me held my chin and said, "Oh darling, you must be very sad in the school". Then I gently pushed her hand aside and said, "No we are very happy, indeed. We go outside, we go to field trips, we are happy here." Then she asked,

> "How does your school look like?" I said, "It is all broken, did you want to visit it?" …. They asked questions like, "Where do you live? Who pays the rent? I said, "I have a family, my dad works." They thought we are orphans or unaccompanied. They asked us in which orphanage you grew up. I said, "What? No, I have a family here. They also asked me if the school gives me pocket money. I said, "No, my family gives me money."

This demonstrated that the stories of refugee youth were reduced to one story of an adult refugee woman from Thailand, and a school director who is a citizen of Malaysia talked on behalf of youth refugees' experiences. Because adults spoke for the youth, the attendees got preconceived ideas about them and engaged in conversations with the youth with already shaped biases. Those perceived notions made youth even more vulnerable to having their boundaries violated with personal and patronizing questions being asked.

The UNHCR is the main support system in place for forced migrants, and the participants expressed their disappointment with the UNHCR. Maryam said,

> We are not allowed to work, no education and health insurance. We are all human being and disease and sickness is inevitable. I think now that we are deprived of all these rights, at least they need to help things move faster. I want the UN to help our migration files process faster. For how long do you think we can tolerate such situations?

4.1.3 Growth Opportunities

Although being a forced migrant in countries like Malaysia where youth are strained from not having access to basic rights, the participants reported feelings of change and maturity due to migration. For the girls, change included learning English and

math, physical and developmental growth, wearing hijab, better understanding of family situations, and feeling more responsible for themselves and their siblings. Mina said,

> I don't know how I changed but my mom tells me I have changed. She says it's not just because of a changing environment, it's because I was younger then and I'm not growing in our country. I would love to grow in my own country, but I can't because of the war. I have to grow somewhere else and become someone else, in somewhere else, not in my hometown.

The participants in Group B did not report feeling as much change as a result of migration due to their past refugee experiences. Rosa said she did not feel changed: "No. because I still want the things I wanted as a child. It's the same. In Iran they take more money from us, here also. Here cannot go to a hospital or better schools."

Maryam said,

> Actually, I don't feel any change because in Iran also we weren't part of the people. We were as migrants there. They were not counting us… Here also the people and the government of Malaysia don't accept us and in Iran also. So there is not much difference.

Forced migration is equated with limited social safety. The isolation and fear resulting from the criminalization of forced migration leads refugees to go to other refugees to resolve issues or answer questions. This makes them even more vulnerable to being taken advantage of, which creates a cycle of bad experiences translating to less trust so they limit their social network further and their feelings of loneliness increase. All these lead to even more limited growth opportunities for youth in transit. Ziba said,

> We came to Malaysia; everything was strange to me. Because we were new here, everyone would deceive us. We wanted to ask for direction for a place, they would take money from us to tell the place. Like we asked where is help centre like MSRI, they would say pay us and we tell you the direction.
>
> I asked, "People on the street?"
>
> Ziba said, "Not people on the street, people who knew we are new here. They were like they are new here, let's take advantage of them."
>
> Me: "Were they Malaysian or Iranian?"
>
> Ziba: "They were Iranian."

4.1.4 Safety in Transit

Forced migration does not only mean a change in one's citizenship or migration status, it also creates significant changes in everyday life. Changed circumstances paired with new, different experiences in transit are complex. Reflecting on this complexity, participants compared and contrasted their lived experiences in their first country and constantly negotiated ways to tolerate the transition. Participants in Group A expressed feelings of significant safety from conflict in Afghanistan, influencing their overall mental health. Sahar said, "Malaysia is good. Like here we are safe, there is no bomb. There is nothing to kill you. But we still have problems." As mentioned above, limited access to education and healthcare and restricted mobility as well as the being part of the religion minority pushed girls further to the edges of society.

Most of the girls reported that being Shia was important to them but they could not openly practice it in Malaysia by going to the mosque or talking about it to others. Tina said "Being Shia living in Malaysia is very difficult. If people know you're Shia,

they will kill you. Whenever they ask us, we just say we are Muslim." Sana said if Malaysia offered her citizenship, she would not accept it as the country is not accepting of Shia minorities. "Being a Shia is very important to me. So, if I can't celebrate Shia's events (i.e., Moharram) then life would be meaningless to me. That's why I won't accept their citizenship."

For the girls in Group A, living in Malaysia meant a freer life with less control and restriction from their parents on their choice of clothing, going out with friends, or participating in group sports such as soccer. Sahar said,

> Overall, I feel we are more free here. In Afghanistan, even when my dad came home from work, we were afraid of him but now poof, not at all. Sometimes my father teases us and say you are going wild here (wearing no hijab at home), what would you do when you get resettled in a third country."

However, for Group B who came from Iran the experience was a bit more complex. Accepting and respectful interaction with the Malay citizens made Malaysia a safer space for girls who had been already born refugees in Iran. Group B reported have received more respectful interactions with Malaysian citizens compared to those they had in Iran. The overall respect and acceptance make the transit life easier in Malaysia. Maryam said, "Here if we don't tell them anything they would not tell us things. Of course, they don't allow us in school, but unless you engage in a conversation with them, they wouldn't tell you anything."

However, having limited interactions with citizens and refraining from engaging in conversations to avoid scrutinizing questions has irreversible effects. Ziba said,

> So, half of my life I've been living in Malaysia, so I don't really remember anything from Iran. That's why I started learning things like being a teenager in this foreign country. So, I started to learn a lot of things in Malaysia. I grew up here. One thing I didn't learn here is their language. Is really hard and I wasn't interested, that's why I didn't learn that language.

Both groups reported a better quality education premigration to Malaysia. Sahar said, "Something we used to have in our country but do not have in here is school. Here schools are not good quality. Like we are just migrants so we just study to learn something but not good quality." Sana said, "I don't like studying here. School was better in Afghanistan and I have no love for school in Malaysia. My father always says had we stayed in Afghanistan you'd be more successful in school".

Sahar said, "You cannot get to other schools, Malay schools, international or private school. For the private school, they take money. If you have no money, you cannot go there. And the Malay school you can't go because you are a refugee." For Group B participants, quality education was intertwined with paying fees and ongoing discrimination from school staff and other students. Maryam said, "We could study but in school they not counting us as a human because they say oh, you are an Afghan, sometimes separating us from others."

Denial of refugee rights in Malaysia means no policies in place to protect the rights of those who reside there as FMs. This includes no guaranteed access to healthcare, no access to government sponsored education (except in rare cases), and no social protection. FMs are scattered across cities like KL and often live in cramped spaces, (often 20 people per single family unit) in low-cost buildings. In addition, Malaysia has a

loose migrant work policy which often leads to FMs being viewed as illegal migrant workers. This promotes a misconception by Malaysian nationals of the FMs' living situation; FMs are widely seen by nationals as migrant labourers rather than individuals who are fleeing persecution in their home countries. This misunderstanding is reported to lead to many Malaysian nationals remaining unaware of the harsh realities of FM lives in Malaysia. Meanwhile, FMs have to work to survive in Malaysia. They are often employed in low-paying jobs which demand long hours and are often dangerous (Kok et al., 2021; Wake & Cheung, 2016). Rightlessness not only pushes teenage boys into working precarious jobs, but is also harmful to FM girls as they are pushed to stay home with limited access to the public sphere. Such adverse experiences not only lead to educational underachievement, but also increases the vulnerability of FM youth to suicidal behaviour, poor mental health, substance abuse, and criminality. (Kok et al., 2021).

4.2 Social Safety

Social safety refers to all the social-emotional experiences participants had in their experiences of displacement. The subthemes feeling at home and sense of belonging are discussed to capture the meanings the girls attributed to their social safety.

4.2.1 Safety as "Feeling at Home"

The goal of this study was to understand forced migrant youths' sense of belonging while living on the margins of the society with little access to basic human rights. As the data analysis progressed, I realized my questions of belonging and sense of belonging were rooted in a sense of luxury and security. I realized a sense of belonging is

influenced and shaped by factors such as safety, inclusion, equality, and being sought as human beings not by a specific status like being a refugee.

For youth in transit, feeling at home went beyond a physically familiar place. To them, home was where they were recognized as human beings and were loved and respected. Participants in Group A articulated feeling at home as being bound with respect, love, and a route to achieve their dreams. They came from their countries of origin and had a clear idea of what it would take for them to feel at home. They actively looked forward to resettlement to feel at home. Mina said,

> Home, for some others, it might be a place where there is a roof and four walls but for me, its somewhere I feel loved and safe. somewhere I can be free and can trust people around me. That's where home to me.

She added, "Home is where you achieve your goals."

For participants in Group B, feeling at home was bound with safety in general as well. They reported that they have lived in limbo for a long time but were hopeful to finally get somewhere. When asked, "What does home mean to you?" Maryam answered, "I was born a refugee. Actually, I haven't ever thought of that. We are suffering here but we will get to a good destination."

For both groups, feeling at home was bound with having family members safe, happy, and healthy along with making good memories and share laughter. Youth reported feeling the most at home when at school with their peers. They said that in precarious, stressful situations, home as a physical space became rather irritating as they witnessed their families suffer. Sahar said,

> I am happy here at school, but when I go home and see my mom sick, when I see they are sad, they are just waiting for when we can go, I don't have the feeling I have at school. At school we laugh, make fun with each other but at home is not like this. When I go home, I change.

4.2.2 Sense of Belonging

For forced migrants, a sense of belonging becomes congruent with a sense of self: a sense of who they are and what their situation is, and to some extent, they feel they belong to their new situations. Despite their young age, the girls were disillusioned with their migration journeys. They thought of who they were and how their lives were shaped by migration. Ziba said,

> I always thought about it. Where am I belong to? Iran? not Iran, because I moved already from there. To Malaysia? They don't accept us here and we are still waiting to go to another country. So, where I belong to? I always ask myself this question since you told us this. I always ask myself and I'm like maybe I don't belong anywhere. But I'm still hopeful to belong somewhere which is United State. Hopefully, in the future, when I get my passport and my identity card for a place, that's where I belong to. But in general, where I belong to is my family.

As the quote suggests, sense of belonging begs the questions of sense of self, feeling of belonging to country of origin (if any), countries of transit, what belonging means to them, and what it takes for someone to feel they belong. Those girls who came to Malaysia at a young age were still navigating their sense of self in the midst of statuslessness. Ziba said,

> I don't think so I'm still anyone. I'm waiting to be accepted to a group of people which I'm going to be hopefully accepted for America. So… we will be a new person, make a new life, a new chapter, a new present. I'll make myself a new [Ziba], you know, so I don't see myself as any.

Although all participants were looking forward to resettlement and struggling with their sense of self in Malaysia, they all reported being proud of their countries of origin. Mina said, "I'm really proud to be an Afghan and no matter where I go, I'll still told them I'm an Afghan." Even though life in Afghanistan is not always easy for girls, the participants thought it was important to identify as Afghan and people should be proud of that. Mina said, "It's really hard for girls to live there [in Afghanistan] but still, if you say you're from Afghanistan people should be amazed that you still think of your country as a good place."

Having a country to call your own influences one's sense of belonging. The participants also reflected on their sense of belonging in connection to their country of origin and migration experiences. For girls, to belong went beyond peace and safety. Sahar from Group A said,

> In Malaysia, everywhere you go, you have peace, but you don't feel like you belong there... I used to think my country was not very important because I was not a migrant. I was born in Afghanistan and then I came here, I didn't know when you miss your country how you'd feel. When I came [here] I said it doesn't matter that there were bombs, it's ok.

This however, was different for the girls in Group B. Most of the Group B participants reported that all they knew was a life of being a refugee and sense of

belonging to a particular place was not as salient for them. They never lived otherwise to know what it felt like to not to be a refugee. Tina said “I was never in Afghanistan to experience a life not being a refugee.” They said they knew they were refugees from the beginning in Iran and that they were never part of the mainstream. Tina said “I never wished not to be a refugee because I was born a refugee and I never had an experience other than that.”

Exclusion on the basis of religion and race is a social unsafety many forced migrants experience. Malaysia practices a Sunni branch of Islam. Sunni refugees from certain countries – Syria and Rohingya – are allocated relatively safer living conditions. For example, they are issued work visas so that some of them are allowed to work while waiting for resettlement, even though they are still refugees and illegal. This creates a discriminatory situation for other Sunni refugees that come from Africa – South Sudan and Somalia – and for the Shia refugees who predominantly come from Afghanistan and Iran. Religious discrimination means most of the Sunni refugees are welcomed in mosques but not the Shia ones. Maryam said, “Being Shia living in Malaysia is very difficult... Whenever they ask us, we just say we are Muslim.” Sana said she would never accept Malaysian citizenship if offered because she likes to practice her religious events. “Being a Shia is very important to me. So, if I can't celebrate Shia’s events, then life would be meaningless to me.”

Refugee status was not found as an indicator of a sense of belonging. The participants did not view being a refugee as inherently problematic. Rather, the root causes – the treatment by the state – that resulted in the exclusion of and discrimination against refugees was rather problematic to the girls. Tina said, “I don’t blame my status

as a refugee but I think why these people treat us this way. We had to leave otherwise our life was in danger."

Feelings of belonging are not fixed and prescriptive. Belonging is an interdependent, self-made construct which is strongly associated with individuals' physical and social safety. Girls reported belonging as feeling safe, peaceful, and respectful, with their family members being safe and having opportunities to thrive.

Chapter Summary

As a temporary place of residence, Malaysia provides little physical safety for FM youth and thus it is not surprising that youth in this study conveyed no sense of belonging to Malaysia. There are no government policies to protect the rights of refugees or to provide for their basic housing, health or education. Youth participants described living in constant fear of migration authorities or any uniformed authorities. They often witness their parents or caregivers being arrested by the authorities which leads to bribery, detention or deportation of their parents and adult caregivers. These experiences expose FM youth to stressful situations which may cause them to develop mental health problems such as anxiety, high levels of stress, depression and hopelessness.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

"This is not a crisis of numbers; it is a crisis of solidarity." Ban Ki-moon, 2015

The focus of this study was to find out what it meant to be a forced migrant youth living in protracted displacement in transit countries. Concepts such as sense of self, feeling at home, feelings of belonging to country of origin (if any) and to countries of transit were investigated. Over the course of the study, I realized it was better to shift the question from how forced migrants felt in displacement to examining what belonging meant to them and what it took for them to feel they belonged. What strategies could facilitate the sense of belonging? The study highlighted that belonging is a felt need that is fluid and influenced by the surrounding society and social interactions. Belonging can be experienced with reference to a large scale, such as feeling a sense of belonging to one's country of origin and its people, on an immediate scale, such as belonging to family or a peer group, or as an abstract personal sentiment, such as belonging to happiness and peace. In this section, I strive to explain contributing factors in belonging or non-belonging in forced migration. Understanding these factors might inform policy-making processes on a larger societal scale.

The exclusion of FM youth from most aspects of life in Malaysia may lead to limited physical and social safety. Not feeling safe negatively impacts a youth's sense of belonging. Some studies investigate the experiences of people on the move with reference to 'place' and the search for a 'place' to call home or, conversely, the problem of dispossession (of physical property or one's place) as something to be solved by finding a new place or being 're-homed' (Ganguly-Scrase & Lahiri-Dutt, 2013; Relph, 2016).

For youth who were born refugees, the situation resembles not only limited sense of belonging to Malaysia but also encountering feelings of *placelessness*. Relph explains that placenessness "involves detachment from the particularity of places. For an individual it is the experience of not belonging anywhere, of being an outsider or a refugee" (2016, p. 21). In addition, I argue that, for refugees and FMs, developing a sense of home and belonging in Malaysia is almost impossible as Malaysia is a liminal 'non-place' for refugees and most undocumented people. It means FM youth are not given the chance to make Malaysia 'theirs' (Hoffstaedter, 2014; Relph, 2016). Malaysia remains indefinitely a non-place space for FMs as it is neither "relational, or historical, or concerned with [their] identity" (Augé, 1995, pp. 77–78). Refugees remain temporary passengers who live in the shadows and move through Malaysia without leaving any lasting mark on and in it (Hoffstaedter, 2014). In such situations, there is no space for resistance and contestation. For FMs in Malaysia, Malaysia cannot be viewed as *home* and the youth cannot feel *at home* there. FM youth cannot inscribe such feelings with their logic, nor can they make it legible for themselves (Hoffstaedter, 2014). In other words, Malaysia remains a foreign land that does not accept refugee and FM youth (Hoffstaedter, 2014).

The current findings suggest that FM youth are more likely to find their 'place' as an abstract, psychological or interpersonal space not necessarily manifested materially but rather in, as some participants expressed, "opportunities to thrive" or "being safe [from persecution or detention police]." Even their physical safety seemed to have less to do with having their place as it had to do with not being harassed, persecuted, ridiculed, detained or constrained. For the youth, no doubt having a place to live with family

mattered - even a rented, over-crowded, temporary dwelling was enough to feel some respite from the everyday oppression of life in a hostile environment. But this did not make them feel at home or contribute to a sense of belonging beyond the confines of their temporary shelter.

Not being recognized as refugees or FMs, populations on the move are technically illegal, undocumented migrants and are often stuck in the political manufacture of class of cheap and exploitable, undocumented workers, which one might imagine has helped to improve Malaysia's economy for the past decades. In such situations, refugees and their families are tolerated when they are needed, and expelled and disposed when the economy declines (Abella & Ducanes 2009). This is challenging for refugees as "they have nowhere to return when the economy faces a downturn. They simply lose their job and subsequently their housing and their ability to secure food" (Hoffstaedter, 2014, p. 872). Malaysia's active involvement in various international modernization projects and 'poverty reduction' plans is malicious, as they simultaneously give rise to poverty and disempowerment for displaced people while exploiting the surplus value of readily exploitable and expendable underclass created by their policy of abandonment regarding forced migrants (Ganguly-Scrase & Lahiri-Dutt, 2013).

Police surveillance and brutality are directly related to the liminal status of refugees. Even though refugees and those FMs who are registered with the UNHCR have identification cards, they are still vulnerable to detention at any moment. If refugees get into migration detention centres it is almost impossible to come out without the help of the UNHCR agents. This enables corruption and bribery at the local police level where money is demanded from FMs to prevent a relative from being sent to migrant detention

centre. In situations where refugees have to carry their cellphone with them all the time in case they receive a phone call from the UNHCR, it is not only an endless wait for such calls, but also a significant stressor when their cellphones are apprehended by police officers, potentially extending their wait for the critical call from the UNHCR (Hoffstaedter, 2014). These unpredictable yet always possible abuses contribute significantly to the sense of non-belonging for FMs youth.

Exploring the sense of belonging of forced migrant youth in Europe, Kohli (2014) found that the youth "transition through three stages 'safety', 'belonging' and 'success', as [they] move within and across spatial, temporal and maturational dimensions of change" (Kohli, 2011, 2014 as cited in McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021, p. 799). While schools are identified as places of safety in which children have safe spaces for healing and support to reduce psychological distress, forced migrants' insecure status, lack of reliable access to schooling, experiences of bullying (Guo et al., 2019), unfamiliar pedagogies and practices, and lack of specialized teachers (Hek, 2005) are threats to a sense of safety (Kohli, 2014, McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021; Sleijpen et al., 2017). Belonging is a complex and continuous process which is shaped by the building of a series of connections across a range of systems (Hiorth, 2019; McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). Education, described in many reports as providing children with means to contribute to societies by encouraging them to construct new relationships with others and with their transit country, could improve the overall well-being of forced migrant youth. However, this understanding of a key determinant of sense of safety and belonging underscores the challenge for forced migrants in countries such as Malaysia where they are deemed illegal and denied many of the normative settings and opportunities that

promote safety and belonging. Two main factors jeopardize forced migrant youth experiences in Malaysia: nonaccredited education offered by nonprofit organizations and the high youth school dropout rate when they reach teenage years. Records show that 30 per cent of school-age refugee children in Malaysia were registered in 133 community learning centres run by the nongovernmental organizations or religious and humanitarian groups (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018). Refugee children attending refugee-run community-based educational centres are unable to attain educational qualifications recognized in Malaysia or elsewhere (Ball & Torok, 2022; Kok et al., 2021; Razali et al., 2015).

Adolescent forced migrant girls often have no choice but to stay at home without any form of education, and teenage boys often work illegally in shopping malls, construction sites, and restaurants to help provide for their family. Research indicates that such experiences create vulnerabilities for youth that may be expressed as mental health problems, suicidal behaviours, substance abuse, criminality, and educational underachievement (Kok et al., 2021; Vaghri et al., 2019). Other displacement-related stressors, such as discrimination by local authorities, lack of social supports, and underemployment contribute to the poor mental health of forced migrant youth in Malaysia (Kim, 2016; Kok et al., 2021; Vaghri et al., 2019). The findings of the current study highlight that even though Malaysia strives for a more equitable society, the state is not upholding the rights of forced migrant children under the UNCRC and the UN SDGs that Malaysia pledged to in 2015.

As discussed at the start of the thesis, refugees and asylum seekers have three hypothetical options: a) voluntary repatriation to their home country, b) local integration

in the host country, and c) resettlement to a third country. Repatriation remains possible only for some and resettlement is a rare outcome for refugees globally. Because Malaysia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, local integration is not an option for the refugees; Malaysia can only be used as a transit country. Resettlement to a third country relies on a functional global system where third countries, especially those that are the wealthiest globally, significantly increase the number of refugees and asylum seekers who are admitted. This "leaves refugees in uncertainty, potentially for decades, without formal, robust protection or the provision of basic human rights, such as the right to work, security, healthcare, and education" (Loganathan et al., 2022, p. 8).

5.1 Recommendations

This study suggests significant anxiety from multiple sources experienced by FM girls in Malaysia. They wait indefinitely for resettlement while being painfully dependent on the goodwill of NGOs and religious organizations to help them access education, healthcare, and livelihood. Meanwhile, the numbers of FMs around the world is rising as more people flee from conflict areas (Hoffstaedter, 2014). Based on the findings of the current study, considered alongside review of relevant literature provided earlier, efforts by government and nongovernment actors are needed to significantly reduce the length of time that youth spend in transit, promote a sense of belonging, combat discrimination, fulfill basic needs, and ensure access to quality accredited education and healthcare.

The most urgent and significant reform would be for Malaysia to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention. Following the refugee convention would make a huge difference in the lives of FM youth and their families because local integration would then become an option, refugee rights would be upheld, and refugees would be treated with more dignity.

Even if Malaysia does not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is crucial that the government at least live up to the UNCRC and other agreements such as the CDWN and the SDGs they pledged to achieve by 2030. The Malaysian government must lift the five reservations on the UNCRC, particularly Article 2 (principle of nondiscrimination), Article 28(1)(a) to make primary education compulsory and available free to all, and Article 37 (the prohibition of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and life imprisonment). If the Malaysian government took those actions, physical and social safety for FM youth in Malaysia would be attainable because FM youth would be viewed as equal to Malaysian youth citizens: Random stop and searches and detention for little or no reason should stop, as should harassment, bribery and extortion. I recommend a public inquiry into police abuse of FMs. Relevant authorities must prevent "othering" of refugee youth and minimize racism by questioning the (in)activity of authorities on addressing this issue (Burck & Hughes, 2018).

A significant finding of this study is that FM youth in Malaysia need safety and a sense of *home*, meaning stability (Burck & Hughes, 2018). Almost 90% of the world's forced migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are hosted in developing countries (Matlin et al., 2018). While Malaysia is viewed as a transit country, FMs there are not in transit; rather, they are living in a state of protracted displacement. Children and youth may be born into this liminal space and spend their entire childhoods as "illegal aliens" in the place of their birth. Efforts should be made to help FM youth access accredited, formal education equivalent to that available to citizen youth. Given that displaced people spend an average of nearly 20 years waiting for a resolution to their displacement, the active inclusion of FM youth in everyday life can allow them to participate in society as healthy,

successful residents, regardless of their migration status. The government could acknowledge the significant contributions of FMs to improving Malaysia's economy and consider providing the FN children with better developmental foundations

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Baak (2019), that for forced migrant or refugee young people to feel a sense of belonging, it is crucial that they be included in everyday social engagements and practices that directly target elimination of racism and othering. Ganguly-Scrase and Lahiri-Dutt suggested this can be achieved by investing in the "accelerated development of displaced communities, such that they have appropriate livelihood opportunities and are not left behind the wider economy in the time it takes for them to resettle" (2013, p. 8).

I would like to address the ineffectiveness of the three admission criteria introduced by the UNHCR as possible resettlement pathways for refugees regardless of their age or refugee status. These three criteria are in addition to the UNHCR complementary pathways and include "humanitarian, skill-based, and community-based pathways. Humanitarian-based complementary pathways may include humanitarian admission programs, humanitarian visas, and family reunification. Skill-based complementary pathways include opportunities for migration based on employment or education, such as jobs or student scholarships offered to well-qualified refugees. Community-based complementary pathways include initiatives through which citizens, community groups, or nonprofit organizations can sponsor a refugee on their own" (Solf & Rehberg, 2021, Complementary Pathways section, para. 2). From my viewpoint, none on these pathways can facilitate the resettlement of the FM youth in the present study as most of these criteria rely on refugees' qualifications rather than their protection needs.

For example, the FM youth in the present study cannot access the resettlement via the education or employment visa as they receive no accredited education or any form of job training in Malaysia.

Although for the last few decades the UNHCR has been responsible for submitting the vast majority of resettlement referrals, reports have frequently been "hamstrung by limited funding and challenging political dynamics in countries of asylum and resettlement" (Solf & Rehberg, 2021, para. 4). While the number of global refugees continues to grow, the UNHCR resettlement system is clearly under strain. As crises mount, the system will either need to adapt to effective realistic means of resettlement or will find itself increasingly marginalized as a tool for protection (Solf & Rehberg, 2021).

It is incumbent on the UN to exert more effective pressure on countries of asylum and resettlement (mostly developed countries) to increase the numbers accepted for resettlement and to prioritize, not only unaccompanied minors (which is generally already a priority) but families with children and youth, and particularly those born in non-signatory states to forced migrant parents.

This brings us to the resettlement rate of refugees to safe countries which is chronically low. Not only are the third countries (which are often Global North countries) reluctant to resettle larger numbers of refugees, but also, they feed into antimigration sentiment through securitization and politicization of migration. Most recently, countries including Canada have demonstrated, through its welcoming of vast numbers of Ukrainian asylum seekers, prioritization of migrants in its resettlement policies based on ethnic and religious preferences. Canada received over 32,000 Ukrainian in 2022 (Osman, 2022). If resolving the refugee crisis can be so well-organized and expedient,

why is the resettlement of other refugees remaining at around 1% of the global refugee population waiting to be resettled? (UNHCR, 2021b). In 2021, fewer than 39,000 refugees out of 20.7 million were resettled, which is a fraction of a percent (UNHCR, 2022b).

Finally, regarding the role that the international community can play in FM youth migration experiences, international law should recognize that accompanied youth are not simply baggage carried by adults (Ball, personal communication, August 19, 2022; Bhabha, 2014). Nongovernmental organizations could improve their services to young refugees and FMs by first listening to them to better understand how they are experiencing their displacement situation, and what the youth view as top priorities for assistance. The youth may prioritize different needs than those prioritized by aid and resettlement agencies; for some it could be gender-based-violence, for some a lack of accredited education, for others, it is psychological trauma, and for some it is sustaining connection to cultures of origin without being repatriated, (Ball, personal communication, August 19, 2022). Once the needs are identified, then the NGOs could develop tools and approaches that would benefit youth regarding their concerns and their situation. For example, youth-centred methods of research and practice, such as the PMSN – now called Storyboard Peers – offers one youth-centred approach that is attractive to youth, and provides psychosocial benefits, while also yielding rich insights into youths' concerns, capacities, needs and goals (Ball, personal communication, August 19, 2022).

5.2 Limitations of the Study

This study had a number of limitations. First, it was limited in size and scope. This study could be considered an exploratory study due to its small sample size of eight

participants, its single gender (female), and common religious identification of the participants (Shia Muslim). Other limitations include that the data were collected from only one centre in Malaysia and included only the narratives of FM youth who were registered by the UNHCR, so that the findings may not be generalizable to asylum-seeker or stateless youth. Finally, this study was conducted in a non-signatory state at a particular time (late 2019) and the findings cannot be generalized to the states that are signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

5.2 Future Research Directions

Feelings of safety for forced migrant youths are not sufficiently discussed in literature. They are often explored in relationship with other factors such as education or coping strategies as described briefly in this study. The results of this study make clear that feelings of safety underlie all aspects of youths' experiences of forced migration. Further emphasis on safety in transit in research and in practice is essential.

More research is needed about the migration experiences of children and youth and their experiences either in protracted displacement or on the move. More research is needed about child and youth migrants in the Global South. The vast majority of youth migration studies and intervention approaches focus on that one per cent of migrants who are eventually resettled in third countries while 99% of the refugee youth are facing extremely difficult day-to-day realities as refugees or as illegal migrants in transit countries. There is a need to study gender as a determinant of migration experiences and outcomes. Studies are needed to explore how migration experiences are shaped by the degree of fit between the migrant and their transit country in terms of significant dimensions such as religion, country of origin, language, appearance in terms of skin

colour, clothing, external indicators of wealth or status, and so on. As well, this study made it clear that migration experiences are greatly shaped by whether the country in which one is in transit recognizes forced migrants as legally permitted to reside temporarily and/or as entitled to basic rights such as healthcare, education, and social protection, or whether the country denies migrants legal status, dignity, and rights as Malaysia does (Ball, personal communication, August 19, 2022).

Further study of the PMSN method (now called Storyboard Peers) is recommended as it is a research method that is enjoyable for the participants and is youth-centred, while also being an intervention approach. Use of an elaboration of the Storyboard Peers method is currently being piloted in Phase 2 of the YMP in Thailand (Ball & Torok, 2021). Findings from the current study and a study in Thailand point to the value of the method in shedding new light on young migrants' experiences (Torok & Ball, 2021).

This study investigated how displaced refugee youth explicate their sense of belonging as they experience multiple transitions outside their home countries. Such transitions include living temporarily and illegally in Malaysia and the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This research contributes to better understanding of the meanings that forced migrant youth ascribe to their displacement experiences. It provided insights into their circumstances and how they define home and belonging. The findings can be applied to improve child and youth care practices with youth in transit and with those few who are welcomed to third countries as newcomers.

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Appendix A: Free and Informed Consent

Information Sheet for Youth Participants

To be translated into local language

Researcher: **Mobile:**

My name is _____. I am working as part of a team doing a study based at the University of Victoria in Canada. I hope to find out what youth in Thailand/Malaysia think about their situation as migrants from Myanmar and what their experiences have been of growing up and looking forward to the future. We can talk about the study and how I may talk together with you and you can ask me questions.

Description: I am interested in talking with youth are between 12 and 18 years old and who live outside of Myanmar as a result of being forced to leave because of conflict in Myanmar. I would like to ask you questions about what you think about your situation – what it has been like to spend some of your growing up years outside of Myanmar and what you hope will happen in the future in terms of where you could live and what you could do. This conversation will take about two hours. I will take notes and use an audio recorder to have a record of your answers. If you agree to talk with me, I will give you a made up name so that no one will ever know what you said. I will be the only one who will know the name you told me and I will keep the notes and audio recordings locked away with a key. I will not share this information with the government, any government institutions or with anyone who has power over you. We will publish results of the study in reports, academic journals, on the web, and in presentations. However, we will not reveal the actual names of any youth who participate in the study.

If you choose to participate, one week before our conversation I will give you art supplies and a simple art-based activity. You can spend as much or as little time on this as you like, and there is no right or wrong way to do this. Please bring your art with you to our interview, as it will help to guide our conversation.

You do not have to talk with me if you do not want to. You may decide that you do not want to be involved in my research anymore. That is okay. There is no punishment for deciding that you do not want to talk with me. If you decide to talk with me and you do not like something we are talking about, you can stop talking any time. You can refuse to talk to me, or draw without any bad outcomes. You will not be treated differently by

anyone involved in this study or any organization who is helping us. If you decide you do not want to participate in the study anymore, I will destroy the information that I collected from you.

You will be given a small gift for helping with the study. If you decide you no longer want to talk with me, you will still be given this gift. If you feel you are being forced to participate in order to get the gift, you should decline the invitation.

Risks and Benefits: This study might help other migrant youth in the future. There is no direct benefit to you in helping me with this project. There is some chance that by speaking to me you will identify you or your parent(s) as not having legal papers. I will do everything I can to keep our conversations private. If you are worried about this risk, you can decide to not talk with me.

To get more information about the ethics of this research, you can contact the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at 1 250 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca or [name and email].

Information Sheet for Parent or Guardian

(Note: many forced migrant youth aged 12-18 years old are unaccompanied and live independently. These youth may be asked to participate without a legal guardian or parents' consent). To be translated into local language.

My name is _____. I am working as part of a team doing a study based at the University of Victoria in Canada. I hope to find out what youth in Thailand/Malaysia think about their situation as migrants from Myanmar and what their experiences have been of growing up and looking forward to the future. We can talk about the study and how I may talk with your adolescent and you can ask me questions.

Description: I am interested in talking with youth who live outside of Myanmar as a result of being forced to leave because of conflict in Myanmar. I would like to ask your adolescent questions about what he/she thinks about their situation – what it has been like to spend some of their growing up years outside of Myanmar and what they hope will happen in the future in terms of where they could live and what they could do. This conversation will take about two hours. I will take notes and use an audio recorder to

have a record of the youth's answers. If your youth agrees to talk with me, I will give him/her a made up name so that no one will ever know what they said. I will be the only one who will know the name they told me and I will keep the notes and audio recordings locked away with a key. I will not share this information with the government, any government institutions or with anyone who has power over you or your child. We will publish results of the study in reports, academic journals, on the web, and in presentations. However, we will not reveal the actual name of the youth who participate in the study.

If your child/youth chooses to participate, one week before our conversation I will give him/her art supplies and a simple art-based activity. He/she can spend as much or as little time on this as they like, and there is no right or wrong way to do this. They will be asked to bring their art with them to our interview, as it will help to guide our conversation.

Your young person does not have to talk with me if he/she does not want. Your young person may decide at any time not to be involved in the project anymore. If your youth decides to talk with me and he/she does not like something we are talking about, he/she can stop talking any time. Your young person can stop talking to me without any consequences. If he/she decides he/she does not want to participate in the study anymore, I will destroy the information that I collected from him/her.

Your youth will be given a small gift for helping with the study. If your youth decides he/she no longer wants to participate in this study, he/she may still keep the gift. It should not be coercive; if they would not participate without the gift then they should decline.

Risks and Benefits: This study might help migrant children, youth and families in the future. There is no direct benefit to your child in helping me with the research. There is some chance that by speaking to me your child will identify you or your family member as not having legal papers to be in the country where they are living. I will do everything I can to keep our conversations private. If your youth is worried about this risk, he/she can decide not to talk with me.

To get more information about the ethics of this research, you can contact the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at 1-250 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca or [name and email].

Informed Consent/Assent Instructions for Youth Participants

As the youth who choose to participate in this project may not be literate, the following procedures will be followed:

The researcher (with the aid of a translator as needed) will:

- When appropriate/possible, first approach the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the youth by reading them the information sheet for parent or guardian and completing the parent/guardian consent form.
- Read aloud to the youth the Information Sheet for Youth Participants.
- Ask the youth if he/she has any questions and check that the youth has understood the information sheet by asking the youth to state what they have understood about what has been said (e.g., repeat it back, summarize it, say what they think they are being asked to do).
- Read each statement on the consent form and ask the youth to circle or point to  if the answer is 'yes' and  if the answer is 'no.'
- Write the youth's name in the final box and ask them to sign or make a special mark that he/she will recognize as their own.
- Fill in the date and place.
- Make a copy of the information and consent forms for the youth to keep.
- Keep originals in a secure file.

Youth Participant Informed Consent/Assent Form

(September 2019)
To be translated to local language as needed.

I have a copy of the information sheet that explains what this study is about.		
I have been able to ask questions about the project if I wanted to.		
I understand what this study is about.		
I agree to answer questions and tell about my experiences to the project leaders and my peers.		
I agree to have what I share for the project being written down by a project leader.		
I agree to have what I share for the project being recorded using an audio-recorder.		
I agree to having what I share for the project being recorded using a video-recorder.		
I agree to what I share for the project being used in reports, articles or presentations, without my real name being shared.		
I agree to have my photograph taken and used as part of the project and reports, without my real name attached to the photograph.		
I understand that I can choose to not participate in the project at any time and I will not be treated differently by anyone involved in the project or organizations if I decline.		
I agree to photographs of my story-board (art work) being taken and used in the project.		
I agree to the project team keeping my story-board if they ask to keep it, and if I choose to not allow them to keep it, I can still participate in the project.		
I understand that the information collected about me will not be kept if I choose to stop participating in the project before it ends.		
I understand that I do not get paid to participate in the project, but that I will be given a small gift for being in this study as a token of appreciation. I know that if I choose to not participate in the study anymore, I will keep the small gift.		

I agree to let the project leaders see my file with the service agency (e.g.,MSRI) and to collect information about me from my file, without my real name being attached to the information.		
I understand that at all times, the project team will not report my real name or the name of any family members, and will keep my real identity and the identity of my family members confidential and anonymous (i.e. private and secret).		
I understand that my arts-based project and my personal story will be heard by a small group of my peers.		
My name is: _____ This is my signature: _____ Date: _____ Place: _____		

OR: Witness Attestation:

The name of the person who read this information and obtained the youth's assent is:

_____

I hereby attest that the youth named for the purpose of this project (name of youth or pseudonym)

_____

has assented to the items marked on this form.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

*****

To ask questions about the project or change your mind, contact a project leader:

Name:

Email:

Name:

Email:

Guardian Informed Consent/Assent Form

v. July 20, 2019

To be translated to local language as needed.

Adults who are literate in English and who wish to read the consent form and complete it themselves are welcome to do so.

A project team member can offer to:

Explain the project in plain language

Convey in simple terms the intent of each item on the consent for

Record the guardian's consent or refusal on each item

Witness this form of assent or decline their youth's participation in the project.

If a guardian declines to participate, or declines on too many items to make it possible to include their youth meaningfully in the project, there is no need to provide a copy of the consent form.

If a guardian agrees to participate, they must receive a copy of the consent form and the contact name and email of at least one available project team member to contact if they have any questions or concerns as the project goes along. The copy could be given within a few days of the consent procedure, before data collection begins.

I have a copy of the information sheet that explains what this study is about.		
I have been able to ask questions about the project if I wanted to.		
I understand what this study is about.		
I agree to the young person answering questions and sharing about their experiences to the project leaders and their peers who are also participating in the project.		

I agree that the young person's answers and experiences will be recorded by the project team using written notes.		
I agree that the young person's answers and experiences will be recorded by the project team using audio-recording.		
I agree that the young person's answers and experiences will be recorded by the project team using video-recording.		
I agree to what the young person shares will be used in reports, articles or presentations, without their real name being shared.		
I agree to have the young person's photograph taken and used as part of the project and reports, without their real name attached to the photograph.		
I understand that I can choose not to agree to the young person participating in the project and they will not be treated differently by anyone involved in the project or organizations.		
I agree to photographs of the young person's story-board (art work) being taken and used in the project.		
I agree to the project team keeping the young person's story-board is the project team asks to keep it, and if I choose not to allow them to keep it, I can still participate in the project.		
I understand that the information collected about the young person will not be kept if I decide that they will not to participate.		
I understand that the young person and/or their family will not get paid to participate in the project, but that the young person will be given a small gift for being in this study as a token of appreciation. I know that if I choose to not participate in the study part way through, the young person will keep the small gift.		

I agree to let the project leaders see the young person's file with the service agency (e.g., MSRI) and to collect information about the young person from their file, without theirreal name being attached to the information.		
I understand that at all times, the project team will not report the young person's real name or the name of any family members or guardians, and will keep their real identity and the identity of their family members or guardians confidential and anonymous (i.e. private and secret).		

My name is::

_____

This is my signature:

Date: Place:

OR: Witness Attestation:
The name of the person who read this information and obtained the youth's assent is:

_____

I hereby attest that the youth named for the purpose of this project (name of youth or pseudonym)

_____

has assented to the items marked on this form.

Signature: _____
Date: _____

To ask questions about the project or change your mind, contact a project leader:

Name:
Email:

Name:
Email:

Appendix B: Demographic and Social Questions Part I, II, & Embedded questions
(October, 2019)

Consent Form Received from Youth: Yes Not Yet

Consent Form Received from Guardian: Yes Not Yet

1. First Name: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. Age: _____ years

4. Source of evidence of age (e.g, self-report, birth certificate, etc.)

   _____

5. Country where participated in the study: _____

6. What country were you born in? _____

7. What year did you arrive in Malaysia?

8. How many years you have been living in Malaysia: _____years

9. What other countries have you lived in beside Malaysia_____
   _____

10a. How many people do you live with?

10b. How many of them are your family members?

DSQ Part II

11. Do you Have an identity document (ie. passport, UN card, etc.)? What is it? Who keeps these documents for you (your parents, UNHCR, etc.)

12. You are a citizen of …… . . How do you know you are a citizen of that country?

13. Did you go to school before coming to Malaysia? If yes, what was your grad level?

14. How many years of education have you had so far since you have been living here?

15. Do you have a health card? if not, when was the last time you had one?

16. Besides your parents, who else can protect you when you feel unsafe?

17. Were you ever in a detention centre? Where and how long you were detained?

DSQ embedded questions

18. Why did you leave your home country?

19. How do you identify yourself personally, in terms of culture, ethnicity of nationality that means the most to you?

20. How do you think you have **CHANGED** since migrated to Malaysia?

21. How do you think you have **stayed the same**, despite being a refugee and living far from your home country?

22. In what ways has your sense of yourself in the world changed, as a result of your experience of migration?

23. Do you hope to **return** to your country of origin to LIVE, someday? If yes, why? If no, why not?

24. What is your anticipated next step in migration journey, if known (e.g., resettlement in a new country, reintegration to the home country, assimilation into the current country of residence, other).

25. Where do you see yourself in five years time.

26. Is there **anything else** you would like to tell us that we have not asked about yet?

Appendix C: Storyboard Questions

When making your storyboards, these are the questions we would like you to think about and answer through art:

1. Think about the country your family came from. How do you feel about that country? Why did they leave that country?

2. How do you feel about living in Malaysia now? What are the good things? What are the challenges?

3. Think of home. Where is home? What does home mean to you?

4. What does being a migrant or refugee youth mean to you? Does it make you a different person than before?

5. Where do you hope to go next? Return to home country or a new country?

6. What are your future goals for yourself (job, family, country, etc.)?