

RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

Feeling at home across time and place: A study of Ecuadorians in three European cities

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Funding information

H2020 ERC-StG HOMInG, Grant/Award Number: 678456

Abstract

International migration creates significant dilemmas for people to feel at home or not and a meaningful field to investigate this emotional experience. Using a cross-country survey of Ecuadorians in Madrid, Milan and London ($n = 1093$), we explore how spatial, relational, infrastructural and emotional variables influence the sense of feeling at home in a place. We link these aspects to length of residence and the location's 'connectedness' to Ecuador. Immigrants' sense of feeling at home increases over time, regardless of location or scale. However, feeling at home is positively associated with the location's connectedness to Ecuador. The importance of social relations (especially inviting friends) and infrastructural characteristics for feeling at home in a place also increases over time, contrary to the influence of nostalgic homeland reminders. Overall, Ecuadorians attach a sense of home to their local context of settlement, more than to their homeland. Results are remarkably similar across genders.

KEYWORDS

city, Ecuadorian migrants, feeling at home, gender, length of residence

1 | INTRODUCTION

What makes someone feel at home? This question has been explored by several authors, whose findings suggest that factors such as housing conditions, proximity to significant others and the possibility to feel secure, familiar and in control within a place play a key role (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Boccagni, 2017; Cuba & Hummon, 1993a; Kusenbach & Paulsen, 2013). So does, however, the time spent there, particularly among immigrants, who live away from what used to be home and may have gone across a major transformation of their sense of home, as a result (Cuba & Hummon, 1993a).

Much has been written on the factors that shape people's ways of feeling at home and yet very little of this has been validated through surveys, even less so within the same immigrant group across different cities. By relying on this research strategy, in this paper, we

contribute to the literature on the determinants of home as an emplaced and relational emotion (i.e., as feeling at home: Duyvendak, 2011; Nowicka, 2007), by addressing the following question: *How do factors related to time and place affect the sense of feeling at home?*

We use the concept of time, here, in reference to the length of residence of an immigrant in a given location. There is a broad agreement in the literature on the importance of the time spent in a place, for someone to attach a sense of home to it (Lawrence, 1987; Miranda-Nieto, Massa, & Bonfanti, 2020; Werner, Altman, & Oxley, 1985). Most notably, newcomers, as maintained under the broad theoretical rubric of assimilation (Alba & Nee, 2003), tend to forge new friendships, families and other closed connections as their length of stay increases (Alba, Beck, & Basaran Sahin, 2018). They also tend to integrate culturally and increase their appreciation for

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different aspects of social life in the country of residence (Jimenez, 2017). These transformations related to length of residence can affect the sense of feeling at home and the factors that make someone feel at home.

Our notion of place is more fluid. In the conceptual background, we focus on the fact that some locations are more connected to the country of origin of an immigrant (e.g., closer in cultural and/or linguistic terms, larger communities of compatriots, among others), whereas others are less connected. In the estimations, for operational purposes, we mostly explore the role of the city of residence of the individual (Blunt & Sheringham, 2019; Feng & Breitung, 2018). However, in the analysis we also recognise that the notion of place—and potentially, a feeling of home towards it—can also operate on different scales, below the city level (e.g., dwelling and neighbourhood) and above it (e.g., country of residence and of origin) (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Cuba & Hummon, 1993b; Kale, Stupples, & Kindon, 2019).

Our analysis focuses on Ecuadorian immigrants living in Europe. Such a case is particularly useful for our purposes for three reasons. First, Ecuador has been historically an emigration country, with about 8% of its population currently residing abroad (Ledesma, 2019), many of them after the large emigration wave that took place in the late 1990s to early 2000s (Casas, 2011; Herrera & Torres, 2005). Second, there is a steady flow of Ecuadorians going abroad, many to reunite with relatives (Iglesias Martínez, Moreno Márquez, Fernández García, Oleaga Páramo, & Vega de la Cuadra, 2015; INEC, 2019). Third, the large majority of emigrants from Ecuador settle in a few countries, mainly Spain, the United States and Italy (United Nations, 2016). The large size of the Ecuadorian emigrant population and different periods of departure allow us to explore the implications of different lengths of residence abroad. The concentration in different countries means that we can explore the sense of feeling at home of Ecuadorians in locations with different levels of 'connectedness' to Ecuador.

In this context, our study focuses on Ecuadorians in three large cities: London, Madrid and Milan. The data collected for this paper, one survey in each city during 2019, is the first large cross-country data collection effort with the purpose of elucidating feelings of home among a particular immigrant group. This was done in the scope of HOMInG, a multimethod comparative study of immigrants' experience of home across countries and immigrant groups.

In what follows, we first discuss feeling at home as an elusive but revealing emotional experience, in light of the insights provided by the literature, with particular regard to first-generation international immigrants. We then advance a number of hypotheses. Central to our research design is the need to establish the relative significance of the spatial, relational, infrastructural and emotional aspects of a place for immigrants to feel at home (or not) there, over time and across different local contexts of settlement. As our data analysis reveals, immigrants tend to feel more at home in locations with stronger connections to the country of origin, and yet there is a convergence in that they feel increasingly at home over time, regardless of the national or local context of settlement. As important, length of

residence and location affect the relational, infrastructural and emotional bases of feeling at home for men and women in similar ways.

2 | FEELING AT HOME AWAY FROM 'HOME': WHY IT MATTERS

Feeling at home may seem quite an ordinary and natural condition—to those who cultivate it, often within relatively continuous and sedentary life trajectories. To that extent, one might wonder why it should matter, or what is the point of investigating it? In fact, a number of life events and biographic disruptions, including those related to international migration, make it less an obvious *given* than a potential and contentious *achievement*, depending on time- and place-related factors that await systematic explanation (Cuba & Hummon, 1993a; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Even among relatively sedentary or well-settled people, research in 'home studies' reveals that feeling at home is not to be taken for granted, and that it does matter, for both academic and policy purposes (Duyvendak, 2011; Feng & Breitung, 2018). In the latter respect, studying people's way of feeling at home (or not) is of interest for applied research on well-being, local integration and housing satisfaction, among other topics. Asking people where, when and with whom they feel at home provides an accessible and meaningful entry point into more complex questions of identity, belonging and self-achievement. For international immigrants, in particular, questions about feelings of home help approach their lived experience of integration and their expected investment towards their places and communities of residence.

Feeling at home is also relevant in itself, as a topic for the interdisciplinary social study of emotion (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Van der Graaf, 2015). Although it is still relatively understudied, feeling at home is generally seen as an emotional engagement with one's social environment, including distinctive places, objects and significant others. In fact, feeling at home relies less on place as such than on the social relationship being enacted with (in) it and is necessarily exclusive to some extent (Duyvendak, 2011; Kusenbach & Paulsen, 2013). Under circumstances of international migration, several studies have illustrated that—contrary to common sense—people's sense of feeling at home does not simply fade away nor does it necessarily stay anchored only to the country of origin (Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, & Sheller, 2003; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Rather, a number of emotional reconfigurations occur, the empirical question being then how, and depending on what, a sense of feeling at home is reproduced towards different places and on different scales—dwelling, neighbourhood, city, national or transnational (involving also immigrant countries of origin).

In short, feeling at home is far from a predefined notion or an abstract emotion. Rather, it is an emotional experience embedded in particular material and relational circumstances on multiple scales. It evolves over time, in reach, locations and points of reference, parallel to the individual and family life course. Among international immigrants, in particular, feeling at home may stem both from the possibility to reproduce a life environment similar to the (past)

homeland and from the achievement of a sense of security, familiarity and comfort afforded by a place as such—regardless of its ‘ethnic’ characteristics. As our study reveals, over time, after migration, the latter dimension of feeling at home becomes predominant over the former.

So far, however, the bulk of social science research on immigrants' ways, prospects and limits of feeling at home has been done via qualitative case studies (e.g., Dudley, 2011 and Kale et al., 2019, on the struggle to feel at home among particular refugee groups; Wagner & Peters, 2014, on Moroccan-origin women ‘feeling at home in the public’ in the Netherlands and Morocco; Kuurne & Gómez, 2019, on interethnic relations at a neighbourhood level; Cabalquinto, 2018, on transnational ways of feeling at home through mobile media).

Instead, quantitative studies on immigrants' sense of home are few in number (Cuba & Hummon, 1993a, 1993b; Feng & Breitung, 2018; Karlsen & Nazroo, 2013; Lam & Yeoh, 2004). In spite of their merits, they provide little scope for comparison or generalisation. This is another pragmatic reason, besides the theoretical ones discussed above, for an original and comparative study of the time- and place-related determinants of immigrant ways of feeling (or not) at home.

3 | HYPOTHESES

In our analysis, we place attention on two factors. First, we focus on differences in feeling at home between recently arrived and more settled immigrants. The purpose is to link feeling at home with length of residence. Second, we explore differences in feelings of home across locations. Here, we aim to link feeling at home with the connectedness of different locations to the country of origin. Therefore, for each topic of interest, we have typically two sets of hypotheses: (a) *relation with length of residence* and (b) *relation with location of residence*.

We start the analysis by exploring differences in feelings of home across time (length of residence) and location of residence (at different scales). Then, in order to understand what makes immigrants feel at home in different places, we focus on different aspects of a place: the people immigrants share it with (*relational*), its practical characteristics (*infrastructural*) and the range of emotional experiences it embodies and facilitates (*emotional*).

3.1 | Feeling at home across time and place: Baseline hypotheses

The majority of the literature suggests that as immigrants stay longer in a place, they feel more at home there (Boccagni, 2017). This is the case for different scales, such as dwelling, neighbourhood, city and country. However, the degree to which this occurs could vary per location, as those locations with greater

connectedness to the home country are likely to facilitate a stronger sense of feeling at home. We therefore advance two hypotheses, as follows:

H1a. Over time, immigrants feel increasingly at home in the place where they live.

H1b. Immigrants feel more at home in locations with greater connection to their country of origin.

Besides looking at the location of residence, we can explore similar hypotheses for the country of origin. Here, also the previous scholarship provides clear guidance. We expect that as individuals spent longer abroad, they are likely to feel less at home in the country of origin (Fitzgerald, 2014). This should be particularly the case for those residing in places that have weaker connection to their country of origin, as their notion and sense of home change as they integrate into the host society. In this context, we put forward the following hypotheses:

H2a. Over time, immigrants feel less at home in their country of origin.

H2b. Immigrants living in locations with greater connection to their country of origin are more likely to feel at home in their country of origin.

3.2 | On the relational side of home: People you share it with

Moving to a different country reduces the size of friends and family networks. Therefore, for many immigrants, the home as domestic space can have a major importance as a place to connect with family and friends. This is particularly important in those locations with less connectedness to the country of origin, where these encounters are less likely to occur elsewhere. The emphasis on family and friends, as constitutive of what makes people feel at home (Mallett, 2004), should increase over time as immigrants create new friendships and reproduce or renovate their family ties in the country of destination.

Based on the previous evidence, we advance two hypotheses on the nexus between the sense of feeling at home and the condition of sharing the place with other people:

H3a. The importance of sharing a place with family and friends, for immigrants to feel at home in it, increases with length of residence in the host location.

H3b. Sharing a place with family and friends is less important for immigrants to feel at home in it in locations with greater connection to their country of origin.

3.3 | On the infrastructural side of home: Order, safety, autonomy

The infrastructural qualities of a place are also likely to influence one's sense of feeling at home there. Previous studies highlight that immigrants often live in residences or neighbourhoods that are not safe, lack proper hygiene, are overcrowded and do not have suitable appliances (Bolt, 2012; CECODHAS, 2007). This is more likely for recent immigrants as they adjust to life in the new location of residence. However, parallel to immigrant socialisation into the mainstream society over time, we can hypothesise an increase in their expectations about the 'proper qualities' of a place, for example, its cleanness and safety—if not always an improvement in their actual conditions. This is likely to occur across all locations, regardless of the connection of a place to the country of origin.

Based on the previous discussion, we developed two hypotheses on the practical characteristics of a place:

- H4a.** The importance of the characteristics that make a place suitable for immigrants to feel at home in it increases with length of residence in the host location.
- H4b.** The importance of the characteristics that make a place suitable for immigrants to feel at home in it is not affected by the degree of connection of the location of residence to the country of origin.

3.4 | On the emotional side of home: The significance of the feelings it stirs

Places stir different feelings as people, including immigrants, get accustomed to them. One such emotion—a rather selective and sophisticated one, as illustrated above—is precisely a sense of feeling at home. This tends to be correlated to a range of less specific and equally place-dependent feelings, like familiarity (Mallett, 2004), sense of control (Easthope, Liu, Judd, & Burnley, 2015; Lucas & Purkayastha, 2007) and stability (Settles, 2001). Following the literature, we can expect that such emotions are so constitutive of people's ways of feeling at home that they retain their significance at all the steps of the migration process, regardless of length of stay in the location of residence. As such, we only have one hypothesis regarding these emotions:

- H5.** The attribution of a sense of familiarity, control and stability to a place, for immigrants to feel at home there, remains constant regardless of their location and length of residence.

3.5 | On the nostalgic side of home: The role of 'reminders' of the homeland

In the particular case of immigrants, the list of home-related emotions may include also nostalgia (Cieraad, 2012). This is a feeling and a set

of memories that is projected towards one's country of origin (and/or to the past life spent there) but is mediated by particular habits and material cultures in everyday life abroad (Kale et al., 2019; van der Horst, 2012). We can then expect certain emotional and material reminders of Ecuador (including special objects, decorations or habitual ways of cooking or listening to music) to be more influential on immigrants' feelings of home in places which are less connected to their country of origin. Moreover, the importance of emplaced memories from the home country as a factor making immigrants feel at home is likely to decrease over time, as their links with the country of origin weaken (Jones, 2019; Waldinger, 2015). This leads us to articulate the following hypotheses:

- H6a.** The importance of reminders of the homeland, for immigrants to feel at home in a place, decreases with length of residence in the host location.
- H6b.** The importance of reminders of the homeland, for immigrants to feel at home in a place, is smaller in locations with greater connection to their country of origin.

4 | DATA AND METHODS

Our analysis is based on a face-to-face survey conducted in London, Madrid and Milan during 2019. The research design followed a centre sampling approach (Blangiardo, 2008; Reichel & Morales, 2017) in selected neighbourhood and public locations. The main priority in the sampling was for consistency in the data collection across the three locations, to maximise comparability. The analysis below includes 1093 first-generation Ecuadorian immigrants (i.e., born in Ecuador and residing abroad), with 240 interviewed in London, 491 interviewed in Madrid and 362 in Milan.

The three cities are connected differently to Ecuador. By 'connectedness', we mean the aggregate result of factors such as language similarity, other cultural aspects (e.g., religion) and the size of the compatriot community. In the empirical analysis, we take Madrid as the city with the strongest country of origin connection for Ecuadorians, followed by Milan and London. This is based on an analysis of the factors described above during the fieldwork related to the overall project. For example, London has the smallest number of Ecuadorians (15,000) relative to overall population size and is the most distant to Ecuador, language wise. Madrid has the closest cultural connection to Ecuador given the colonial links of Spain and Ecuador and hosts the largest number of Ecuadorians (90,000) in Europe. Finally, Milan's Ecuadorian population (14,000) is slightly smaller than the one in London, in absolute terms, but much higher relative to overall population size. Its language proximity falls between Madrid and London.¹

The interviews were conducted in Spanish. The choice of the questions and of the precise words to articulate them was driven not only by the existing literature but also by the findings of HOMInG's previous fieldwork with Ecuadorian immigrants in the

three cities (Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020; Miranda-Nieto & Boccagni, 2020; Pérez-Murcia & Boccagni, 2021). Moreover, the clarity of each question was subject to a pilot test and was discussed with all the interviewers in dedicated training sessions, prior to data collection.

In the different analyses, we estimate a series of regressions along the following lines:

$$y_{ip} = \beta X_i + \sum_{p=1}^2 \phi_p \Pi_p + \sum_{t=1}^4 \gamma_{it} T_{it} + \varepsilon_{ip}. \quad (1)$$

In this case, y_{ip} is one of the dependent variables of interest, described in detail below. X_i are a series of individual characteristics which act as control variables. These variables include socio-economic factors such as age, gender, education, marital status and employment status. These socio-economic factors are included in all estimations. Π_p is the indicator of location of residence, which in this case are dummies for Madrid and Milan (i.e., London is the base category). Finally, T_{it} is the indicator of length of residence in the host location, operationalised as dummy variables for residing in the country of interview for 6–10, 11–15, 16–20 and over 20 years (0 to 5 years is the base category). ε_{ip} is the error term. In discussing the results, our interest is on the coefficients ϕ_p (role of city of residence) and γ_{it} (role of length of residence). In all cases, we present the results graphically for easier exposition.

Table 1 presents the means for all the controls variables. The average age of participants in the survey was 40, most have at least secondary education, most are in employment and a slight majority are single and female. The main concentration in terms of length of residence is in the 16–20 years category (41%), with other categories

TABLE 1 Means of independent variables

	All	Females	Males
X_i			
Age	40.26	40.40	40.08
Female	0.56	-	-
Primary education	0.15	0.14	0.16
Secondary education	0.58	0.58	0.59
Tertiary education	0.23	0.24	0.22
Married	0.44	0.42	0.46
In employment	0.82	0.81	0.83
Π_p			
Madrid	0.45	0.40	0.51
Milan	0.33	0.38	0.26
T_{it}			
6–10 years	0.14	0.13	0.16
11–15 years	0.13	0.12	0.15
16–20 years	0.41	0.42	0.40
Over 20 years	0.12	0.12	0.11

being similar with between 12% and 14% of the respondents. The omitted category, those who have resided in the country between 0 and 5 years, accounts for 20% of the sample. We also present some of the results by gender, as one might expect to encounter significant gender variations in the material and relational underpinnings of feeling at home (Cuba & Hummon, 1993b). As Table 1 shows, however, the distribution by gender does not correspond to major differences across participants.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the dependent variables. The analysis starts with a simple question on whether the individual feels at home in the location of residence and in Ecuador. A majority of those interviewed (82%) responded that they do feel at home in the city where they live. The percentage is similar if we scale the question 'up' (i.e., the country of residence) or 'down' (i.e., one's dwelling). Interestingly, though, feeling at home in one's neighbourhood is slightly less prevalent (75% of respondents). On the other hand, the share responding that they feel at home in Ecuador is substantially lower at just 44%.

We then ask a series of questions in order to test the other hypotheses related to place and time. Table S1 has the precise wording of each of the questions in the questionnaire. These are separate questions, and respondents could indicate that any of the factors is important for a place to feel like home. First, we explore questions related to sharing a place with others (i.e., H3a and H3b). In this case, individuals are asked whether 'sharing a place with family', 'being able to invite friends' or 'being able to be alone' are important factors for

TABLE 2 Means of dependent variables

	All	Females	Males
Spatial reach			
Feels at home in dwelling	0.82	0.83	0.81
Feels at home in neighbourhood	0.75	0.74	0.76
Feels at home in city	0.82	0.83	0.82
Feels at home in country	0.81	0.80	0.82
Feels at home in Ecuador	0.44	0.42	0.47
People you share a place with			
Family	0.90	0.91	0.90
Friends	0.62	0.61	0.63
Being alone	0.69	0.68	0.69
The characteristics of the place			
Clean and orderly	0.92	0.92	0.92
Safe	0.98	0.97	0.98
Cook what you like	0.80	0.79	0.81
Other feelings it stirs			
Familiar	0.92	0.92	0.91
In control	0.71	0.71	0.72
Long term	0.49	0.50	0.47
Emotional and material link to the homeland			
Like Ecuador	0.36	0.37	0.36
Has reminders of Ecuador	0.83	0.83	0.82

them to feel at home in that place. As suggested by Table 2, sharing a place with family is important for the large majority of respondents (90%). However, somewhat surprisingly, the possibility of being alone in a place is important for a slightly higher share of respondents (69%) than being able to invite friends (62%).

We also explore questions related to the characteristics a place should have, for people to feel at home there. In this case, the questions inquire about the importance of the place not only being 'clean and orderly' and 'safe' but also having enough space for autonomy—as measured by the possibility to 'cook the food that I like' inside it. The responses suggest that cleanliness and safety are of paramount importance for respondents (92% and 98%, respectively), whereas the autonomy for cooking option is slightly less popular (80%).

Next, we explore questions on the emotions that a place is expected to embody or facilitate, for people to feel at home there. These include 'being familiar', 'like I am in control' and 'like I can be there forever'. Respondents appreciate familiarity in a place (92%) and, to a lesser extent, the sense of control they retain over it (71%). Instead, feelings related to the expected permanence, as a proxy of a future-oriented dimension of home (Hage, 1997), are less common (49%). Although length of residence in a place does matter for people to feel at home there, the same does not necessarily hold for an expectation of temporal stability in it.

Finally, we explore the role of a place feeling like Ecuador or having something that reminds the person of Ecuador (e.g., pictures, decorations, food or music). Interestingly, 83% of respondents have something in their house that reminds them of Ecuador. Yet only 36% of them associate a sense of feeling at home in a place with its being somehow 'like Ecuador'. Overall, then, immigrants' feeling at home is shaped by a number of spatial, relational and emotional characteristics but not so much by continuity with their everyday lives prior to

migration. The retention of some material reference to Ecuador in terms of symbolic ethnicity (Gans, 1979) does not necessarily mean that the symbolic repertoire of 'Ecuadorianness' is still important for immigrants to feel at home in a place. Both relational and infrastructural factors matter more for that purpose, as we illustrate below.

The methodological advantage of using the same group of immigrants across three cities is that we can compare feelings of home in different contexts among individuals who share a similar cultural background. Still, our analysis has limitations that are important to consider while interpreting the results. In the analysis, we control for a number of observed characteristics of the individuals. However, it is not possible to control for unobserved differences of Ecuadorians across the three locations. Also, our analysis is cross-sectional; hence, we do not follow the same individuals over time but instead compare different cohorts of immigrants based on year of arrival. As in the previous case, it is not possible to account unobserved differences across the cohorts. We do not think that these are major problems given that our purpose is to explore the role of time and place for feeling at home, not to make strong causal claims.

5 | RESULTS

5.1 | The spatial reach of feeling at home

We first analyse the spatial reach of immigrants' orientation to feel at home, regarding not only their context of settlement (H1) but also the one of origin (H2). In the former case, we further differentiate between feeling at home at different scales of reference. Panel 1 of Figure 1 reports the coefficients for length of stay (solid black line) in the regressions in which the dependent variable is a dummy indicating

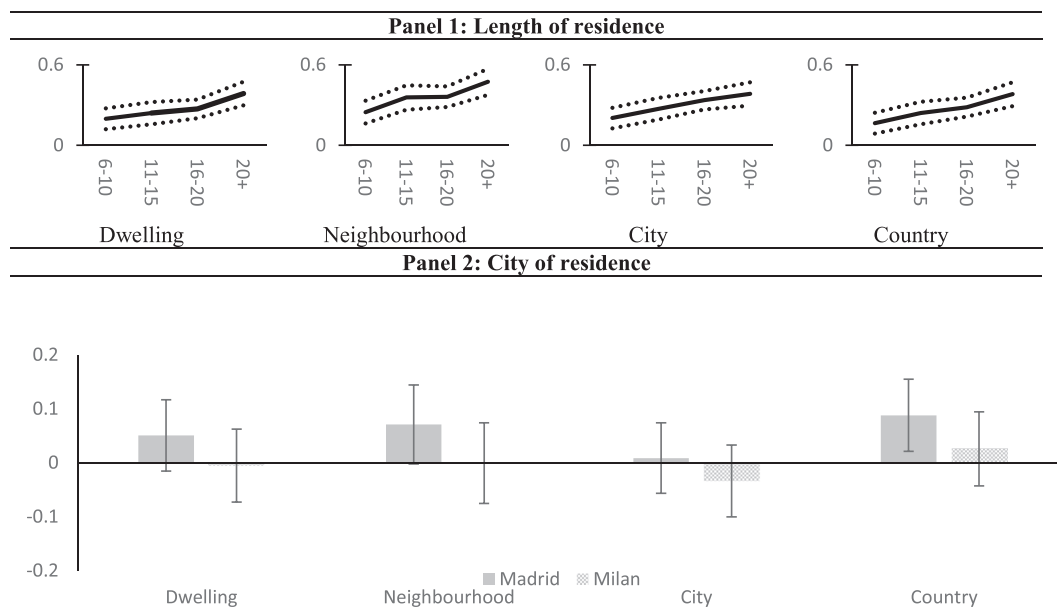


FIGURE 1 Spatial reach of feeling at home. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base categories. The base category in Panel 1 is those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The base in category in Panel 2 is those residing in London. The dotted lines in Panel 1 and the error bars in Panel 2 represent 95% confidence intervals

whether immigrants feel at home in the location of residence. The dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals, and the zero line represents the base category (i.e., those who have been between 0 and 5 years in the country). The result is statistically significant if both dashed lines are above or below zero for a given length of residence. Please see Table S2 for an example of the full list of regression coefficients in the estimations.

The results suggest that those who have been longer in the location of residence tend to feel more at home in it. For example, an Ecuadorian immigrant who has been 16 to 20 years abroad is 34 percentage points more likely to feel at home in the city of residence than a recently arrived immigrant. The size of the coefficients is similar if we look at dwelling, neighbourhood and country. These results provide clear support for H1a—over time, immigrants feel increasingly at home in the place where they live. At various spatial scales of reference, staying in a place for longer is in itself predictive of higher likelihood to feel at home there.

Panel 2 reports the coefficients for the Madrid and Milan dummies (i.e., base category is London) in the regressions in which the dependent variable is a dummy indicating that immigrants feel at home in the location of residence. The wide bars represent the coefficients from the regressions, whereas the solid black lines represent the 95% confidence intervals. The result is statistically significant if the confidence interval is above or below zero.

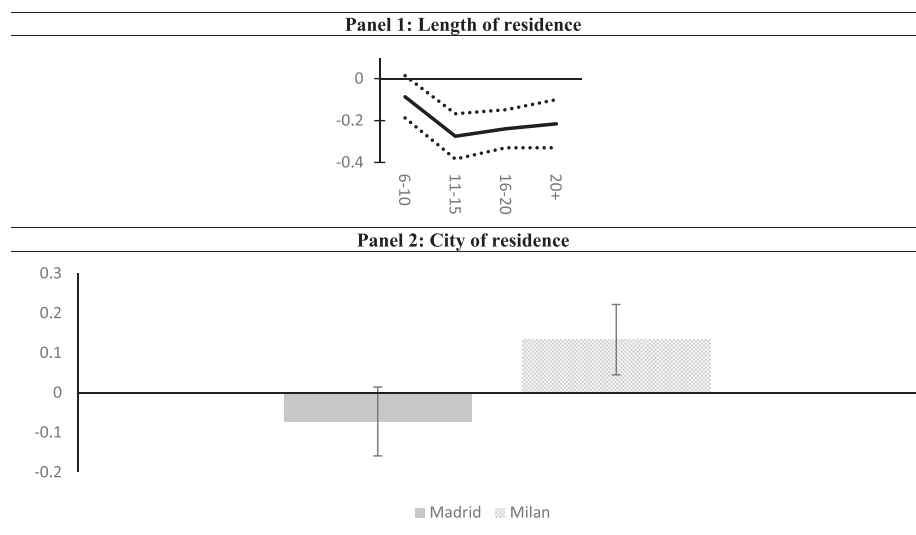
H1b suggested that immigrants should feel more at home in locations with greater connection to their country of origin. In terms of Panel 2, this means that the bar for Madrid should be above zero and, to a lesser extent, also the one for Milan. In most cases, the bar for Madrid is indeed above zero, but the results are only statistically significant at the country level. Hence, the findings support the idea that Ecuadorians are more likely to feel at home in Spain than in Italy or in the United Kingdom. This confirms the importance of a shared language, as a condition that enhances significantly people's chances to feel at home in a place, all other factors being equal (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

Having said this, do Ecuadorian migrants (still) feel at home in Ecuador (Figure 2), and how does that feeling evolve across cities? H2a, inspired by the literature on immigrant 'dissimilation' (Fitzgerald, 2014), suggests that over time immigrants feel less at home in their country of origin. This hypothesis is supported by the results. Those migrants who have been longer abroad feel less at home in Ecuador. In particular, those who have been 16 to 20 years abroad are 24 percentage points less likely to feel at home in Ecuador than recent immigrants. The loss of a sense of home 'back home', over time, has been discussed in several ethnographies of transnational and return migration (e.g., Anghel, Fauser, & Boccagni, 2019; Markowitz & Stefansson, 2004; Vathi & King, 2017), including in a HOMInG study on transnational housing across Ecuador (Boccagni & Pérez-Murcia, 2020). However, the point had hardly ever been demonstrated on such a large scale, through a comparative survey. Regarding H2b, there is no statistical difference between those in Madrid and London regarding feeling at home in Ecuador, and those in Milan actually feel more at home in Ecuador than others.

5.2 | Feeling at home through relations

Whether for migrants or anybody else, feeling at home is also a fundamentally relational achievement. As such, it changes over time, parallel to the life course, at individual and family level (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Werner et al., 1985). Following this basic point, Panel 1 of Figure 3 presents the results for the importance of sharing a place with others in order to feel at home there. Our initial hypothesis (H3a) states that as length of residence in the destination country increases, migrants create new friendships and families, and these factors become more important for a place to feel like home. The results confirm this expectation. Those who have been in the country for 16 to 20 years are close to 21 percentage points more likely to answer that being able to invite friends is important for a place to feel like home compared with recent migrants. The coefficients for sharing the place with family are

FIGURE 2 Feeling at home in Ecuador. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base categories. The base category in Panel 1 is those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The base in category in Panel 2 is those residing in London. The dotted lines in Panel 1 and the error bars in Panel 2 represent 95% confidence intervals



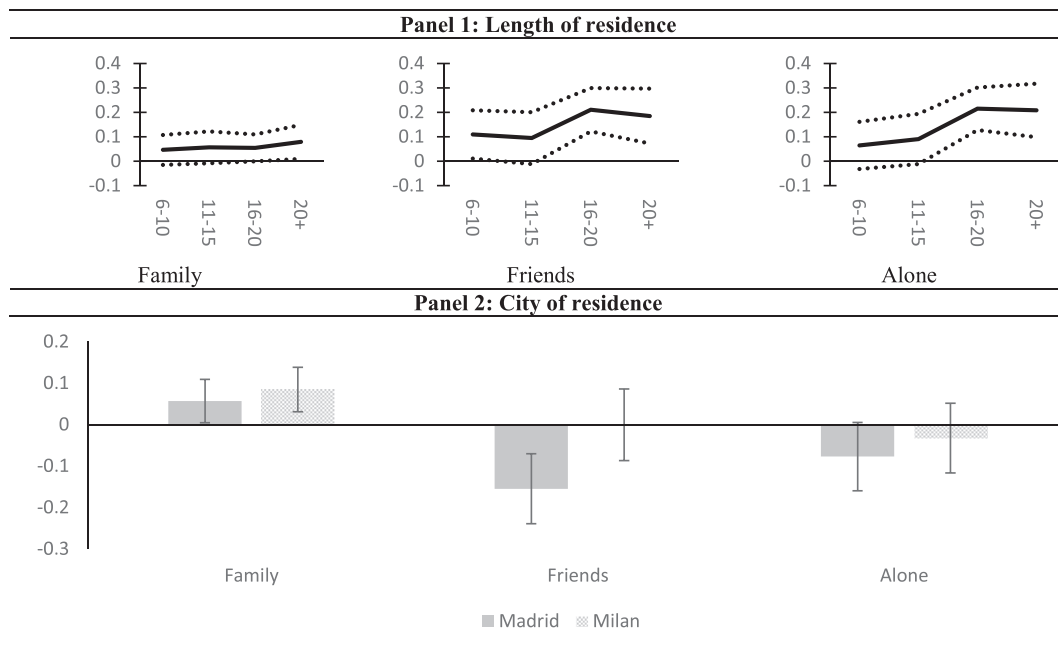


FIGURE 3 Feeling at home through relations. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base categories. The base category in Panel 1 is those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The base in category in Panel 2 is those residing in London. The dotted lines in Panel 1 and the error bars in Panel 2 represent 95% confidence intervals

smaller, which is unsurprising given the high share of migrants that selected this option. Importantly, in Panel 1, we also included an estimation in which the dependent variable indicates that the possibility of being alone in a place is important for feeling at home and it seems that this also increases with length of residence in the host location. This relates to the shift from co-housing to autonomous living, if and when this occurs in Ecuadorians' housing pathways, as a critical precondition for them to feel at home in their own dwellings. Indeed, 'having a space for oneself to live alone or with loved ones'—rather than sharing accommodation with strangers—is a turning point' in the life experience of migrants like Ecuadorians in Europe (Masterson-Algar, 2016, p. 183).

One question regarding the results in Panel 1 of Figure 3 is whether the results are affected by the number of people living in the dwelling or by the share of these individuals who are family members. These two factors affect the importance of being able to share a place for it to feel like home, but including them in the estimation does not affect the other results discussed above. See Figure S1 for further details.

Following H3b, sharing a place with family and friends should be less important as a factor that shapes feelings of being at home in locations that are more connected with the country of origin. In this case, we would mainly expect the coefficient for Madrid to be negative. Interestingly, this is actually the case for friends but not for family. As explained above, this could be partly driven by the large share of migrants who selected sharing a place with family as an important characteristic of home (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

5.3 | Feeling at home through infrastructures

Feeling at home or not in a place is also a matter of infrastructures, including the possibility to live in a clean dwelling (Gram-Hanssen & Bech-Danielsen, 2012) and the possibility to cook particular foods (Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020). As indicated by Panel 1 of Figure 4, the importance of both characteristics increases with length of residence in the host country. This supports H4a. In particular, those who have been between 16 and 20 years in the country are 8 percentage points more likely to consider cleanliness and orderliness as key characteristics of home, relative to recently arrived migrants. Similarly, the former group is 13 percentage points more likely than newcomers to consider the possibility to cook at home following one's own tastes an important factor for feeling at home. This could mean that a more extended length of stay—more time being spent in a country and in one's life course—expands immigrant orientation towards aspects of feeling at home that have to do with autonomy and self-achievement, rather than only with a basic sense of protection from the outside.

Another critical variable for feeling at home in a place is its perceived safety. The results in this respect are broadly constant over time and not statistically significant. This does not mean that safety is not important. Instead, the importance attributed to safety for a place to feel home-like remains constant and remarkably high, regardless of the length of stay in a country. That a place feels safe enough is often considered a precondition for it to feel like home (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998).

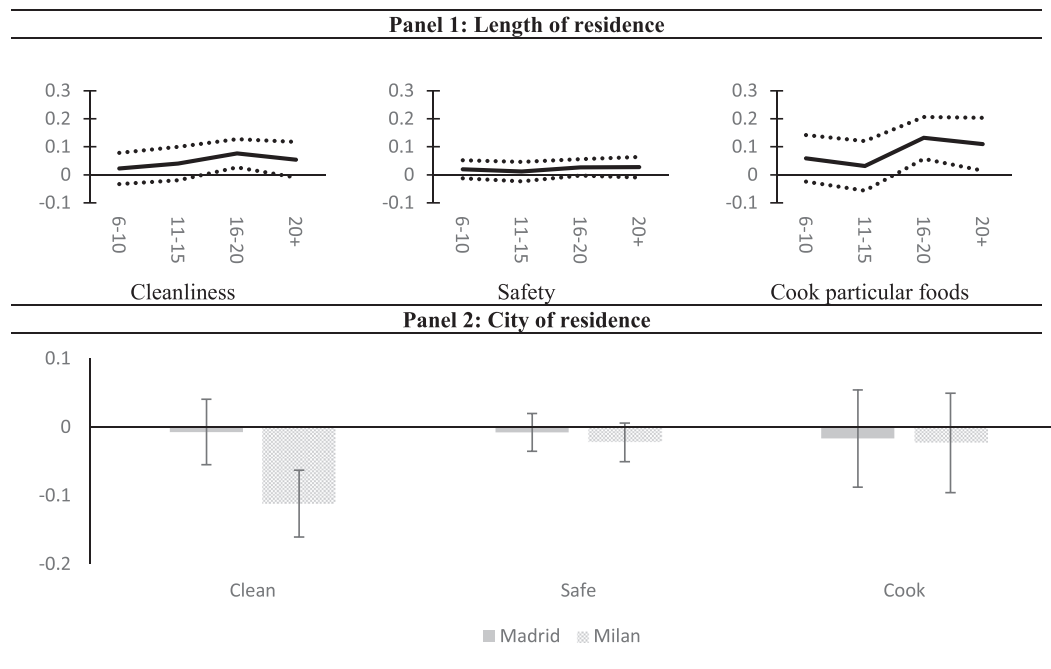


FIGURE 4 Feeling at home through infrastructures. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base categories. The base category in Panel 1 is those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The base in category in Panel 2 is those residing in London. The dotted lines in Panel 1 and the error bars in Panel 2 represent 95% confidence intervals

H4b suggested that the importance of characteristics that make a place suitable for migrants to feel at home is not affected by the degree of connection of the location to the country of origin. In other words, the bars in Panel 2 of Figure 4 should not be statistically significant. In most cases, the results support this hypothesis. The one exception is Milan, where the fact that a place is clean and orderly seems substantially less important for feeling at home in it than in London or Madrid.

5.4 | Feeling at home through emotions

Feeling at home in itself can be appreciated as a constellation of normatively positive and emplaced emotions such as familiarity, sense of control and long-term stability (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Not all of these emotions, of course, have the same 'weight'. As already shown in Table 2, familiarity with a place is acknowledged as important to feel at home by 92% of respondents, whereas long-term stability is emphasised only by 49%. That said, our hypothesis is that links to these emotions are stable across time and should remain constant regardless of the location and length of residence. In other words, we expect the coefficients plotted in Figure 5 to be small and statistically insignificant. This is actually the case for Panel 1 of Figure 5. Length of residence does not seem to make a major difference concerning the role of familiarity, control and stability for feeling at home.

On the other hand, city of residence does make a difference in this regard. Familiarity is emphasised more in Madrid and Milan than in London, whereas the opposite is true for being in control. The need

for stability is higher in Milan than in London. Although at first factors such as familiarity, being in control and stability would seem to describe related aspects that could be bundled together concerning feeling at home, there are important dynamics across these aspects, at least concerning the city of residence.

5.5 | Feeling at home through nostalgia

Last, as discussed above, it is theoretically meaningful to explore the connection between immigrants' sense of being at home and their potential nostalgia for the country of origin (Figure 6). This relates to the place-related emotions discussed in the previous section, but in this case, we want to investigate the importance of a place, and of the material cultures embedded in it (Dibbitts, 2009), in facilitating nostalgic emotional connections with the homeland. H6a stated that the importance of homeland nostalgia would decrease, parallel to the length of stay. Panel 1 of Figure 6 suggests that indeed as length of residence increases, the importance of a place feeling like Ecuador in order to feel like home decreases. Those who have been 16 to 20 years in the country are 9 percentage points less likely to respond that a place should feel like Ecuador, for someone to feel at home therein.

In Panel 1, we also include information on a related question, which investigates whether an immigrant has something in their dwelling that brings memories of Ecuador. This could have to do with pictures, music, food and so on (Miranda-Nieto et al., 2020; van der Horst, 2012). Results show, however, that keeping domestic

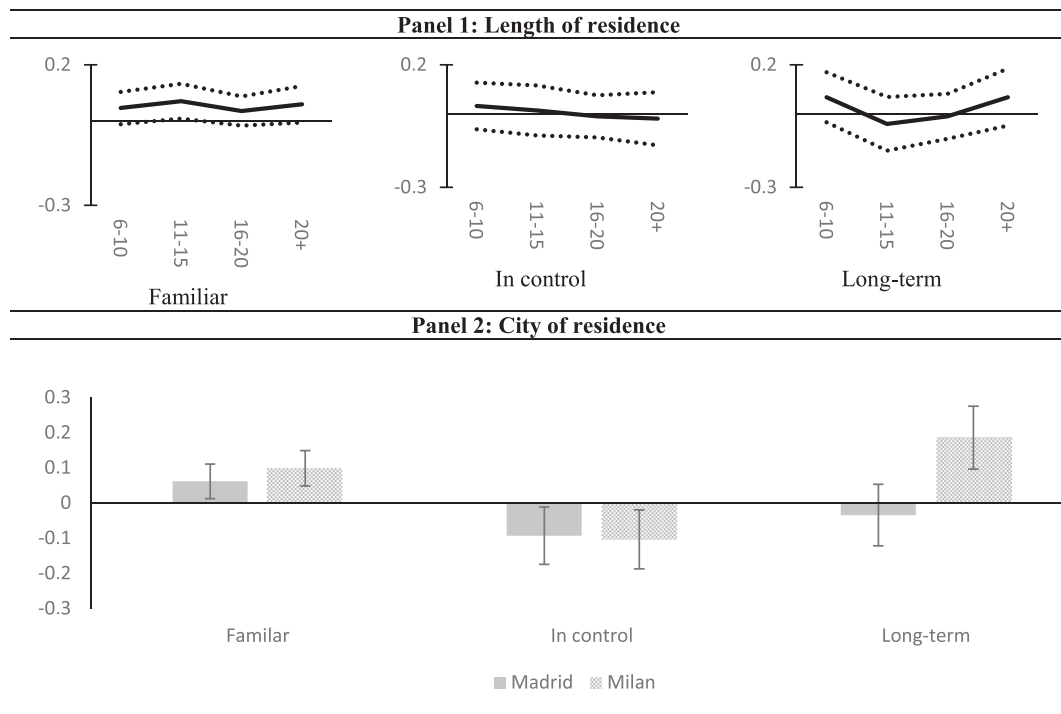


FIGURE 5 Feeling at home through emotions. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base categories. The base category in Panel 1 is those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The base in category in Panel 2 is those residing in London. The dotted lines in Panel 1 and the error bars in Panel 2 represent 95% confidence intervals

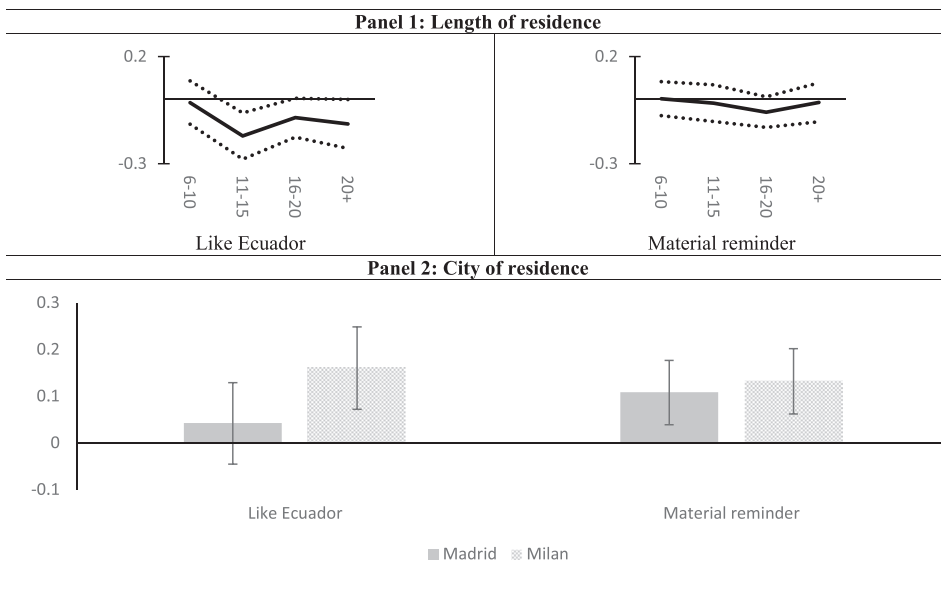


FIGURE 6 Feeling at home through nostalgia. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base categories. The base category in Panel 1 is those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The base in category in Panel 2 is those residing in London. The dotted lines in Panel 1 and the error bars in Panel 2 represent 95% confidence intervals

reminders of Ecuador in the dwelling is *unrelated* to length of residence abroad. Importantly, then, the protracted existence of reminders of Ecuador in immigrants' material cultures does not mean that the homeland is the main source of their home feelings. It is rather in the context of settlement, whatever the scale, that migrants report to feel at home—increasingly so, with their length of residence. Put differently, the time spent abroad tends to de-ethnicise immigrant

views and emotions about home. It by no means undermines the importance of feeling at home though—it rather relocates this, as an emotional attachment, towards the country and the local context of settlement, depending on the life conditions and opportunities they achieve there.

H6b suggested that the perceived resemblance to the homeland of a place—its 'Ecuadorian ambience', as it were—is more important in

locations with a weaker connection to the country of origin. However, the evidence does not support this hypothesis. The importance of a place feeling like Ecuador and the likelihood of having emotional reminders of Ecuador in the dwelling are higher in Milan and Madrid than in London. Those in Madrid are 11 percentage points more likely to have an emotional reminder of Ecuador in the dwelling compared with those in London, whereas those in Milan are 13 percentage points more likely. In short, domestic cultures do not operate as a substitute for connectedness at a city level; if anything, they mirror it. Furthermore, it seems that those who are reminded more often about Ecuador in their location of residence, given the stronger connection of the location with Ecuador, are also the ones more likely to value that aspect as a condition to feel at home.

5.6 | Feeling at home by gender

A large literature is available on gender differences and inequalities in relation to homemaking activities, especially in the domestic realm

(e.g., Anxo et al., 2011; Treas & Tsui, 2016). Therefore, we could expect that at least some of the findings above would differ substantially across genders. In Figure 7, we present some of the results separately by gender of the respondent. Surprisingly, there is gender similarity in the increase of place-based feeling at home over time on all the scales considered (Panel 1) and in the relative importance attributed to family, friends and to being alone, as conditions for migrants to feel at home (Panel 2). The same goes for the infrastructural characteristics of a place (Panel 3) and for the most important emotions it embodies or facilitates (Panel 4).

This result is counter-intuitive but intriguing, for the critical approaches to the normative views and representations of home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Mallett, 2004), to find out that—at least among Ecuadorian migrants in these three cities—women experience the emotional bases of home, and the changes in these bases over time, in a similar way to men. Gender-based inequalities in the ordinary practices of homemaking do not necessarily correspond to major gender differences in the emotional repertoires and imaginaries associated with the notion of home. Although the interface between

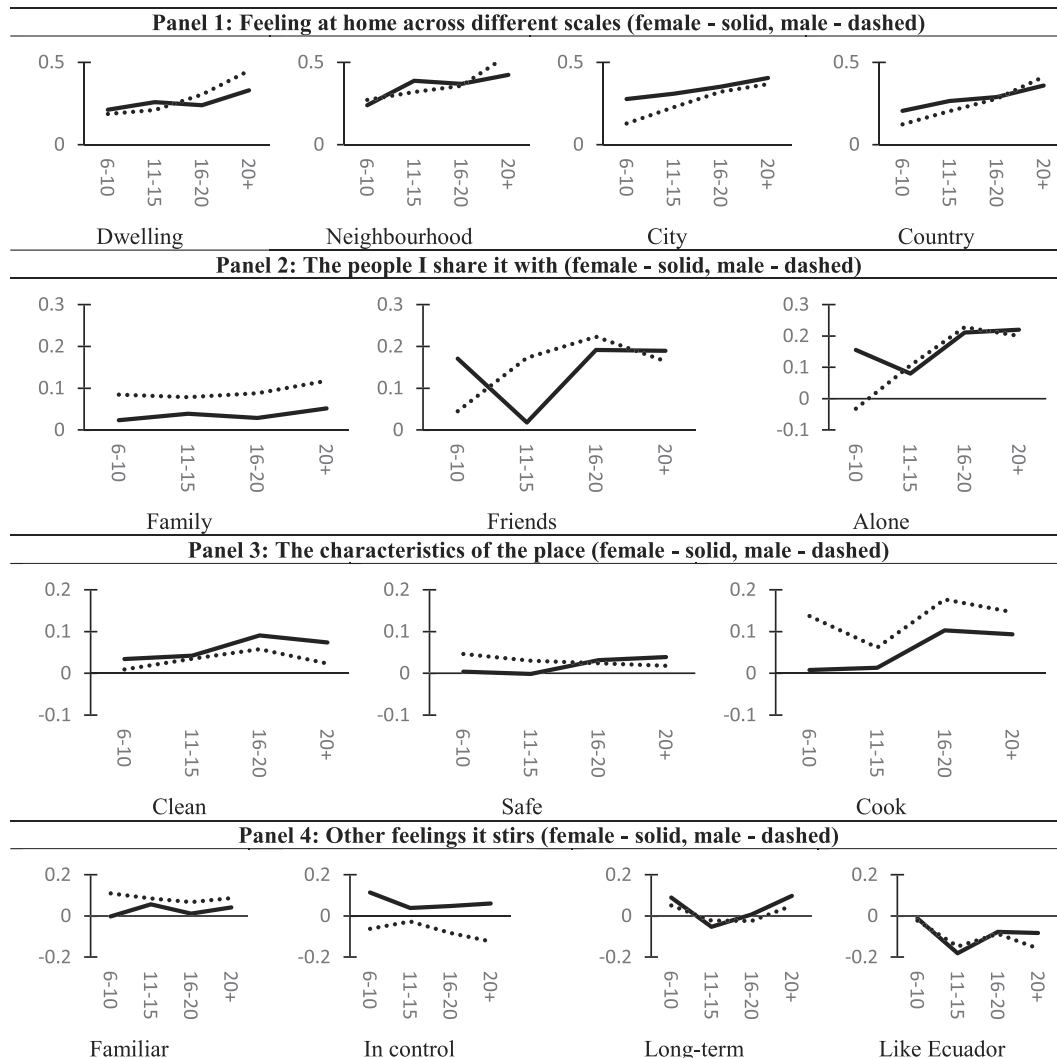


FIGURE 7 Feeling at home by gender. The figure reports coefficients obtained from estimating Equation 1 in the paper. The zero lines represent the base category, those who have resided in the country from 0 to 5 years. The dotted lines represent 95% confidence intervals

homemaking and feeling at home calls for further elaboration, the fact that the former is far more gendered than the latter should not go unnoticed.

6 | CONCLUSION

Using a cross-country quantitative survey of Ecuadorian migrants in Madrid, Milan and London, we add evidence to the debate on feeling at home among immigrants, which has grown largely out of qualitative accounts. We start by looking at the spatial aspects of feeling at home. In times with unprecedented potential for transnational connectedness and circular mobility, the assumption that home no more relies on a clear or distinctive location, particularly among people on the move, is simply incorrect—at least among Ecuadorian migrants in Europe. So is, however, the essentialistic view of their country of origin as the main or even the only place in which they should feel at home. In fact, migrants' experience of feeling at home is fundamentally time dependent and multiscalar. As our data shows, Ecuadorians' attachment of a sense of home towards their local and national context of settlement increases over time. On the other hand, the feeling of home towards their 'homeland' decreases with length of residence.

Following the early qualitative findings of HOMInG and the recent literature, we unpacked feeling at home along three other dimensions: relational, infrastructural and emotional—all of them in connection to location and length of residence. The importance attributed to social relations and infrastructural characteristics for feeling at home in a place increases over time. On the other hand, the association of feeling at home with most other emotional aspects explored tends to be constant. Yet the interaction of feeling at home with other emotions differs across locations. Most notably, 'familiarity' is more important for feeling at home in locations more connected to Ecuador (i.e., Madrid and Milan), whereas being in 'control' is less important in those locations compared with London. One emotional aspect that changes with length of residence, instead, is the importance of the Ecuadorian ambience of a place, for it to feel like home. The perceived connection between 'Ecuadorianes' (as articulated in the material culture of a place) and feeling at home decreases over time. Put differently, as immigrants' life course proceeds, feeling at home has to do less with continuity with the past than with the possibility to live in a place perceived as safe, familiar and orderly, possibly with one's own family members. As time in immigration goes by, home ends up being a matter more of perceived *normality* than of *ethnicity*. That said, the symbolic ethnicity of home is stronger in locations more connected to Ecuador, suggesting the existence of a meaningful interplay between the external environment surrounding migrants and their domestic and material cultures.

Contrary to our own expectations, the spatial, relational, infrastructural and emotional dimensions of home reveal little differences by gender. In short, the ideals that coalesce in the notion of home, or the main characteristics that home as a place should have, are very

much the same between Ecuadorian male and female migrants. This opens up yet another space for further research, on how feeling at home—a matter of place-based emotions, imaginaries and ideals—interplays with the practice, typically a gendered one, of homemaking in immigrants' everyday lives.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are under embargo until the end of the HOMInG Project (May 2022).

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ENDNOTE

¹ Data on Ecuadorians in the United Kingdom comes from Vargas-Silva's analysis of the 2017 UK Labour Force Survey, data on Ecuadorians in Spain comes from the *Padrón Municipal* of the Municipality of Madrid (2020) and data on Milan from the estimates of ISMU (2020)—a local think-tank specialised in surveys on immigrant populations.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Boccagni P, Vargas-Silva C. Feeling at home across time and place: A study of Ecuadorians in three European cities. *Popul Space Place*. 2021:e2431. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2431>