



# Finding a Sense of Belonging?

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# Abstract

Immigrants often face many challenges unique to their new surroundings, hindering the ease with which they can integrate into this new environment. These internal and external challenges pose huge barriers for immigrants regarding their ability to assimilate into a population. This dissertation then explores the dynamics of such challenges and their repercussions on the ability and ease of integration. Immigrants deal with the loss of what they once called 'home' and are forced to discover a new sense of belonging. The narrative of this dissertation unfolds through its author's journey of growing up outside of their home country, providing insight into challenges often faced by people in similar situations. Whilst focusing on an individual case, this study recognises the individuality of each immigrant's unique experience by drawing upon diverse sources to help define and understand these challenges and to illustrate the concept of 'home'. This dissertation explores its author's various living spaces throughout their lives, providing varying degrees of recognition of the idea of 'home'. Factors such as language, environment and sense of belonging are critical to the author's journey of self-discovery. Given these challenges and factors, the author understands that the concept of 'home' is not solely defined by the physical location where they reside but a combination of variables all contributing towards the true definition of 'home'.

# Acknowledgements

Chapter 2 covers the importance of language, another challenge immigrants face when emigrating from their home countries. This topic will discuss the significance of language in an architectural context and, from there, will cover how language impacted my experience and how it will further impact my future career and life.

Chapter 3 details the country of Luxembourg, the country I spent my early years growing up in as an immigrant. Its unique demographics and history make it an interesting and attractive country.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores my experience as an immigrant and how the previous factors impacted my journey in defining what 'home' is and how to feel like you belong. Throughout this chapter, I also discuss the different places I lived in during my 18 years in Luxembourg and will analyse each location through drawings I drew from memory to emphasise how I perceived them in entirely different lights. The analysis will compare the theories from previous chapters to my own experience to develop a real-life example.

# Introduction

People constantly traverse the world; some do so to discover it, and others become permanent immigrants in their chosen country.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, it was estimated that there were “...281 million international migrants in the world...”<sup>2</sup> Immigrants are different in several ways, varying significantly from person to person. Some migrate alone, and some migrate together with their families. Regarding classifications, adults are referred to as first-generation immigrants, whereas children who migrate are 1.5th-generation immigrants.<sup>3</sup> New-borns are known as second-generation immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, whether they successfully adjust to a new country is primarily decided by their willingness and desire. Unfortunately, many immigrants face difficult challenges that either make or break who they become as individuals. According to New Zealand Migration, immigrants face challenges such as language barriers, adapting to the new culture, finding employment, accessing education, financial instability, and feeling isolated due to their lack of family presence.<sup>5</sup>

This essay will start with Chapter 1, which investigates what a ‘home’ is. It is an element that immigrants must leave behind when moving countries, which can make them question their purpose and who they are. Often,

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1 Cambridge Dictionary, “IMMIGRANT | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” in Dictionary.cambridge.org, accessed October 29, 2023.

2 IOM UN Migration, “World Migration Report 2022,” iom.int, 2022.

3 Immigration Initiative at Harvard, “First and Second Generation – the Immigration Initiative at Harvard,” Immigration Initiative at Harvard, January 30, 2021.

4 Ibid

5 NZMigration, “What Are Some Common Challenges That Immigrants Face When Settling in NZ,” NZ Migration Help (blog), April 20, 2023.

immigrants see the country they are leaving as an irreplaceable part of their lives they call 'home', and when that happens, an important part of them is lost. This chapter will cover certain factors that contribute to the definition of 'home' and how personal identity relates to it. Additionally, examples from my journey are used to illustrate how I, as an immigrant, was able to find my purpose and feeling of belonging. Thus, drawing similarities to experiences that other immigrants might face.

Chapter 2 covers the importance of language, another challenge immigrants face when emigrating from their home countries. This topic will discuss the significance of language in an architectural context and, from there, will cover how language impacted my experience and how it will further impact my future career and life.

Chapter 3 details the country of Luxembourg, as it is the country that I spent of my early years growing up in as an immigrant. Its unique demographics and history make it an interesting and attractive country.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores my experience as an immigrant and how the previous factors impacted my journey in defining what 'home' is and how to feel like you belong. Throughout this chapter, I also discuss the different places I lived in during my 18 years in Luxembourg and will analyse each location through drawings I drew from memory to emphasise how I perceived them in entirely different lights. The analysis will compare the theories from previous chapters to my own experience to develop a real-life example.

# Home and Identity

The concept of 'home' is a complicated idea to put into words. Most people will find the thought of defining a 'home' to be a challenging subject, especially for an immigrant who might not fully understand their roots and origin. According to a survey in May 2023 that asked, "What is home?" the most common expressions were "... safety, security, unity, peace, the people we love, and the right to be oneself..."<sup>6</sup> One of the main challenges that immigrants face is feeling isolated, as they must be away from 'home' in an environment different than their childhood. In some cases, they must deal with the lack of family presence, so there is not much familiarity they could draw from. When one does not know their 'home', they are likely to face difficulty defining their identity as they struggle to understand where they belong due to this notion of isolation.

British anthropologist Mary Douglas states that "..., home could be defined as a pattern of regular doings, furnishings and appurtenances, and a physical space in which certain communitarian practices were realized.... Homes also gave structure to time and embodied a capacity for memory and anticipation."<sup>7</sup> John Berger, an English art critic, novelist, painter, and poet, states, " Salient among traditional conceptualizations of home was the stable physical centre of one's universe – a safe and still place to leave and return to (whether house, village, region or nation), and a principal focus of one's concern and control."<sup>8</sup> Mary Douglas defines 'home' as simply a physical location where one creates daily

6 Mojo Concierge Properties, "What Is the Meaning of 'Home' for People? What Are the Three Words You Would Use?," MOJO Boutique Real Estate, May 11, 2023.

7 Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, *Migrants of Identity : Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 6.

8 Rapport and Dawson, *Migrants of Identity : Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, 6-7.

routines and they fill up the space with resources. In contrast, John Berger describes it as somewhere with comfort, the feeling of safety, and somewhere they are always welcome to return to, which is more relatable to the survey that extracted the most common words previously mentioned. The journal "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement" defined 'home' as a "... familiar place..."<sup>9</sup> seeing as "Such a space is comforting, not because one has arrived, but because one has the security of a destination."<sup>10</sup> which supports the definition of a 'home' being one's comfort place as it will be there to provide security. Safety and comfort also come from having the opportunity to live in the right environment, which plays a big part in shaping who we are.<sup>11</sup> Iain Chambers, a British anthropologist, sociologist, and cultural studies scholar, wrote that 'home' is not a singular place, but that it is their description of the space that a person or being occupies. The book also describes one's 'home' as being mobile. From this, we can derive that 'home' can take the form of many places for one person, such as work, a house, or another location. However, recognising that many people will not have the same 'home' or the exact description as of their 'home' as everyone due to them having their own identity.<sup>12</sup>

Having a 'home' is one thing, but having an identity and knowing oneself is another topic related to 'home'. The concept of a 'home' and identity are similar in many ways. A 'home' is somewhere one can feel safe, comfortable, and confident, and knowing one's identity provides a similar feeling of safety and comfort. The book "Migrants of Identity: Perception of Home in a World of Movement" explores the relationship between

9 Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," International Journal of Cultural Studies 2, no. 3 (December 1999): 330.

10 Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," 330.

11 Christele Harrouk, "Psychology of Space: How Interiors Impact Our Behavior?," ArchDaily, March 20, 2020.

12 Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 4.



identity and fixity "... necessarily and universally finding a stationary point in the environment from which may use the concept of 'home' to refer to that environment...in which one best knows oneself, where one's self-identity is best grounded..."<sup>13</sup> This quote implies that when one feels at 'home', there is certainty in one's identity, and when one feels they belong somewhere the most, that is where their 'home' is.

Home and identity were challenges I faced growing up as I am Japanese but grew up in Luxembourg. I never saw Japan as my 'home', but I felt too Japanese to be considered Luxembourgish and too westernised to be considered Japanese. This conflict within me was something I struggled with for a long time, especially when I would change schools. Trends were constantly evolving, and I was trying to make friends. Whenever someone asks me which I am, I always respond with both. Even though I consider myself both, Luxembourg is my 'home' as I do not have any personal attachments in Japan besides family. Growing up in Luxembourg and being blessed with the spaces I got to live in made me who I am today.

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13 Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, *Migrants of Identity : Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 21.

# Language and Belonging

As previously mentioned, language barriers are one of the challenges that immigrants must face to adjust to a new location. In this world, the exact number of languages is yet to be determined as there are still areas that have not been fully discovered.<sup>14</sup> According to research, the best estimate is that almost 7100 languages exist throughout the seven continents, and approximately 150 to 200 of them are “...spoken by more than a million people.”<sup>15</sup> Language plays an immense role in people’s daily lives as people use language to understand one another and build relationships, which ultimately creates a sense of belonging.<sup>16</sup>

Language is a tool people use to communicate, but it is also crucial in architecture and design industries. It is easy to ignore language as an essential factor in architecture, as stated in the book by A. Markus Thomas and Deborah Cameron: “Language is a neglected subject in discussions of architecture, which is conventionally regarded as a visual rather than verbal activity.”<sup>17</sup> In architectural environments, most of the work produced is collaborative and rarely just a one-person job. Collaborative work means the architects must communicate with others, such as clients, co-workers, and contractors.<sup>18</sup> The book analyses Dana Cuff’s detailed architectural study, and she clarifies the amount of written

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14 Michele, “How Many Languages Are There in the World 2023 (THIS Will Surprise You),” *The Intrepid Guide*, March 31, 2023.

15 Ibid

16 Kelsey Holmes, “Language: The Essence of Culture | Greenheart International,” *Greenheart.org*, 2019.

17 Deborah Cameron and Thomas A. Markus, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*, 2001, 1.

18 Cameron and A. Markus, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*, 2001, 1.

language: "...written language is produced in any architectural project. Meetings are recorded in memos and minutes; letters may have to be written to various authorities and community representatives; agreements and contracts must be drawn up."<sup>19</sup> Another factor that language could affect is finance. Moving to another country and needing to understand the language may stop one from getting a job. Even if you have a degree in architecture, you need to speak specific languages to get a job in the field, which may affect you financially. Financial issues also affect your environment because they could deprive you of living in a good home and cause financial stress.<sup>20</sup>

Immigrant affairs manager and author of the article "Surviving or Thriving? What It Takes for Immigrants to Succeed" Farhat Popal writes about her experience as "...part of the '1.5 generation'..."<sup>21</sup> and how the first-generation immigrants suffer more in their experiences because not understanding the language "...affects immigrants' ability to access services, navigate the bureaucracy of government institutions, and understand the nuances of things like insurance policies and health care."<sup>22</sup> which proves how important language is. She also explores how people can exploit those who do not yet speak their native language.

Language represented a big part of my life as I was taught five languages during childhood and adolescence. Throughout my upbringing, I often interchanged some aspects of one language with others, as I lacked the knowledge of some words in one language and then resorted

19 Deborah Cameron and Thomas A. Markus, *The Words between the Spaces: Buildings and Language*, 2001, 1.

20 Impact on Urban Health, "Health and Money," *Impact on Urban Health*, April 14, 2021.

21 Farhat Popal, "Surviving or Thriving? What It Takes for Immigrants to Succeed," *George W. Bush Presidential Center*, 2021.

22 Ibid

to the work in another. Hence, I occasionally interchange words because they work to complete the context of a sentence. In the semi-autobiographical book by Ruth Ozeki, "A Tale for the Time Being", one of the two main characters is Japanese and American and lives in Tokyo. Throughout the book, she often uses Japanese words within her English sentences,<sup>23</sup> implying that it is not odd for multilingual people to interchange between languages when they fail to remember words in one language. Every time I changed schools, I had to learn a new language, meaning communicating and making friends would be more difficult. Language is crucial to finding a sense of belonging as it is the primary way to communicate and create understanding between people. However, language has also benefited me in my architectural career as I study interior architecture in English but acquired internships in Luxembourg, where the main languages are French and Luxembourgish. Throughout my studies, as much as visually communicating your ideas as a designer is essential, the number of tutorials, lectures and hours of research required to navigate a design's visual process is significant, and so is language, as everything surrounding the process needs to be communicated through the medium of language.

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23 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*. (Viking, 2013).

# Luxembourg

For much of my life, I have considered Luxembourg to be the place I consider 'home'. It is where I grew up, and I will always desire to return as I always feel welcome. It is an exciting and lively country with a strong economy. Luxembourg is "...the second-wealthiest country in the world..."<sup>24</sup> even though it is the 28th smallest country<sup>25</sup> out of 195 countries and the seventh smallest country in Europe.<sup>26</sup> Its population is approximately 660,000 as of January 2023.<sup>27</sup> It is an incredibly international country with more than 170 nationalities coexisting within its borders.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, Luxembourg is often mistaken for a business and finance area with no charm, giving it an unrepresentative stereotype despite being beautiful. There seems to be an idea that it is just another tiny wealthy country when it has so much to offer. It has many beautiful forests and natural habitats, such as the example in Figure 1. Luxembourg is more than just a place to work as the economic centre of Kirchberg is located right above the *Grund*, which is one of the oldest districts with historic structures, known as the "Fairy tale district".<sup>29</sup> Luxembourg has managed to balance old and new, which has always been quite interesting for me, especially as I realised that my interests were following the direction

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24 U.S. Department of State, "Luxembourg," United States Department of State, accessed November 19, 2023.

25 Carly Hallman, "The 100 Smallest Countries in the World | TitleMax," [www.titlemax.com](http://www.titlemax.com), September 28, 2020.

26 Catherine McGloin, "10 of the Smallest Countries in Europe," Skyscanner's Travel Blog, May 5, 2020.

27 Statistiques.lu, "Luxembourg's Demography in Figures," [statistiques.public.lu](http://statistiques.public.lu), September 19, 2023.

28 Just Arrived, "Cosmopolitan Population and Harmonious Cultural Diversity," Just Arrived Luxembourg, accessed November 19, 2023.

29 Luxembourg City, "THE GRUND: Luxembourg's Unforgettable Fairy Tale District," [www.luxembourg-city.com](http://www.luxembourg-city.com), accessed November 19, 2023.



Figure 1 - Photo Taken by Candidate, Müllerthal, Luxembourg

of an Architectural Designer. Another interesting fact about Luxembourg is that it is one of the most sustainable countries in the world.<sup>30</sup> What massively helped was their removal of charges for public transportation in 2020, which helped reduce carbon emissions.<sup>31</sup> Luxembourg being so sustainable has shaped me as a designer because it has shaped my beliefs and interests towards creating environmentally friendly designs.

In terms of architecture, Luxembourg has both new and old buildings (shown in Figures 2 and 3). Figure 2 is the famous Luxembourg Philharmonie, the country's official and main concert hall. Figure 3 displays a photo of the Red Bridge, which is seen as a tourist destination. It is the main connection road for "...the city centre of the capital to the main economic hotspot of the country on Kirchberg – seat of European Union institutions such as the European Court of Justice and core of Luxembourg's financial sector."<sup>32</sup> It is also known for its bright red colour. Being surrounded by beautiful scenery and structures inspired me to enter the design industry.

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30 Peter, "Ranked: Most Sustainable Countries in the World," Atlas & Boots (blog), May 10, 2023.

31 Steve Rose, "All Aboard! Can Luxembourg's Free Public Transport Help Save the World?," The Guardian, September 20, 2023.

32 H-Europe, "The Red Bridge," H-Europe, accessed November 20, 2023.



Figure 2 – Photo Taken by Condair, Philharmonie Luxembourg | Hybrid Humidifier, [www.condair.de](http://www.condair.de), accessed November 19, 2023.



Figure 3 – Photo of Luxembourg Red Bridge, Taken by Candidate



# Personal Experience

My family is originally from Japan and, more specifically, from the north of Japan, Hokkaido. I was born near Tokyo, in Chiba and lived there for more than a year before my father moved to Luxembourg for work. In hindsight, this move was the best thing that happened to me as I now call Luxembourg my 'home', even though the rest of my family has moved back to Japan.

Growing up in Luxembourg was difficult, but I was lucky with how and where my parents raised me. I went to three different schools where I learned four new languages. Luxembourg is an incredibly international country, which made it easier for me to feel like I belong. One of the main factors that helped me develop a feeling of belonging was knowing many languages, as it reduced language barriers. I first started attending a French nursery and preschool from ages one to four, where I learned French and Japanese simultaneously and at a similar level; since I communicated to my parents in French and Japanese, I was unsure which of these two languages would be considered my first language. This example is similar to Ruth Ozeki's book, as one of the main characters would write in Japanese and English in their diary.<sup>33</sup> My parents used to live in Paris, France, for three years before my brother and I were born, hence why they understand French. Then, I started learning Luxembourgish and German in the local school and continued improving my French skills. My local school taught these languages, as these were the main languages used in Luxembourg. Finally, my parents switched me from my local school to the International School of Luxembourg, where my brother was already attending. That is where I

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33 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*. (Viking, 2013).

learned English. Learning these languages was very challenging, but it was worth it as it allowed me to communicate with most of the people I grew up around and provided a place where I felt like I could be myself.

During my 18 years in Luxembourg, I lived in three places: two apartments and one house. They each had their uniqueness and were lovely places to live, but only one place truly felt like 'home'. All three were in similar locations, all within 4.2 kilometres of each other. I spent ten years of my life in the first apartment, then in the house for two years, then finally in a new apartment for five years. The first apartment is the place that most closely identifies with the concept of 'home' (Figure 4). I will analyse these spaces in the following paragraphs through plan drawings, colours and theories that support my experience.

In Figure 4, the different colours have different meanings. The grey areas are spaces I rarely used as they were not my rooms; instead, they were my parents' or my brothers'. To illustrate the spaces I occupied, figure 4 shows footprints in the areas I used. The footprints represent where I would move within the house and perform my daily routines and habits. A similarity can be drawn from this idea explored by Mary Douglas, who states, "Homes also gave structure to time and embodied a capacity for memory and anticipation... Then again, the routinization of space-time was also aesthetic and moral..."<sup>34</sup> which resonates with how I lived in this space and how these memories and routines I created allowed me to feel comfortable. The yellow represents joy and the spaces where I spent most of my time. It felt like 'home', as most of my happy childhood memories were created in that space. However, other factors made this place feel like 'home' to me. One factor is that I lived with my father for

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34 Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, *Migrants of Identity : Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 7.

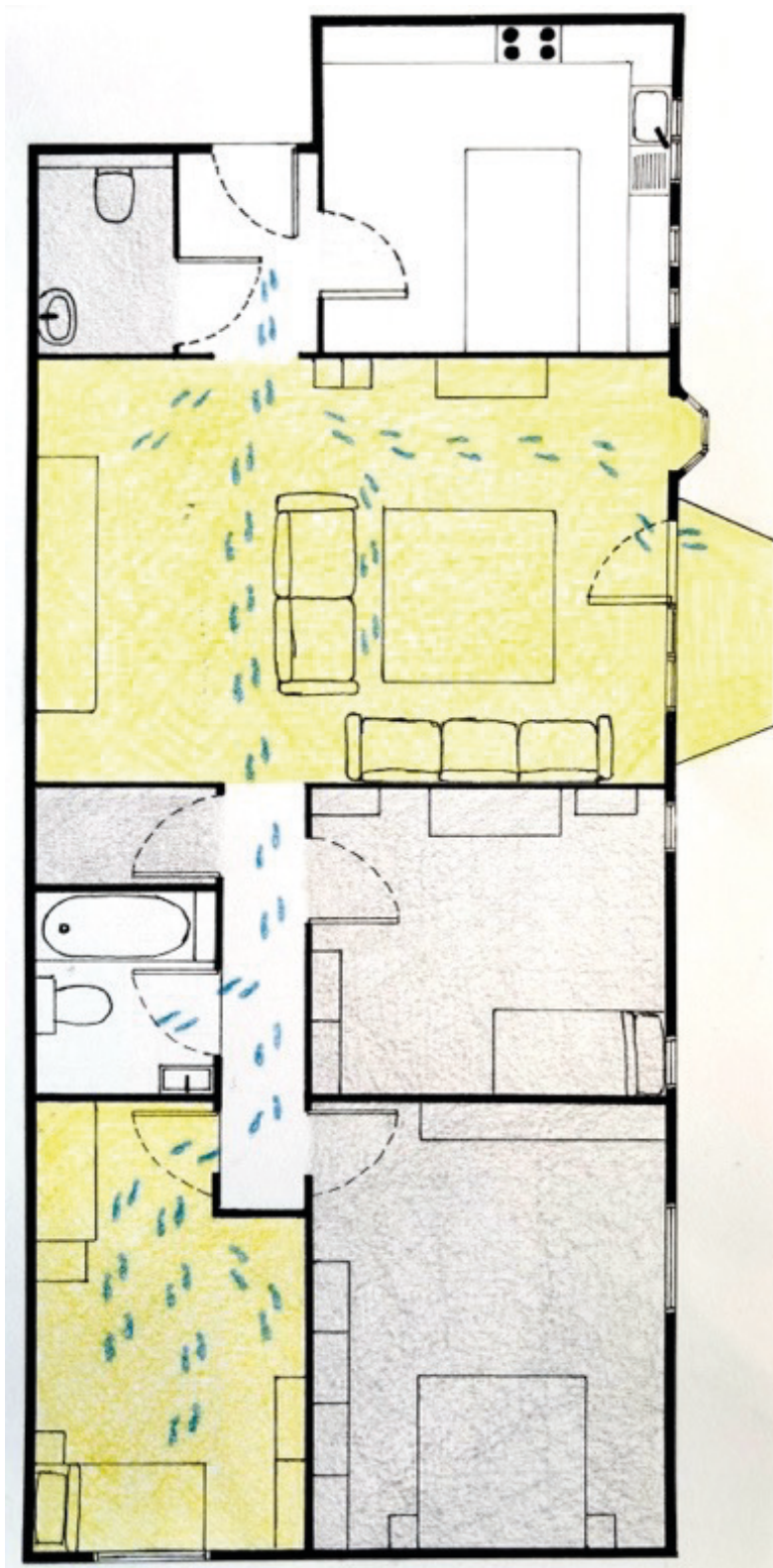


Figure 4 – Plan Drawing of First Space, Drawn by Student

the longest undisturbed period in this space. It is also the place I would return to when things were difficult outside of this space as I had to learn many different languages and change schools, meaning I had to make new friends and fit into these new environments. In this space, however, I could return to feeling welcome and speaking Japanese to my family without worrying about anything. Sara Ahmed stated in her article, "Home is implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience indeed, where the subject is so at ease that she or he does not think."<sup>35</sup> This statement supports how I felt in this space, as my comfort made it feel like a true 'home'.

Figure 5 displays plan drawings of the second location that I lived in. It was a house with four floors and a back garden. I remember always wanting to live in a house with a garden, so when we moved, I was thrilled. Eventually, I realised this place would not become my 'home' as it felt incomplete. Similar to the previous plan drawing (figure 4), this plan has colours representing how I used the rooms. In Figure 5, footprints show the general mapping of where I usually occupied and had some form of routine, one of the elements that made up a 'home', according to Mary Douglas.<sup>36</sup> The grey spaces were rooms I rarely spent time in. In contrast, the few yellow spaces were where I spent time with my father, which carry memories I treasure. The dark blue rooms had the least natural lighting, and one of these was my own. This resulted in me not spending time there as these dark rooms always felt gloomy and made me feel lonely as a child. This illustrates that lighting is an essential element in the spaces one occupies, as it can create an entirely different

35 Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (December 1999): 339.

36 Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson, *Migrants of Identity : Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 7.

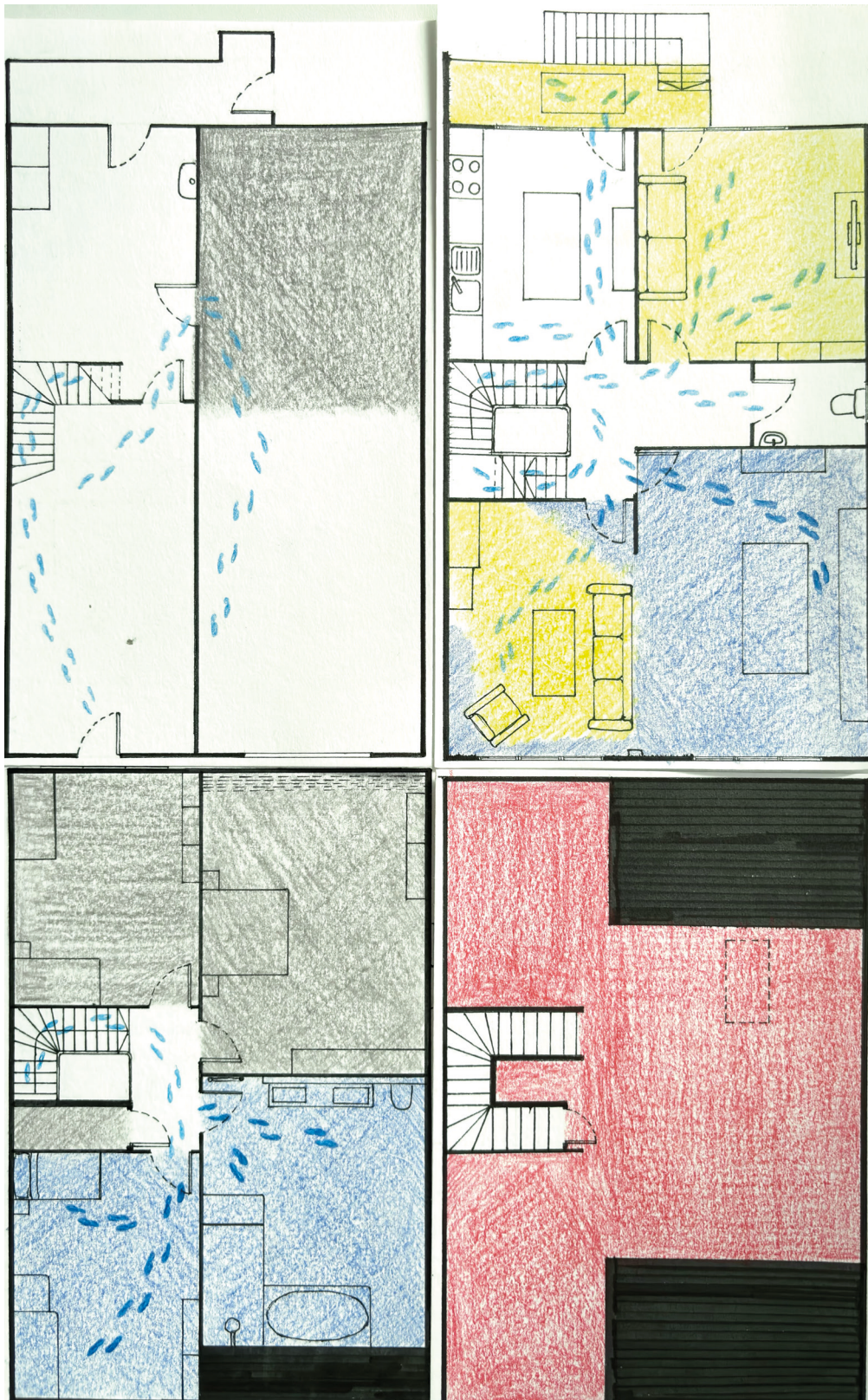


Figure 5 – Plan Drawings of Second Space, Drawn by Student

atmosphere. The top floor was an attic full of items, belongings and unpacked boxes. These unpacked boxes were a strong factor that never allowed this house to feel like a 'home', as it made me think that we were not staying there forever, hence why it is red. Another factor that made me feel lonely was that my brother left for his studies, and my father moved back to Japan for work. Having people go makes it difficult to enjoy a space where you used to spend a lot of time with those people.

Finally, figure 6 presents a plan of the last space I lived in until I moved abroad for university. This place was my least favourite as I never saw it as a 'home'. It was a place where I did not want to be as I never felt safe in this space, and it felt more like I was stuck there. I remember being overwhelmed by schoolwork, yet trying to balance my many extra-curricular activities as they kept me from having to return home early. Even though I lived in this space longer than in the previous place, I only created a few memories I can clearly remember or cherish. Although this space had much better lighting than my last and had so much potential, it never felt like 'home'. To me, this place was just where I slept and ate because, by the time I moved into this apartment, it was just my mother and me, whom I, unfortunately, did not have the best relationship with, and as a result, it always felt incredibly lonely. Whilst living in this space, my parents considered for us to move back to Japan, and I can remember being completely supportive of that decision. Growing up, I always wanted to stay in Luxembourg, but living in this space was one of the many factors that made me feel okay with starting anew in Japan. That is why most of this space is depicted in red because the atmosphere in this space never allowed me to see it as a safe and comfortable place. As previously mentioned, a 'home' should be a place of "... safety, security, unity, peace, the people we love, and the right to



Figure 6 – Plan Drawing of Third Space, Drawn by Student

be oneself...”,<sup>37</sup> and this space did not fulfil any of these criteria during my time there.

Editor Christele Harrouk previously wrote about the “Psychology of Space: How Interiors Impact our Behaviour?” which analysed how space can affect the user’s emotions. Elements such as “Lighting, colors, configuration, scale, proportions, acoustics, and materials...”<sup>38</sup> can affect how we act and feel. In my experience, my emotions were not so much affected by the spaces I lived in, but my feelings affected how I perceived these spaces. Psychological scientist Erika Siegel researched how our emotions impact what we see, and she states that “...what we see is not a direct reflection of the world but a mental representation of the world that is infused by our emotional experiences.”<sup>39</sup> This research supports my experience, showing that emotions can affect perception. All the spaces were equally lovely at their core, but the first space felt the most comfortable and safe, making it feel the most like a ‘home’.

What was common in all three spaces was that my parents would always set up Hina-ningyo and Kabuto on the same furniture. Hina-ningyo would get set up every year on March 3 to celebrate a Japanese girl’s holiday called Hinamatsuri. This memorable holiday was “... to pray for the healthy growth, prosperity and happiness of girls...”<sup>40</sup> Then, for the kabuto, they set it up yearly on Boy’s Day, or others consider it as Children’s Day on May 5, also known as Tango no sekku. It means to

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37 Mojo Concierge Properties, “What Is the Meaning of ‘Home’ for People? What Are the Three Words You Would Use?,” MOJO Boutique Real Estate, May 11, 2023.

38 Christele Harrouk, “Psychology of Space: How Interiors Impact Our Behavior?,” ArchDaily, March 20, 2020.

39 Association for Psychological Science, “The Emotions We Feel May Shape What We See,” ScienceDaily, April 11, 2018.

40 Japan Wonder Travel Blog, “What Is Hinamatsuri? How to Celebrate Girl’s Day in Japan 2022,” Japan Wonder Travel Blog, February 28, 2022.



pray for success in a boy's life. The meaning behind the kabuto is to "... inspire boys to be strong and powerful." a kabuto was part of the armour that samurais used back in the Edo period.<sup>41</sup>

Figures 7, 8, and 9 display a photo of where my parents would set up these Japanese items. They would always set it up on our large buffet sideboard, and they never changed its location, bringing this sense of familiarity throughout all three spaces. Figure 7 was in my first living space; Figure 8 was in my second space; and Figure 9 was in my last living space. Seeing as I moved from Japan when I was only one year old, knowing more about Luxembourg culture than Japanese culture was typical. Having these familiar items throughout my 18 years in Luxembourg helped me find an interest in Japanese culture and understand myself better. I remember the struggle I used to have when embracing my Japanese side as I was going to a local school, and I was the only Japanese person who attended that school. However, after meeting more Japanese people at the International School of Luxembourg, I started being able to embrace the fact that I am both Japanese and Luxembourgish.

My parents wanted me to familiarise myself with a few practices as they wanted me to understand the importance of my culture of origin. In Japan, it is normal not to wear shoes indoors but rather indoor slippers. They call the entrance area where people leave their outdoor shoes *genkan*.<sup>42</sup> They taught me how to have Japanese table manners, such as

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41 JNTO, "Celebrating the Boys of Japan the Traditions of Tango No Sekku," Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), April 28, 2021.

42 japan-guide.com, "Indoor Etiquette - Good Manners in the Japanese House," Japan-guide.com, June 30, 2019.



Figure 7 – Photo of Student with Hina-ningyo dolls in the background  
Photo taken by Student's Family Member



Figure 8 – Photo of Student with kabuto (samurai helmet) in the background  
Photo taken by Student's Family Member



Figure 9 – Photo of Hina-ningyo  
Photo taken by Student

saying *itadakimasu*,<sup>43</sup> meaning “I gratefully receive”,<sup>44</sup> before eating and after finishing to say *gochisousama*,<sup>45</sup> meaning thank you for the meal. My parents wanted to teach us these Japanese habits and much more to understand the mannerisms of my country of origin. This experience helped me have a stronger connection to Japan and its culture.

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43 Japan-guide.com, “Japanese Table Manners,” Japan-guide.com, June 30, 2019.

44 Ibid

45 Ibid

# Conclusion

I conducted this research through a combination of external resources supported by my internal experience. This dissertation mainly draws examples from my own experience, meaning that by nature, every immigrant cannot have had the same experience, but many may have had similar experiences in different contexts. Other stories, such as the ones by Farhat Popal<sup>46</sup> and the semi-autobiographical book by Ruth Ozeki,<sup>47</sup> made me feel like part of a community. People write about their stories to let others know they are not alone. I faced many challenges throughout my journey, such as feeling confused about where I truly belonged and my identity. For a long time, I was unsure about who I truly was, which led me to delve into a research proposal titled “Feeling out of place?”.

While writing the research proposal, I was simultaneously trying to regain my Luxembourgish visa, as my previous one had expired. When I applied for a new visa, I got rejected as they concluded I needed more connections and personal ties in Luxembourg. It initially felt heartbreaking as it felt that I had my ‘home’ taken away from me. I eventually appealed their decision with proof of my bonds to Luxembourg and finally regained it in July 2023. I have to renew it every year, but it was all worth it as I regained access to what I perceive to be the closest definition of a ‘home’.

Many factors can affect an immigrant’s life, and through my research, I understood how much environment, finance, language, and connections

46 Farhat Popal, “Surviving or Thriving? What It Takes for Immigrants to Succeed,” George W. Bush Presidential Center, 2021.

47 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*. (Viking, 2013).

can affect one's life. These factors were undoubtedly the ones that helped me belong somewhere. After years of uncertainty, I concluded that Luxembourg is my 'home'. This certainty of having somewhere to call my 'home' motivated me to write this essay as a continuation from "Feeling out of Place?" to "Finding a Sense of Belonging?". Compared to how I felt when I wrote "Feeling out of Place?" writing this dissertation, I felt passionate, and I was happy to share my story. I also researched different theories about home, identity and belonging during this process. Reflecting on my own experience alongside other theories and concepts made me understand my experience more and realise that my emotions played a big part in defining my 'home'.

Even though I currently reside in a beautiful area that satisfies all the requirements for a house, I have realised over time that Luxembourg is my 'home' as a country. It feels familiar because I know where everything is, and hearing people talk in different languages makes me feel comfortable. I got used to the international side of Luxembourg, which made my move to the United Kingdom, where I mainly heard English, feel unfamiliar. Luxembourg is also a small country that often feels calm, which was one of my favourite parts of growing up there. It is also where I learned all my languages, which will stay with me for the rest of my life and benefit my future. As a child under the age of 18, you do not get much choice of where you go in life and what you do, but my father was always doing everything he could for me without me realising until later in life. It was my father who decided that I should stay in Luxembourg so that I could continue the life that I had built there. This experience allowed me to find my 'home' in Luxembourg and provided me with the life I have now.

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# Bibliography of Images

Cover page – Photo Taken by Candidate, Japan, Sha

Figure 1 – Photo Taken by Candidate, Müllerthal, Luxembourg

Figure 2 – Condair. Philharmonie Luxembourg | Hybrid Humidifier.

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Figure 3 – Photo of Luxembourg Red Bridge, Taken by Candidate

Figure 4 – Plan Drawing of First Space, Drawn by Student

Figure 5 – Plan Drawings of Second Space, Drawn by Student

Figure 6 – Plan Drawing of Third Space, Drawn by Student

Figure 7 – Photo of Student with Hina-ningyo dolls in the background,

Photo taken by Student's Family Member

Figure 8 – Photo of Student with kabuto (samurai helmet) in the background, Photo taken by Student's Family Member

Figure 9 – Photo of Hina-ningyo, Photo taken by Student

# Appendix

This appendix consists of the process of this dissertation and how different factors affected my choice of topics. The topic initially sparked in year 2 when I chose to write about feeling isolated throughout my experience of being an immigrant in Luxembourg. This topic is personal, so I decided to continue researching further. When thinking about the title, I initially struggled and even got critiqued by my peers that my initial title of “What it takes to be a Japanese immigrant in Luxembourg” was more of a statement. I thought back to how I titled my previous writing, and after discussing it with my peers during reviews and my tutor, I realised I wanted to title my dissertation so that it was more of a sequel, which led to the title “Finding a sense of belonging?”. Figuring out the different contents was complex as the topic is vast, so I chose factors that impacted my experience the most, which aided my adjusting to Luxembourg. Initially, I wanted to stick to the topics I had chosen, but due to some topics having many similarities, I had to merge some topics, making the writing better. The research that I did during this dissertation was a mix of theories and migrant stories, which helped make this dissertation personal but also theoretical. It was interesting to compare these different theories in my upbringing as, generally, you do not think about your life in a theoretical manner.