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The Complexities of 'Home': Young people 'on the move' and state responses

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Abstract

'Home' invokes ambiguous meanings for policy, practice and academia. This paper explores the complexities of 'home' in relation to the experiences of two groups of young people in transitory circumstances (UK children who go missing from the family home or alternative care; and young people who have been separated from their home and families as refugees). We consider how the meaning given to 'home', despite its inherent ambiguity, functions as a central concept around which the vulnerability and credibility of children and young people is constructed. By problematizing the universalised concept of home and the notion of 'family' that it implies this paper contributes to Criminology and Refugee Studies by exploring state responses to 'youth journeys' (within and to the UK) through an idealised lens of 'home'. This normative view, we suggest, forms the basis for determining state responses, with significant consequences for these young people.

Introduction

The concept of 'home' as a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch, 1995) is not a universal experience. In terms of both academic theorising, policy and political engagement, and practice-based interventions, there is growing acknowledgement that the concept of 'home' is a problematic ideal that has changed over time and across space. In some contexts, it denotes a place of safety and supervision for children and young people, in contrast to the potential insecurity of unsupervised public spaces (Harden, 2000). However, the notion of the private sphere of the home is a particularly westernised, idealised setting where children and childhood have become increasingly located. As Mallett (2004: 84) suggests, home is for many children and young people, a more ambiguous space that "can constitute belonging and/or create a sense of marginalisation and estrangement".

The sociological concept of home has taken account of meaning and emotional attachment in various ways (Mallett, 2004; May, 2011). Criminology scholars have paid attention to the home as a place of fear and violence (i.e. a site of 'crime') both from outside intruders, but also specifically from threats experienced within the home (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Edwards, 1989). Feminist and critical scholars have exposed the myth of the nuclear family setting of the privatised home as a location characterised by harm, abuse and neglect for many women and children (Smart, 1989; Walklate, 2008). Indeed Wardaugh (1999) considers the possibility of being 'homeless at home'. Attention to domestic abuse, in its various forms, has increasingly highlighted the experiences of violence and intimidation that can characterise personal relationships, and the 'intimate terrorism' [domestic abuse/coercive control] that can be enacted within the home (Fitz-Gibbon, Walklate and McCulloch, 2018).

Central to the analysis of this paper is the complex basis of 'the home' as applied to young people in transit, specifically, young people who 'run away' or go 'missing' from home in the UK; and those separated children 'on the move' who come to the UK. The problematic ambiguity that determines home as both the 'problem' and the 'solution' to young people in situations of transit highlights a central and pervasive ambiguity of policy and practice that is underexplored in relation to young people more broadly. This paper attempts to disrupt the common sense concept of home which, when it appears at all, is often presented as a problematic absence: the place young people have run 'from' and in most cases, the place they should be returned 'to'. However, more significantly, assumptions and ideals about what constitutes 'home' often influence decision-making processes and assessments of risk, particularly around notions of 'safety' and appropriate responses by state institutions.

In this respect, the concept of 'home' (and the judgements that revolve around it) often underpin the enactment of policy in relation to young people. In this paper, we direct our attention to the interface between child protection and immigration policy with asylum seeking and separated children, and child protection and youth justice policies with those UK children who 'go missing' or 'run away'. In particular, we explore the tensions between these systems, exploring the normative concept of 'home' as a determining factor that is used to shape perceptions and responses. We argue that 'home' is a political construct that employs different categories and definitions which, in effect, favours some groups over others. In this

way, the application of state responses based around constructs of home often exacerbates rather than ameliorates harm, as we illustrate by drawing on the experiences of the two groups of young people who form the basis of this paper.

No place like home: concepts and ideals

The contemporary social fiction of the family and the family home has enjoyed the support of an enduring set of political institutions since the Victorian period. A 'strong and orderly' family has, in social policy constructs, been central to providing the necessary support for a 'strong and stable' state (Scruton, 1997; Sclater and Piper, 2000); the home is thus a cornerstone of social policy and engagement. This has implications for how 'running away' and/or 'going missing' from the home is understood and conceptualised, and the ways in which this provokes different responses and meanings. Social conditions for the realisation of the family and the idealised notion of 'home' are not evenly distributed throughout society, in fact, their distribution is decidedly uneven. The home and the family are key sites of social reproduction and are political constructions that serve to mask the root of social, economic and gender inequality. Like the public location of the streets, home is a space distinguished by gender, social class and by age (Atkinson and Jacobs, 2016; Calder, 2016) as well as nationality/ethnicity.

It is difficult to disentangle the meanings we attach to the 'home' and to the 'family'. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1998) points out the category of 'family' is a social fiction made real through the process of naming and collective recognition. This is possible since, he argues: "it can be said without contradiction both that social realities are social fictions with no other basis than social construction, and that they really exist, in as much as they are collectively recognized" (Bourdieu 1998: 66). The names 'family' and 'home' become real because we accept them as such and thus collectively construct the 'family' and the 'home' in reality. The concept of the home is supported by (western) legislation, with the 'right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence' enshrined in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Exemptions to legislation can be telling and impact on rights to be at home and the recognition of such entitlement. Although the UK Government ratified the UN Convention

on the Rights of the Child in 1991, it entered a general reservation relating to the entry, stay and departure from the UK of children and young people subject to immigration control and the acquisition and possession of citizenship. This had implications for young people subjected to immigration control and those seeking asylum. Campaigns by a number of organisations resulted in the removal of this reservation from UK Law in 2008. Similarly, inclusion of Home Office agencies (UK Visas and Immigration, Immigration Enforcement, Border Force) as required to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under the 2004 Children's Act was not formalised until the introduction of Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, again as the result of pressure from campaign groups. Inclusion and exclusions all contribute towards consensus on the existence and the meaning of things. Words and the process of 'naming' creates the 'common-sense' that becomes accepted by all as self-evident. This process of constructing reality is all the more potent when the objective structures regarding the home and the mental categories that we apply to such concepts are mutually reinforcing. This is evidenced through a range of cultural practices that arise from the idealized image of the 'family home' while at the same time reinforcing it, making it seem entirely natural. This means that the idealized nuclear family in advanced capitalist society is inextricably bound up with western cultural forms that emerge from capitalism itself. State policies and practices operate around particular concepts of citizenship and rights that have, in themselves, notable consequences (Hudson, 1993), confusing the boundaries between 'justice' and 'security' (Hudson and Ugelvik, 2012).

Un-homed: Children and young people on the move

The interface between child rights and child protections have been the preoccupation of policy makers, practitioners and researchers for decades, both in the UK and internationally. Recent social service enquiries and criminal court cases on the exploitation of children and young people, largely located within northern English cities, have been presented in terms of risks that young people may encounter when disengaged from families and communities. Recommendations focus on improving multi-agency working and joint-partnership approaches to identify and ameliorate risk (All Party Parliamentary Group, 2012, 2016 and APPG/Children's Society 2019; Jay 2014). Children who are 'looked after' by the state have been identified as particularly vulnerable when they go missing and have been the focus of attention for various bodies; for example the Joint Parliamentary Committee Inquiry

(AAPGs, 2012) and the Jay Report (2014). These reports exposed systemic failures in the identification of children as victims and, in many cases, noted that agencies blamed young people for the abuse they experienced.

Ongoing and recent attention to young people 'on the move' has highlighted the international dimension to the significant problems facing many young people in their homes, or homeland. War, disaster and profound poverty have eradicated safety and security for many young people across the globe. Widespread recognition of the problems facing separated children (Beddoe, 2017; Chase, 2010), and the contexts that may result in this separation are notable (Cody, 2017). The challenges experienced by unaccompanied asylum seeking children (Kohli, 2006 and 2007; Wright, 2014) have been overtaken by widespread attention to concerns about the human trafficking of children and young people (Harvey, Hornsby and Sattar 2015; Rigby and Ishola, 2016; Gearon, 2018). The risks associated with separated children on the move also focus on the dangers that may be encountered as they move between transit and destination countries (Chase, 2010) with frequent concerns expressed about human trafficking and other forms of exploitation (Stone, 2018).

This attention has, it seems, overshadowed wider (and less sympathetic) attention to the contemporary concerns of migration and international sanctuary seeking (Ecpat UK, 2018) and children's agency in decisions to leave 'problematic' homes or homelands. These circumstances certainly challenge orthodox concepts of the home, as does recent parliamentary decisions to make family reunification more difficult for separated children in the case of a no-deal Brexit, and highlighting that the concept of family and home can be interpreted differently depending on circumstances and context (Home Office, 2020). The tendency to categorise children and young people in terms of perceived vulnerability has been shown to be highly problematic, often obscuring the inter-related and overlapping experiences of harm that may have been encountered (at home, in transition, for survival). As we explore in the sections below, the experiences of the young people considered in this paper highlight the ways in which the concept of 'home' is disrupted and complex. The prevalence of accepted normative understandings of 'home' presents a challenge for policy makers and practitioners, and theoretically and conceptually, for criminologists.

'On the run' and 'going missing'

Young people who 'run away' or 'go missing' from home within the UK have presented an ongoing challenge to professionals working in the area of child protection and safety. Across the UK, terminology has changed to incorporate 'young runaways'¹ within the wider group of 'missing persons' and National Missing Persons Frameworks, and reflects the prominent role of the police in policy and practice. New definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' have been implemented since 2013 in relation to children and adults reported as missing to the police. 'Missing' refers to anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another; while 'absent' refers to a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be². The police classification of a person as 'missing' or 'absent' is based on ongoing risk assessment, although the All Party Group (APPG 2016) highlighted serious concerns with the classification 'absent' and argued it could leave some young people at risk of harm.

There are no exact figures for the number of children who go missing or run away but according to the Children's Society, at least 100,000 children in the UK run away from home each year, working out at one child running from home or care every five minutes. Various estimates suggest that approximately 25 percent of children and young people that went missing were 'at risk' of serious harm with links between children running away and sexual exploitation highlighted. Vulnerabilities to other forms of exploitation included violent crime, gang involvement, and drug and alcohol misuse (AAPG, 2012)). Issues of trafficking, or more generally, sexual exploitation have been increasingly recognised by practitioners and policy-makers (as Pearce, 2011; Stone, 2018; Moyle, 2019 highlight). However, definitions and distinctions in this area are problematic. Significantly, the central and often initial role of the police in responding to young people who go missing has wider consequences in determining both victimisation and potential criminalisation.

The evaluative research literature has illustrated that young people who go missing from home constitute a diverse population with different needs. Different age groups, those running from home and those running from care placements, different minority groups (in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and (dis)ability), those exhibiting different patterns of running

(e.g. single incidence compared with repeat incidence), and those who are at risk of sexual exploitation may require different responses (Rees, 1993 and 2001; Rees and Smeaton, 2001; Rees et al. 2005; Rees and Lee, 2005; Malloch and Burgess, 2011; Children's Society 2013a and b, Ecpat UK and Missing People, 2018). Practical interventions aimed at tackling the needs of young people more broadly have relied upon strategies to prevent running away and to identify young people who go missing (both those who are reported missing and those who are not). Responding to the immediate needs of young people led to the establishment of agencies that provided help and occasionally emergency accommodation, as well as focusing attention on underlying issues. However, with these different responses there is often a taken for granted concept of home that may determine responses and often influences interventions without due regard to the consequences. As the All Party Parliamentary Group/Children's Society (2019) noted, there are particular risks for young people placed in out of area placements, where 'home' very often retains a pull that results in running away from care placements and additional risks incurred by unauthorised (and unsupported) journeys back home.

A consistent finding of various studies on young runaways has been that differential responses were evident in relation to young people who went missing from home (the family home) compared with those who went missing from local authority care. Protocols and strategies often overlooked the circumstances of those missing from home as attention was increasingly focused on responding to young people in the care of the state (AAPG, 2012; AAPG, 2016; McIver and Welch, 2018). It has been estimated that as many as two-thirds of all young people who ran away were not reported missing to the police; the majority of those not reported going missing from the family home and who were often teenagers (Malloch, 2006; Rees and Lee, 2005; Smeaton and Rees, 2004). Problems at home and challenges to parental authority can lead to the depiction, particularly of older teenagers, as 'disruptive', a perception that can influence organisational responses and may influence police actions. The problematic, and often sexualized, depiction of young women who run away has often resulted in girls being viewed as particularly 'troublesome'³. More specifically, research on the experiences of young runaways has identified that offending behaviour may constitute a survival strategy (shoplifting, theft) or a coping mechanism (use of drugs, alcohol) resulting in long-term difficulties including addiction and adult homelessness. The potential

criminalisation of young people who run from home has received international concern (Colvin et al, 2018; McIver and Welch, 2018).

Unaccompanied and Separated Children

The concept of home for separated children 'on the move'⁴ takes on different meaning and connotations; it often refers to the physical place of the 'geographical homeland' and disrupts the category of home as a space of psychological safety (Papadopolous, 2002). War, disaster and global upheaval underpin the bases for dangerous global journeys and attempts to seek refuge. Images of refugees facing the risk of drowning on overcrowded rafts and inadequate and insanitary camps located along international borders have highlighted the dire circumstances facing those fleeing their homeland. The horrific image of a very young Syrian child drowned and washed up on a European beach prompted headlines asking that if this picture did not change Europe's attitude to refugees, what would (*The Independent, September 3, 2015*).

The United Nations Refugee Agency estimated that in 2017, 68.5 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide. Within this context the number of unaccompanied or separated children has also increased significantly over recent years, In 2015, almost 98,400 new individual asylum applications were submitted by unaccompanied or separated children, with 78 countries reporting at least one such individual application (UNCHR 2016). In 2018, 19,700 unaccompanied children applied for international protection in the European Union (Eurostat, 2019). According to Chase (2010) the majority of separated young people identified in UK are found not to meet the criteria for asylum under the Refugee Convention (1951 amended 1963). The changing political climate has also resulted in discretionary leave to stay in the UK until the age of 18 being less likely and more restrictive asylum processes applied. In Chase's (2010) study of 54 unaccompanied young asylum seekers, for most of them, the decision to leave their home country had been made by a significant adult, rather than by themselves. Reluctance to tell people (i.e. social workers) about their past experiences and family circumstances could mean that professionals had difficulty believing the young people while many of them had an "overriding concern to forget the past and move forward with the future" (Chase 2010: 2065; see also Children's Society, 2009).

While the dangers presented by war, disasters and journeys towards asylum are recognised, the significant problems created by state policies and practices towards those deemed 'irregular' migrants are notable and can include detention and enforced separation from families. Immigration concerns have often taken precedence over concerns for the safety of the child (Chase, 2010; Pearce, 2011; Byrne and Miller, 2012; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2015). The Refugee Council (2003) highlighted cases where families, including mothers and babies, were separated in detention centres. O'Connell Davidson (2011: 461) highlights the very differential attention given to child 'trafficking' while, at the same time, very little attention is given to the forcible return of children and young people by states intent on removing undocumented migrants to their country of origin. Young people may be deported with their families or on their own and the failure to provide assessments of future safety have been subject to much criticism. *The Guardian* (25 September 2015) highlighted the circumstances of young people deemed 'undocumented' and facing deportation from the UK under increasingly restrictive immigrations policies. In 2019, *The Independent* (12 April 2019) highlighted the plight of hundreds (734 according to a Freedom of Information request) of children who sought refuge in the UK and who were subsequently deported when they reached the age of 18, to countries that the government itself deemed 'dangerous'. Some of the young people had been living in the UK for up to 10 years before being 'removed'.

Young people without a homeland, and presenting as undocumented migrants are at significant risk of harm, and across Europe they are likely to experience poverty and social exclusion and are often unable to access services and resources as well as having rights acknowledged or upheld. The dire circumstances which face unaccompanied children seeking asylum are frequently exacerbated by UK Home Office practices. It is estimated that almost half of unaccompanied children have their claim to be under the age of 18 disputed by the Home Office, often partly due to the mismatch between the young people's circumstances and stereotypes of a 'child', where they had assumed 'adult' responsibilities and made difficult migratory journeys without a parent.

Precarious living conditions and limited access to schooling directly impact the psychological health and mental frailties of children who may have already been traumatised before and during their journey (Hopkins and Hill 2010; Abunimah and Blower 2010). They often have

additional needs in relation to their asylum seeking situation related to settling in a new country and being alone with no family support or legal support regarding immigration issues (Hopkins and Hill 2008; Kohli 2011). However, there may be assumptions made about the availability of support within homes (O'Connell Davidson 2011). In the context of 'risks', it may be for some young people that it is better to leave home than to remain where parents are unable to support them or where parents are abusive and/or negligent, particularly where societal infrastructure is not able to support young people in these circumstances. As O'Connell Davidson (2011: 469-70) notes "...the uncritically positive emphasis on the family is questionable, given that statistically, families could be argued to pose a far greater risk to children than 'traffickers'".

While there are overlapping understandings and experiences of home, for separated children and those who work with them, it can be difficult to define conceptual and real borders of home (Kohli 2014). Kohli suggests that the concept of home 'ebbs and flows' depending on how the nature of home-like constructions between separated children and professionals is discussed and managed. Often migrant children are not made welcome by the immigration system and processes, and for welfare professionals it may be difficult to support children in their new 'home' where different meaning and expectations of what constitutes home, abound.

Overall, the potential vulnerabilities of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the numerous challenges they face in their new 'homes' are substantial (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan 2010; Hopkins and Hill 2008; Kohli 2006). Young people identified as potential victims of human trafficking who have gone missing from residential care are a particular concern; they have not only left their homeland, they are also missing from their new 'homes'. Central to this complex picture are the ways in which concepts of 'home' draw upon (or indeed exclude) alternative discourses. This change has evolved slowly as this group of young people have been incorporated into wider understandings of 'vulnerable young people' and with the parallel reductions in services (for example dedicated refuge provision, specialist services for 'young runaways').

Policy, practice and the exacerbation of harm

Complicated concepts of the home revolve around two predominant themes and binary positions. In the first, the home, or homeland, was 'broken' where problems were intractable and compelling and interventions were required to 'fix' these problems (domestic abuse, substance abuse, neglectful parenting; conflict; political repression). In the second, the home was viewed as 'functional' and the young person could be viewed as rebellious with interventions and judgements required to address (or redirect) this. These concepts form the basis for decisions about safe responses and the allocation of risk and blame (in line with Douglas, 1992). Either the home/land is the problem, in which case the young person is presented as a 'legitimate victim' or the opposite, the home/land is functional, and the 'problem' is the young person who may be depicted as a vicarious non-conformist or rebel. This impacts on institutional responses to young people which, in turn, affect their ability to feel 'at home'. Indeed the state responses exacerbate harm (Hillyard et al. 2004).

Weber (2020) draws on the work of Ghassan Hage to point out the significance of 'governmental belonging' referred to as the power to legitimise who should feel 'at home in the nation'. This is not merely a concept based on formal citizenship, but has more to do with community acceptance. She explores this further by drawing on a qualitative study with migrant communities in southern-eastern Melbourne, Australia. Weber's work explores young people's encounters with the police and notes that appearance was often the basis for police assumptions that certain individuals did not 'belong', potentially leading to immigration checks (similar to the work of Bradford and Jackson, 2018) where encounters between young people and police officers could reinforce a sense of belonging or exclusion. Weber highlights that discriminatory policing reinforces social boundaries. Unfair targeting by the police, which young people in her study experienced as racist or based on visible difference, were viewed as police determination of 'governmental belonging', essentially state determinations of who should 'feel at home' in the nation (and of course, who should not).

Social policy often seems to operate in silos. Policy areas are distinguished by themes within which attention to 'missing' or separated children and young people forms part of a wider risk environment where current themes of child sexual exploitation, and child trafficking for example, are separated out into different priority responses, and attention to risk assessments

and multi-agency interventions focus on individualised responses to wider social problems. This development has been furthered by the consolidation of neo-liberalism and its 'regulatory' emphasis on managerialist strategies and risk assessments (Hudson, 1993; Arocha, 2013).

The concept of the home as a feature in social policy has significant consequences for the experiences of those within it, for example the deleterious impact of poverty and income inequality. As the UK Rapporteur on extreme poverty (Alston, 2018) highlighted, the combination of a decade of austerity and the introduction of a series of welfare reforms under the banner of Universal Credit will result in child poverty rising to over 40% in 2021. The two-child benefit restriction as well as the universal benefit cap will undoubtedly augment levels of stress within families living at the limits of poverty and deprivation. The Poverty 2019/2020 report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020), shows that not only is child poverty set to increase significantly in the coming years, the negative impact of this will be more acutely felt in some regions of the UK more than others. This geographical dimension will have an impact on groups that are already feeling the strain of poverty and multiple forms of disadvantage. The 'liberal' imaginary that underpins 'traditional' notions of the 'home', is significantly restricted by class, race and geographical location. Both the UN Rapporteur (Alston 2018) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) predict that poverty among young people, and especially among young asylum seekers and migrants is set to increase, as the negative effects of austerity and welfare reform coalesce to compound the damage that severe and enduring poverty has on families and home-life (Woudhuysen, 2019).

The impact of the 'hostile environment for migrants' introduced in the context of the 2014 Immigration Act has severely impacted on concepts of home. The Immigration Act 2016 extended the policing of borders to state agents in a variety of settings, notably the private rented sector of housing via requirements placed on landlords. Private landlords were required to regulate and police the border whilst increasing the potential vulnerability of entire households and families. This has particular consequences for safety and precarity within the home, as well as access to a safe and secure home for many, particular young people. Thus, the discriminatory impact of the welfare benefit system, coupled with the

'hostile environment for immigrants' render meaningless the 'traditional' notion of home for those who occupy already precarious positions within the social structure. For one, there exists in the UK a welfare benefit restriction that precludes anyone under the age of 35 being able to obtain a form of housing benefit for anything greater than the cost of renting a 'single room' in someone's house. Secondly, not only are undocumented migrants precluded from working, under the Right to Rent sections of the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, they are entirely precluded from accessing any kind of accommodation in either the social or private housing sectors (see Crawford, Leahy and McKee, 2016, 2019 and Leahy, McKee and Crawford, 2017)

In relation to young people, the complexities of common-sense representations of home, as a place of ontological safety, a 'haven in a heartless world' versus the location of harm as neglect, addiction, poverty, dysfunctional families, suggest differential experiences across groups of young people. Yet there is still little attention to the problematic and complex way in which representations of 'home' are assessed and judged. Age is key to the allocation of responsibility and significance of 'risk'; under the discourse of 'missing persons', when applied to a younger child, the threat is immediate and urgent, for older teenagers, their agency is central to determining risk and response. In many respects this attribution of agency takes on varied meanings for separated children; they are viewed both as agential in their decisions to leave their homeland and if they go missing from their accommodation in the UK, but are also simultaneously 'at risk' of exploitation and potential victims of traffickers. For many young people after living in another country for many years, they may find themselves detained by the state and facing deportation. Representations of home and what children and young people are leaving in these circumstances is central to responses. Agencies and professionals can be significant in the co-construction of home for young people forced to leave home (for example, see Kohli 2014 and his discussion of the Scottish Guardianship Service), yet state responses can also be fundamental in negating a sense of home (Maccanico et al. 2018; AAPG/Children's Society, 2019; Weber, 2020;).

The dominant, legitimate definition of safety is based around a constellation of words, 'family' 'house', 'home', 'household', which, while seeming to describe a social reality, in fact constructs it. Subsequently, the taken for granted assumptions which underpin these

constructions remain underexplored. This collective process of construction of collective reality means that despite being a fiction, it is nonetheless regarded as 'real' and collectively recognised as such. The theoretical innovation that Bourdieu (1998) puts forward is that the dominant definition of 'home' is nothing more than the universalisation of a very particular categorisation. Indeed, the concept of home differs dramatically between different cultures, classes and social groups. Thus conflicts and crises in the home are, rather than anomalies, often the norm.

Conceptually, the understandably predominant focus on the potential risks of being 'away from home' result in rather vague considerations of home as an absence, an imaginary space. The juxtaposition between risks at home and risks facing young people while away from home are complicated in prevalent documentary discourses. Although obscuring home as a central and explicit concept, many policy responses introduced to address the problems facing young people who leave home, are focused on returning young people to the homes they left. Often without much consideration of possible danger and risks that can result from the normative use of idealised notions of home. For some young people, unproblematic concepts of home result in their potential criminalisation, or questionable entitlement to claim victimisation (Colvin et al. 2018).

As Crawford, McKee and Leahy (2019) highlight, the 'hostile environment for immigrants' which has shaped much of policy developments across the UK, have resulted in to the complete inability of young migrants to access housing and safe homes. The removal of protections of unaccompanied asylum seekers from the Withdrawal Agreement Bill, voted though by Parliament on the 29th December 2019, has also made the reunification of separated children from their families, much more difficult. Young people in the UK who were born beyond this island's borders, will, it can be said with certainty, be under no illusion that they are currently living in a very hostile environment.

Final reflections

The state and its' institutions form the central authority in the construction of official categories. State narratives, as established in discourse, operate to create as much as to describe reality and by the uncritical implementation of state thinking (the thought categories

of 'common sense') by institutions, policy-makers and practitioners, notions of 'home' are reproduced. The reproduction of political categories are evident in the way that social classifications are used to make judgements about a young person (and indeed adults) based on accounts of conformity to the official idea of what constitutes a decent 'home' life and thereby the appropriate version of the 'family'. The state, through its official recording and statistical analyses constructs the concept of a 'decent home life' as one of the most powerful principles of perception of the social world. Yet this is a political illusion that masks the foundations of social and economic inequality, a concept that the criminological gaze must disrupt if it is to question the illusory basis of the 'family home'.

Journeys from home can be viewed interchangeably as escape routes and dangerous endeavours, but can also denote acts of resistance and quests for emancipation. Therefore, home-life, the family, a sense of belonging, feeling wanted and loved, are all important when thinking about 'home' in the context of young people who reside there. However, the distribution of the social and economic factors that facilitate such affective bonds are far from evenly distributed throughout social space. Unstable family life, economic and social precarity (insecure work, unsociable hours, irregular shifts, prolonged absence/prolonged presence) has destabilized the family and the home (affecting even the 'middle class' household). This undermines further any universalised notion of what the family and the home are and highlights the extent to which even some middle class households struggle to maintain the appearances of the idealized notion of the 'family home'.

Child welfare policy and legislation that focuses on the constructed notion of 'home' forces open a gap, both conceptual and actual, in which the rights of children and the safety of children neither meet nor even correspond. Not only is this notion of home an adult-centred conceptualisation, it is a class-based construct that places the imaginary nuclear family, at the heart of a political discourse in which the family unit is both 'harmonious', and 'compliant'. Concepts of home thus form part of a wider, coercive strategy. For asylum-seeking and refugee children, attempts to reconstruct 'home' in the UK are often thwarted on a number of levels. Having outlived these cultural and political epistemes, the notion of 'home' requires renewed attempts at conceptualising and understanding where it fits within the current period of regulatory capitalism. These explorations raise questions about the extent to which policy

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attention to the 'stable home' can offer the anticipated 'ready-made' solutions to a growing number of problems. At the same time, the government making such assumptions is actively undermining this stability through its relentless pursuit of greater austerity and welfare reforms that are damaging to vulnerable families and the home-lives they have to forge. As we have highlighted, the experiences of these young people are subject to a range of policy interventions, which although never entirely explicit, oscillate around concepts of home which permeate the interface between policies where tensions are often experienced. Although state practices and policies are suggestive of 'home' as a social and structural benefit, the actions of state institutions use this political construct to distinguish who is entitled to support and protection, and conversely, who is policed and excluded.

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¹ The term 'runaways', although acknowledged as problematic, nevertheless was widely used in policy and research until the incorporation of this group under 'missing persons'. At the same time, research and resources for this group of young people were depleted.

² The Advisory Group in McIver and Welch (2018) note their preference, in the Scottish context, for the phrase 'not at home' rather than 'absent'.

³ A depiction that continues for young and older women in their encounters with the adult criminal justice system (see for example Malloch and McIvor, 2011).

⁴ Defined by Terre des Hommes International (2009) as: "Those children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement might place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence".