



Reimagining Home in the Wake of Displacement

PARIN DOSSA

Simon Fraser University, Canada

JELENA GOLUBOVIC

Simon Fraser University, Canada

ABSTRACT *In the wake of displacement, people are tasked with reconstructing a sense of home in a new and unfamiliar location. In this article, we consider how the experience of displacement complicates our understanding of what it means to be at home by exposing the significant labour that goes into its imagination and re-imagination. We examine practices of homemaking after displacement through two interrelated themes: (a) narratives of home, where we discuss how displaced persons nurture a sense of home through memory and storytelling; and (b) textures of home, where we emphasize how a sense of home is sustained or re-imagined through material objects. Within this discussion, we maintain that there is a continuity between the violence of displacement and the violence of relocation, as the task of re-imagining home is often compounded by structural factors including socioeconomic marginalization and racialization in the country of settlement. We conceptualize displacement as an injustice and homemaking as a form of cultural labour that exemplifies the agency, innovation, and resilience of displaced persons.*

KEYWORDS belonging; displacement; home; homemaking; inequality; migrants; narrative

Introduction

Salman Rushdie (1996) writes that we can only know what a home means to us when we are exiled from it. Why is this the case? One reason is that exile makes us feel nostalgic about what we have left behind. What we have left behind is more than a physical territory; home is entrenched within a social milieu and a world of relationships. It is a place where sociality is fostered within a network of kith and kin. It is the site where life rituals of birth, marriage, and death are observed. Home is a place that evokes the rhythms,

Correspondence Address: Parin Dossa, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Email: pdossa@sfu.ca

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sights and sounds of everyday life that forms part of one's world. It is a place that enables one to imagine a future, and to advance our goals and aspirations in life. Lest this profile sounds idealistic, we must also recognize that home is not devoid of interpersonal conflict, nor is it exempt from the workings of gender, class, politics, and power; home may be a place that hinders one's life opportunities, not because of exclusively internal dynamics but due to structural constraints. In this respect, home is always in a state of flux and becoming, a consideration that requires close attention as home is often imagined as a discrete entity unaffected by the workings of larger forces.

What does it mean to reimagine one's home elsewhere following displacement? Whether in situations of exile or forced migration, the loss of displacement is immeasurable. But displaced persons are not rendered passive; they draw upon a repertoire of experiential and border-crossing knowledge which makes them uniquely positioned to suggest alternative ways of being. Home-making practices are not only the domain of migrants and displaced persons; each of us engages in imagining and sustaining a sense of home every day, however passively. But the experience of forced displacement deeply unsettles our received notions of home, exposing the significant labour that goes into cultivating and achieving this most basic sense of security. This task entails struggles as well as accomplishments, continuities as well as discontinuities, dilemmas as well as resolutions.

In this article, we explore the complex process of reimagining a home in the wake of forced displacement. We draw on empirical literature on home-making in diverse contexts of displacement (for example, Cyprus, Palestine), as well as vignettes from our own ethnographic research with people who have been displaced (Iranians in Vancouver and Bosnian Serbs in Sarajevo). We begin with a discussion of how forced displacement complicates our understanding of what it means to be at home. Then in the following two sections, we attend to two interrelated dimensions of home-making: narratives of home, where we discuss how displaced persons nurture a sense of home through memory and storytelling; and textures of home, where we emphasize how a sense of home is sustained or re-imagined through material objects, sometimes deeply personal (family photographs), sometimes seemingly inconsequential (teacups), and sometimes lost, available only in memory.

Our perspective of home-making as a form of labour foregrounds the agency and resilience of displaced persons, and it also allows us to draw a line of continuity between the violence of displacement and the violence of relocation. The journey is never as simple as from "there" to "here." We conclude with a discussion about the struggles that await migrants upon relocation, as they endeavor to rebuild their lives amid structural constraints.

Forced Displacement

The term home-making implies a process; it implies that homes are not simply stepped into, ready-made, and nor are they simply stepped out of: they are cultivated and continuously reimagined in the context of everyday life (Jansen & Löfving, 2009). Folded within the desire to reimagine a new home after displacement, there is often a simultaneous aspiration to maintain a connection to what has been lost, to entwine the past and the present, the “there” and the “here.”

But the framework of “there” and “here” cannot be accepted uncritically. For example, drawing on Wimmer and Glick Schiller’s (2002) critique of “methodological nationalism,” Taylor (2013) problematizes the state-centrism of the here-there dichotomy. Forced displacement compels people to move across national borders, but it can also displace people within the boundaries of a nation-state, an experience that is not less disruptive for being “internal.” And, as Kreichauf (2018) points out, the recent arrival of refugees in Europe is characterized by “campization,” a phenomenon that is already deeply familiar to refugees living in protracted refugee situations across the global South.

The “campization” of displaced persons unsettles the here-there dichotomy in two ways. First, it draws our attention to the fact that migrants’ trajectories are rarely as simple as from “there” to “here,” and often involve numerous false starts and detours along the way. These interstitial locations should not be excluded from analyses of home-making simply because they are temporary. As Freund (2015) points out, discounting these periods of liminality as a “vacuum in which migrants feel ‘lost’” (p. 62) only serves to pathologize the condition of migrants as rootless (Malkki, 1995). Furthermore, it neglects the ways in which these locations appear in migrants’ own narratives of their life trajectories as resources for re-imagining a home (Freund, 2015).

Second, the here-there dichotomy cannot be applied in its intended sense to the majority of the world’s refugees, who find themselves in protracted refugee situations, not yet arriving at a projected (Western?) “here” but living for years and even generations in chronic displacement (Adamson, 2006; Adelman, 2001; Loescher & Milner, 2007). Instead of the framework of “here” and “there,” these situations would be better understood by considering how a sense of home is cultivated even in locations that are un hospitable, unwelcoming, and purportedly temporary (Jegathesan, 2018; Taylor, 2013).

Moving beyond a here-there dichotomy means recognizing the plurality of trajectories that forced displacement creates. But it is important to acknowledge that these categories are inadequate *as a binary*. Outside of a binary framework, they continue to be useful for understanding how people ascribe meaning to their lives, how they remember the past and imagine the future. These categories are not exclusive, nor are they static and immovable

(Brah, 1996; Gedalof, 2009). They are dynamic and relational, shaping and mutually constituting one another.

Feldman (2006) reminds us that even though displacement can occur in an instant, one's relationship to home is not severed in that instant. Just as homemaking is a process built on repetition (Ahmed, 1999; Gedalof, 2007; Rosales, 2010), displacement too is a process, whereby people "learn to relate to [their homes] from afar" (Feldman, 2006, p. 23). This process does not occur freely or without compromise. Although migrants offer host societies the possibility for enrichment through the contribution of "border knowledge from two or more countries" (Dossa, 2014, p. 32), their value is often underestimated and under-utilized (Joseph, 2013). Instead, displaced persons often find themselves tasked with cultivating a new sense of home in a context of prejudice and hostility. Even so, identities and communities are actively built and sustained despite these conditions of exclusion, limitation, and often, racialization (Pasura, 2013; Soto, 2012). We now turn to the endeavour of rebuilding a sense of home, assessing this task through the interrelated themes of narrative and materiality.

Narratives of Home

The psychologist Jeremy Bruner notes that narratives are based on a "breach," on an interruption of a "steady state," in other words, on an event (1986, p. 16). Following this observation, Mattingly (1998, p. 1) argues that certain disruptive experiences "seem to demand a narrative shape." Her work refers to breaches such as chronic illness and severe disability, but the experience of displacement can be seen as another such breach, as insecurity compels people to leave their homes, whether due to economic instability, political violence, religious persecution, or other forms of conflict. Displacement fragments families and societies at the same time that it fractures personal biographies and life history narratives. But as a breach, it also seems to demand narrative, as people attempt to communicate their suffering and give meaning to it. In the aftermath of displacement, then, there is an imperative to remember, and to tell (see also Eastmond, 2007).

Anthropologists have explored the close relationship between violence, narrative, and subjectivity, noting that violence fundamentally alters the way the subject experiences the world and her place in it (Das, Jackson, Kleinman, & Singh, 2014). Long after a violent event is over, it remains present in the form of memory. Das (2007) refers to this quality as a "poisonous knowledge" (p. 76) that becomes embedded in everyday life and that it is impossible to unlearn. This is a knowledge not only that violence has occurred, but that was, and is, possible – that the social world is not only deceptively fragile but also dangerous.

However, while the act of remembering or narrating brings the past into the present, it can also help to create *distance* from the past. As Sugiman (2004)

discusses in her analysis of Japanese-Canadian women's narratives of internment, remembering "underscores the distinction between past and present" (p. 383), and lets the narrator symbolically demarcate what was then from what is now, even while these categories may be entangled.

When analyzing narratives, it is important to remember that they are not simply recollections of memories, or after-the-fact accounts of events. The relationship between an event and the narrative of that event is always problematic and can shift and change over time (Allison, 2004; Browning, 2010). Narratives do not provide unmediated access to the past; rather, narratives *are* mediations of that past. They take their shape through a process of selection and exclusion, amounting to the construction of a story that gives meaning or coherence to events that may otherwise seem disparate or even senseless.

In the wake of displacement, memory becomes politicized. Narratives of displacement are not isolated or singular; they speak to and about one another, and they tell a larger story of social suffering and structural violence (Das & Kleinman, 2001). For this reason, the memory work of individuals carries the potential to shift and enrich historical discourse. It can reveal the intimate workings of violence that might otherwise remain unknown within official top-down iterations of the past, thus "multiplying available perspectives on the past" (Waterson, 2007, p. 66; see also Antze & Lambek, 1996; Bourguignon, 2005; Daniel, 1996; Johnson & Leslie, 2002). To this end, Waterson (2007) states that the drive to remember trauma and injustice is "a moral drive" (p. 66) for acknowledgement against the injustice of forgetting (see also Werbner, 1998).

While narratives of displacement are often characterized by an idealization of the past or a romantic desperation to return to one's homeland, to dismiss such narratives as mere nostalgia would be to overlook the work they perform (Bryant, 2010; Datta, 2016; Jansen, 2009; Omata, 2013; Sugiman, 2004). Tsolidis (2011) reframes nostalgia as an "act of cultural labour" (p. 411) by which displaced people cultivate diasporic identities generationally, thus keeping a cultural connection to place even where physical return may be impossible. Similarly, in her work on displaced Palestinians, Feldman (2006) argues that repeated narrations ("refrains") of home function to create a sense of security and community in situations of displacement, thereby approximating the comforting function of homeland.

These examples demonstrate that while narratives of a lost home may be characterized as idealistic or nostalgic, they are *more* than this. They are present- and future-oriented, forging lines of continuity between places and temporalities, and allowing displaced communities to assert themselves in multiple sites of belonging. Through narrative, "communities of memory" (Booth, 2006) are created, and these communities may utilize their collective memories to reimagine a new home in the present. As Ahmed (1999) argues, we do not simply reflect on our pasts, on our homes, on our networks of belonging; we *produce* the very objects of our memory.

Where nostalgia may seem to signal stasis, a kind of freezing in idyllic time, anthropologists have brought attention to the dynamism of narratives of home, and their capacity to shift or transform in response to political events, or in response to the passage of time, as displacement becomes protracted or permanent. For example, Bryant (2010) and Loizos (2009) each discuss how the 2003 opening of checkpoints between the Greek and Turkish halves of Cyprus after nearly 30 years of separation affected displaced Cypriots' narrations and understandings of home. Without being able to access their former villages, Greek Cypriots had kept alive the idea that a future return would be both possible and desirable. The opening of checkpoints allowed them the possibility of visiting their former homes with the realization that the villages of their memory no longer existed as they had imagined. Homes that had been lost to another place were increasingly recognized as being lost to another time, resulting in a narrative shift as home came to be told as a place of permanent loss, rather than a place of eventual return (see also Jansen, 2009).

Alongside the important function of narrative for displaced communities, we recognize that violence and suffering also take us to the limits of the narratable (Goldstein, 2012; Langer, 1997). At this limit, anthropologists have considered the constructive role of silence (Ross, 2003; Mookherjee, 2015; Saikia, 2011), appreciating that what remains unspoken may carry as much meaning as what has been spoken. Ross (2003) presents silence as multifaceted and varied, describing how silences have different origins and different effects. Silence may arise from an inability or unwillingness to "meet the extent of the pain suffered" (p. 3), or it may be respectful, nurturing, or protective. It may signal inability, or it may signal agency. As Das (1996) points out, despite the popular correlation of voice with agency, the choice to remain silent may be the last form of agency left after violence and violation (see also Helms, 2013; Theidon, 2007).

Crapanzano (2011) points out that while articulated stories are poised to influence our understanding of history, most potential storytellers indeed remain silent, whether for lack of opportunity or by choice. Where a listening audience is absent, narrators become reticent. This has been the case for numerous stigmatized groups who could not imagine a sympathetic audience, and whose stories have thus remained largely untold (Golubovic, *in press*; Simic, 2016).

Narratives of home are inevitably bound up with loss and displacement, but also with reconstruction and re-emplacement, which should not be overlooked. As lost homes are remembered (or produced in memory, as Ahmed, 1999, reminds us), new forms of belonging are imagined and engendered. In the following section, we consider the endeavor of homemaking through the lens of materiality, which has seen a renewed emphasis in the context of the transnational turn in the anthropology of migration. We see memory and materiality as intertwined (see Morton, 2007). As Feldman (2006) puts it, displacement involves the loss of "material

intimacy” (p. 11) with one’s home, which then initiates a process of seeking other ways to forge a connection. These other ways can be immaterial, as in acts of remembrance or narration, but often they are material: she cites as an example the practice of keeping keys to homes that have been destroyed. Memory and materiality thus intersect. They come together as people struggle to retain mental images of photographs that have been lost, as people furnish new dwellings to replace what they could not take with them when they left. Physical objects are inevitably located in specific local contexts, but as they fuse with memory they can “speak to places [...] and senses of belonging over larger distances” (Long, 2013, p. 334).

Textures of Home

With the transnational turn, scholars of migration have moved away from the dominance of territorialized and nationalized forms of belonging, and towards cross-border, multi-sited and extra-national affiliations (Vertovec, 2007). This turn has provided grounds for the insight that belonging is not confined to geographical sites; home can be decoupled from territory and re-conceptualized in terms of movement, shedding light on how identities and communities are forged in the interstices between states, in the movement across borders.

However, there is emerging concern that the transnational turn has led to a portrayal of cross-border migration as inherently transgressive or even liberating (Long, 2013; Rosales, 2010). This critique is particularly relevant in instances of forced displacement, in which boundary crossings are not made by choice. Ultimately, migration involves an inevitable tension between movement *and* stasis, between displacement *and* resettlement.

Narratives of displacement are often centered on the “myth” (Safran, 1991) of eventually returning to one’s homeland – or, in some cases, centered on the political and moral *right* to return to one’s homeland (Allan, 2014) – yet displacement also involves working to cultivate a newfound sense of home in an unfamiliar and sometimes unwelcoming location. To accommodate the complexities and contradictions of this experience, scholars have sought to retain the important insights made possible by the transnational turn, but to avoid consigning the concept of home to an “abstract and deterritorialized space of interaction” (Ní Laoire, Carpena-Méndez, Tyrrell, & White, 2010, p. 159).

Taming the transnational turn, Ní Laoire et al. (2010) remind us that regardless of the transnational conceptual reach of migration, people’s everyday lives are nevertheless lived and experienced “in and through concrete territorialized local contexts” (p. 157). Conlon (2011) echoes this thought, arguing that metanarratives of globalization and mobility need to be grounded within the local material contexts in which “the daily lives of migrants actually unfold” (p. 724). In order to temper the overemphasis on

transnationalism, scholars have moved towards a renewed emphasis on concrete and contextualized forms of belonging, particularly through the lens of materiality (Ho & Hatfield, 2011; Rosales, 2010).

A renewed emphasis on the material textures of homemaking brings the everyday experiences of migrants into sharper focus (Ho & Hatfield, 2011); it asks what transnational forms of belonging might look like from the perspective of the everyday, and how the productive tension between being in one place and remembering another is actually experienced. A renewed emphasis on materiality also asserts that a robust conception of home in displacement cannot be fully encapsulated by the transgression of boundaries; it must simultaneously “include but also exceed” those boundaries (Long, 2013, p. 342). As Long (2013) explains, migrants certainly challenge the boundaries of the nation state, but they *also* assert more conventional ideas of home, and the importance of these should not become lost in the transnational turn.

A material approach to reimagining home in the diaspora involves a negotiation between loss and replacement, that is, between lost items of memory and accumulated items of daily use. The loss of material intimacy with one’s home is followed by the forging of new material intimacies and new daily practices as migrants actively work to embed themselves in a new society while retaining a connection to their past locales. In addition to material loss, then, scholars have explored the replacement or accumulation of material possessions after displacement (Conlon, 2011; Long, 2013); the sending of remittances (Lindley, 2009; Vargas-Silva, 2017); and the role of objects in sustaining social networks and relationships (Frykman, 2009; Rosales, 2010).

Consider the house. Scholars have moved well beyond the idea that home is merely a house, appreciating the (material) home as a space of sociality, belonging, and care, while remaining critically aware that it can also be a space of conflict that compromises these very elements. Long (2013) argues that it is productive to explore the entanglement of materiality and sociality by approaching “the house as a ‘thing’ in itself” (p. 336), but a thing through which people relate to the social world around them.

In the lead up to the war in 1991, in the Srijem region that spans Croatia and Serbia, Srijem Croats in Serbia and Srijem Serbs in Croatia organized to exchange houses and property. Each group relocated across the border to their ethnically-designated “homeland,” as they feared that the isolated physical and verbal attacks they were experiencing as ethnic minorities could escalate into full-scale violence. In her ethnography of Srijem Croats, Čapo Žmegač (2007) discusses how her interlocutors lamented the irreplaceability of the things they had left behind. Although the new houses in which they had settled contained the same types of material objects, they did not carry the same emotional value: “my cabinet is more beautiful because it is mine” (Čapo Žmegač, 2007, p. 52). Living among items that were unfamiliar, one

woman explained that she felt “as if she were among stolen things” (Čapo Žmegač, 2007, p. 58), a state that made her unable to feel properly at home.

The 1974 partition of Cyprus also involved an exchange of houses as displaced Greek and Turkish Cypriots moved into one another’s abandoned houses and appropriated one another’s belongings (Bryant, 2014; Loizos, 2009; Navaro-Yashin, 2012). Loizos’ (2009) study of displaced Greek Cypriots reveals the increased investment in material surroundings that occurred after the opening of checkpoints in 2003, when Cypriots displaced from either half of the island were allowed to visit their former homes and villages. In visiting their former villages, many Greek Cypriots found that the social texture of village life that they had kept alive in their memories had been lost to time. This change in attitude was further reinforced by the revelation that the lives they had reluctantly been building for themselves in exile could actually promise them more, relative to their former villages, in terms of sociality and prospects for the future. Loizos writes, “as time went by, people started to treat their lived environments more and more like home in the following quotidian senses: they decorated their dwellings; they cultivated their gardens; they got to know their neighbours...” (2009, p. 68). Through the material endeavors of decorating and gardening, displaced Greek Cypriots forged a deliberate attachment to houses they had until then considered temporary; they allowed themselves to cultivate a deeper sense of home. Yet, Loizos points out that this material reimagining of home did not dilute their emotional ties to their former villages, nor their political appeals that displacement is a form of injustice. If asked where home was, they would still answer “elsewhere” (2009, p. 69).

In our own fieldsites, we have seen the importance placed on material objects in remembering lost homes and re-creating new ones. In her work with Bosnian Serbs who fled Sarajevo during and after the 1992 to 1995 siege, Golubovic found that personal items such as family photographs came to stand for a sense of home that included not only material items but also networks of social relationships. For example, returning to Sarajevo after the siege, one woman found that her family’s “abandoned” apartment was inhabited by a family of refugees who had come to Sarajevo after being displaced from their own home in another part of Bosnia. By the time the refugee family moved in, the contents of the apartment had already been emptied, stolen either by neighbours or looters. However, this woman considered herself lucky: one neighbour had gone into her apartment and collected her family photo albums for safekeeping, in case her family ever returned. His gesture allowed her to maintain a sense of continuity in spite of the upheaval of displacement – “because of him, I have photos of my life before the war” – but his gesture also affirmed the social relationships that make up a sense of home. In safekeeping the photos, he was ensuring that the neighbourly relationships they had known would still be intact, that his neighbours would return to a social texture of home even if their apartment was looted and occupied.

The above example demonstrates how the material and social dimensions of home are bound up together, the way a social visit may be bound up with the serving of food, or a tea party dependent on teacups. For another Bosnian Serb woman, it was precisely teacups, seemingly inconsequential objects, that enabled her to re-imagine a sense of home. Displaced during the war, she took with her four teacups out of a set of six. She understood that this was frivolous, that the teacups were taking up space in her bag that could be filled with something more practical, but she loved them and she wanted to retain some connection to her old life. Returning to her home after the war, she found it was looted. Everything was ruined or gone, including deeply personal items like souvenirs and photographs. Everything except the last two teacups that completed the set.

The examples of teacups and family photos draw our attention to how “the seemingly small, everyday can be of political significance” (Sugiman, 2004, p. 372). As Sugiman points out, official narratives of and responses to displacement often centre on major and calculable losses, such as property loss. Meanwhile, personal narratives tend to emphasize “the small personal items that were left behind” (Sugiman, 2004, p. 370). These items are critical to forging a sense of continuity in the wake of rupture. Their importance is demonstrated by the finding that even when they are lost, they are retained in memory; another Bosnian Serb interviewee described in great detail a cherished photograph of her parents that was lost when her family was displaced, and that exists now only in her telling.

For Dossa, the homemaking value of material items came across through the embroidery of one of her interviewees, a 63-year-old woman named Noor. In the following passage, Noor explains how her embroidery has circulated within her homeland and its diaspora, providing connection among family members dispersed geographically and across generations. Using her embroidery threads, Noor stitches together strands of her lived life:

I was born in the village of Masouleh [in Iran]. I only studied until grade six. There were no schools after this grade in my village. My father said, “You must have some useful skill.” He asked my aunt to teach me how to do embroidery. I learned different patterns for cushion coverings, tablecloths, dresses, wall hangings, and so many other things. When I got married at the age of sixteen, I moved to Shiraz. My husband had a large family. My in-laws liked that I was good at embroidery work. When the prices started going up, my in-laws made me do embroidery work for sale. I was not happy as I had to work for ten hours a day. My eyes would water. Only when factory-made embroidery became popular could I slow down. Machine-stitched embroidered work is cheaper. After the Revolution we had to move to Canada. My son worked for the Shah. It was not safe for us to stay there. Over the years, I had collected all kinds of embroidered pieces. I could bring some. I left other pieces with my sister in Iran. I have told her to give these out to our families who now live in the United States and in Australia. I have kept a few pieces for my grandchildren. This way my family can remember me. (Dossa & Coe, 2017, p. 1)

Noor's father could not have imagined that the skill that he encouraged his daughter to acquire from her aunt would be used in her old age in a faraway place. Noor's narrative indicates that the fine pieces of embroidered work in Iranian homes in Canada do not merely constitute part of the decor. They constitute a means through which older women have sustained their families over the years. They illustrate that older women have moved across geographic spaces. Noor's embroidered work is not frozen in time and space; rather, it is activated in the present transnationally, across and between nation-states (Dossa & Coe, 2017, p. 1).

Dossa points out that this embroidery stitches together the rupture of displacement, connecting a home that was lost to a home that is being remade. The fabric tells the story of how Noor has sustained her family across the years, and across the boundaries of nation-states, as her family came to be dispersed across Iran, Canada, the United States, and Australia.

Re-imagining a home in the wake of forced displacement also involves accumulating new items of daily use and forging new daily routines. However, the capacity of accumulated items to embed migrants within new societies is sometimes overstated in the literature. For example, Conlon (2011) makes a direct connection between the accumulation of material objects and the achievement of a daily rhythm, looking in particular at the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland, whose arrivals are characterized by a marked absence of material possessions. She gives the example of jackets donated to an asylum seeker from Nigeria as an everyday experience of material accumulation that connects the asylum seeker to "local cultural practices and to regional climates that had previously been experienced as jarring" (Conlon, 2011, p. 722). For Conlon, such material accumulation along with the establishment of contextualized everyday routines (taking children to school, participating in religious services) constitute practices that can "supplant" social alienation with social embeddedness (2011, p. 723). While Conlon rightly emphasizes the active work that migrants perform to forge belonging despite experiencing social alienation, we would point out that mere material accumulation or social proximity do not necessarily lead to "meaningful mixing" (Cook, Dwyer, & Waite, 2011). Despite the active work performed by displaced persons, a sense of home is not always achieved after displacement, especially when they are racialized or Othered in the country of settlement.

Conclusion

Attending to homemaking practices through the lens of forced displacement foregrounds the *labour* of this endeavor. A sense of home cannot be taken for granted, but it is only when we lose our homes that we feel this most poignantly. In this article, we have explored some ways that displaced

persons actively work to reimagine a sense of home through the twin labours of narrative and renewed (or salvaged) materiality. Through social memory, displaced persons forge a connection between a spatiotemporal “here” and a “there,” and all the places in between. They remember a past that was once concrete and tangible, and draw it into the present in altered, narrative form. And through material objects, whether deeply personal or seemingly inconsequential, memories of a lost home are given texture, embedding the tactile world into a network of social relationships.

The labour of re-imagining a home after forced displacement is often compounded by the violence of arrival, whether in a host-state or a refugee camp, what Kreichauf (2018) terms “forced arrival.” In this interconnected and unequal world, there is a need for research accountability that recognizes the *continuity* between the violence of displacement and the violence of exclusion that migrants face upon arrival.

Western interventionism – both humanitarian and covert – and Western imperialism have been responsible for the mass displacement of people around the world (Bannerji, 1995; Razack, 2007; Thobani, 2007). We should not expect gratitude from those who arrive at our door (Nayeri, 2017). Instead, we should recognize that the task of re-imagining home is taken up in conditions that are often unwelcoming and hostile. In the Canadian colonial context, Razack (2002) discusses how European settlers position themselves in the desirable category of those who belong to the nation-state while scripting indigenous people as “pre-modern” and racialized immigrants as “late arrivals” (p. 3). This script brings into relief the inequalities between those who purportedly offer hospitality or welcome, and those who must seek belonging in contexts in which they are racialized and systemically disenfranchised – a kind of dislocation that mimics the violence of physical displacement.

There is a need to arrive at a formulation of belonging that can encompass rather than assimilate difference (Jones & Krzyzanowski, 2007). While research on migrants has recognized the work they perform to integrate into a new society, Antonsich (2010) points out that the very notion of belonging is often filled with “a rhetoric of sameness” (p. 650), such that being granted belonging requires the “other” to assimilate: to take on the language, culture, and values of the dominant group (see also Dahlberg, 2014). Similarly, Gedalof (2007) describes the assimilatory logic of UK immigration and asylum policy as a first-us-then-them take on multiculturalism: first the host society must establish a stable sense of identity, and only then can it accept difference without threat of destabilization. As she puts it, the operating logic is that the “‘we’ who were here first” (2007, p. 92) must be protected from the “discomfort of strangers” (2007, p. 92). This amounts to an empty, assimilatory, and unreciprocated multiculturalism. It amounts to an unequal relationship of power as one side must always *bend to fit* the other.

The ongoing refugee crisis has seen migrants from the Middle East and

North Africa flee towards the European Union,¹ and it has seen several European states respond to this influx with a spike in xenophobia and a swing towards right-wing political parties. Asylum seekers are racialized and cast as burdens in the receiving country. Yet the global North is complicit in the production of refugees, in cultivating the very grounds for displacement. We must shift the focus such that what is seen as burdensome is not a person's arrival across a border, but the interruption of that person's life, the loss of their home, the fracturing of their family and social relations, and the unsolicited task laid upon them to start over again.

Foregrounding the labour of migrants in reimagining a home exemplifies the agency and resilience of subjugated people in the face of structural constraints, but it also points to the basic injustice of displacement and the responsibility of receiving countries to partake in the burden of this work. It reminds us that the trajectory of displacement is never as simple as from "there" to "here." Too many migrants never properly arrive at a "here," contained instead in camps that outlast generations. And for those that do arrive, their work of re-imagination is too often obstructed by systemic marginalization. Novelist Gaël Faye (2018, p. 6) poetically gestures to the inadequacy of here-there frameworks, as well as to the resourcefulness of migrants in re-imagining a sense of home amid hostile conditions. He writes that displacement is not a matter of leaving horror to find paradise. It would be simpler if it were. "What about the country inside them? – nobody ever mentions that."

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¹ Under-reported but important to acknowledge are those asylum seekers arriving in the European Union from Europe itself: most notably from Kosovo, Albania, and Ukraine.

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