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14. Home and the politics of location and displacement

Halleh Ghorashi

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s I came across a passage from Hugo of St. Victor when reading Said's *Culture and Imperialism*:

The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man [*sic*] has extinguished his. (Said 1994, p. 407)

This was a refreshing quote at the time because I was searching for a working definition of home through the lens of displacement. Despite my difficulty with the male-dominated reference in the quote, the idea of extinguishing attachment to any place seemed not only appealing but also superior to me. This feeling of superiority gave me a lot of pleasure as a refugee myself who had left my homeland, Iran, in 1988 because of my political activism, which resulted in my becoming homeless in my homeland (see Ghorashi 1997). But the pleasure I felt was mainly due to my experience in exile, when I felt belittled by the strong territorial approach to home in dominant societal and academic discourses. I was confronted with a strong assumption of rootedness in one's homeland as a given, which made me an anomaly.

In this chapter I engage with the notion of home in relation to displacement with a specific focus on refugees' positioning. Some of my arguments also have broader implications for migrants in general, and I explicitly mention that when applicable. However, the major focus of this chapter is about the positioning of refugees, for whom migration is interconnected with the experience of violence in their homeland. The chapter starts from a critique of the "sedentary bias" that may seem outdated, but I argue for its remaining validity, albeit in a changing context. Then I discuss using a rhizomatic approach to home by adapting nomadology as a lens. I argue for the necessity of this choice to prioritize the lived experiences of migrants and refugees as a challenge to legal structures and discursive practices. In the section that follows, I use personal, relational and community-based narratives to show multiple possibilities in which home is experienced, constructed and contested through intersections with mobility and connections to a variety of locations, places and spaces (see Rapport & Dawson, Chapter 2, and Donà et al., Chapter 3, this volume).

ON THE NATIONAL ORDER OF THINGS

As a beginning scholar doing research about identity, home and belonging, I came across Liisa Malkki's groundbreaking work from the mid-1990s. This gave me an in-depth understanding

and theoretical frame for my feeling of abnormality as a scholar with a refugee background. Malkki's profound critique of what she referred to as the "national order of things" in 1992 lays a strong foundation for rethinking the implications of equalizing home with being rooted in a place, both metaphorically and morally. Furthermore, she examines the analytical consequences of a territorial approach to identity and home for categories of people considered displaced and uprooted. Metaphorically, she argues that root as a metaphor of home is not about just any kind of root but is specifically arborescent in form, assuming a duality of settlement as norm and displacement as anomaly. Malkki (1992) unsettles this naturalized "sedentarist bias" by questioning the assumed hierarchal duality in the idea that "the homeland or country of origin is not only the normal but the ideal habitat for any person" (Malkki 1995, p. 509). She then proposes that to capture the multiplicity of situated experiences of identity and home, including mobility and settlement, it is essential to break this dualistic rooted approach of identity and home and to adapt "nomadology," as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

When adapting nomadology as a lens, it is essential to consider Sara Ahmed's warning about using an a-historical and idealized approach that employs nomads as a metaphor "to provide a particular kind of theoretical work" and her caution about assuming nomadism to be a condition chosen by critically self-conscious and autonomous privileged subjects (Ahmed 1999, p. 334). In my earlier work I used this nomadic positioning as a metaphor for individuals who are reflective (thus self-conscious) enough not to fall into the trap of a dualistic choice between past and present (Ghorashi 2003a). However, after reading Ahmed's critique, I came to see the limitations of this approach, especially when it is solely connected to intentional consciousness and individual autonomy. Yet, I find the proposal of nomadology particularly informative because of its unsettling imaginary of the normalized power of sedentary and dualistic points of departure to home. Bauman (2000) calls the era of liquid modernity the era in which nomads (or displaced people) are not the anomaly anymore, they are the norm. Adapting nomadology as a lens, then, enables consideration of multiple possibilities in which home is experienced, constructed and contested through intersections with mobility and connections to a variety of locations, places and spaces. In this way, nomadology is not about power-free, free-floating mobilities but about the rendering of imaginaries and enactments that embrace mobility as a *de facto* experience on the ground when engaging with legal and discursive bordering structures and practices.

Nomadology as a lens is even more appealing, if we consider the moral connotations of the legal and discursive sedentary approach to home that results in the paternalization and pathologization of displaced categories such as refugees. At best, refugees are considered vulnerable and pitiful because they are cut from their broken roots; at worst, they are considered dangerous because of their abnormality. Although somewhat extreme, the following quote captures this pathologization of refugees quite clearly:

Homelessness is a serious threat to moral behavior ... At the moment the refugee crosses the frontiers of his own world, his whole moral outlook, his attitude toward the divine order of life changes ... [Refugees'] conduct makes it obvious that we are dealing with individuals who are basically amoral, without any sense of personal or social responsibility ... They no longer feel themselves bound by ethical precepts which every honest citizen ... respects. They become a menace, dangerous characters who will stop at nothing. (Cirtautas 1957, pp. 70, 73, in Malkki 1992, p. 32)

Although this strongly worded, stigmatizing quote seems outdated for capturing the complexity of the present time and present sources of exclusion, including the subtler ones, it clearly

shows the continuity and persistence of negative images about refugees through time. Images of dangerousness, amorality and lack of personal and social responsibility have gained a stronger presence in recent years compared to the last decades of the previous century. Gray and Franck (2019) identify several shifts in British media concerning the representation of refugees after 2015. The image of refugees as vulnerable and “at risk” changed to one of refugees “as risk,” with a strong underlying gendered and racialized logic (Gray & Franck 2019, p. 276). This logic refers to an intertwined presence of feminine vulnerability and masculine threat. In these images, refugee men are considered aggressive and potential dangers to society, while refugee women’s agency is erased, and they are seen as in need of protection (Gray & Franck 2019, p. 270). A strong manifestation of this image is the representation of refugee men as potential and actual perpetrators in German and Dutch media after the 2015 New Year’s Eve sexual attacks on women in several German public spaces (Brenner & Ohlendorf 2016). Although the connection with home and rootedness was not explicitly made in media reports, a lack of morality and loyalty was clearly connected to “refugeeness” (particularly the racialized othering of refugees and migrants with an Islamic background) in the context of rising nationalism in the West. The reports showed both paternalization (of refugee and migrant women) and pathologization (of refugee and migrant men) at the same time.

FROM ARBORESCENT ROOTS TO RHIZOMATIC HOMES

Although a territorial and rooted approach to home was challenged and criticized extensively in the 1980s (e.g. Anzaldúa 1987; Appadurai 1988; Clifford 1997), global developments such as the “refugee crisis” seem to reinforce this dualistic logic that dominates both societal and academic mainstream discourses. This territorial thinking within mainstream migration studies informed by “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002) has consistently raised the issue of the dual positioning of migrants as a source of concern. In these studies, “the problem” is not located in the global and national conditions leading “to massive territorial displacements of people, but, rather, within the bodies and minds (and even souls) of people categorized as refugees” (Malkki 1992, p. 33). In mainstream studies, references to “dual citizenships,” “dual lives” and “dwelling and maintaining homes in two countries” (Portes 1997, p. 812) are mentioned as sources of concern in terms of “dual authority and loyalty” (Sheffer 1996, in Van Amersfoort 2001, p. 14). Migrants and refugees are considered to be both the sole carrier of the problems and the ones responsible for the solutions; they are expected to “do better and to be better” (Favell 2019; Schinkel 2017). This trajectory and quest for total integration (economic, societal, cultural and emotional) often leads to total disappointment because the structural conditions and complexities of experiences of home and belonging are completely ignored (Eijberts & Ghorashi 2017; Ghorashi 2021; Pozzo & Nerghes 2020).

To capture the complexity of positioning of displaced people (if not all people) and the multiplicity (instead of duality) of their relation to home, it is necessary to deconstruct the normalization of home as an arborescent root. In the case of refugees, this is even more salient, since “if ‘home’ is where one feels most safe and at ease ... then it is far from clear that returning where one fled from is the same thing as ‘going home’” (Malkki 1995, p. 509). The previously discussed nomadology, as a lens to unsettle the sedentarist bias, calls for a more fluid approach to home that is unlinked from the normalized connection to the geographical boundaries of a country of origin; no longer tied to a given territorial space, home is tied to

multiple locations (places and spaces, physical or otherwise) in which past, present and future are intertwined. This deterritorialization opens up new ways of conceptualizing the importance of place in a fluid, changing and contested manner (Van Liempt & Staring 2021).

Rather than signifying a place to return to, a fluid approach to home denotes overlapping sources of belonging/non-belonging in addition to temporal and ambivalent sources of attachment (Appadurai 1996; Gilroy 1997; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Hall 1990). This requires a shift from arborescent roots to rhizomatic connectedness.

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states ... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion ... The tree is filiation but the rhizome is alliance ... the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, pp. 21, 25)

The metaphor of rhizome refers to the non-hierarchical state of a connectedness that is not dualistic but overlapping and “in a state of constant flux ... There is no such thing as a pure point of origin ... but that doesn’t mean there isn’t history” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 10). Rhizomatic connections shape and reshape a fluid experience and narration of home that is simultaneously grounded and shifting. Thus deterritorialization does not ignore the significance of place but approaches it in connection to specific histories and lived experiences in which multiple places overlap. While the sedentarist, territorial approach to home is informed by “methodological nationalism is a form of epistemic misrecognition of migrants,” the deterritorialization approach prioritizes lived local experiences and imaginaries “that challenge the legitimacy of borders as a means of categorizing people” (Uhde 2021, p. 318). This is what Uhde refers to as “critical cosmopolitan imagination,” “a reflexive critique and the normative horizon of ideas about alternative society and actors’ claims for justice” (Uhde 2021, p. 319). In this approach deterritorialization of home is not about overcelebration of free-floating mobile cosmopolitans. It is rather about prioritizing migrants’ embodied histories and memories not as passive victims of marginalization (even when they face forceful acts of exclusion) but as a group that makes the inherent contradictions and failure of global structural injustice visible, and shows how borders operate to maintain it (Uhde 2021).

In such a deterritorialized approach of home, the significance of place is then related to narrations from below that are relational, contextual and thus political. This means that experiencing home is always related to politics of (non-)belonging (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006), which is situationally colored with meanings and emotions. This situatedness stresses processes of inclusion and exclusion, either occurring in sequence (Geddes & Favell 1999) or being simultaneously present (Eijberts & Ghorashi 2017), which always implies the construction of symbolic boundaries related to any kind of collective community considered to serve as a home (see also Ghorashi & Vieten 2012). Experiences of home and belonging (homecoming) are closely connected to societal inclusion. However, the significance of home and “belonging becomes activated most strongly when there is a sense of exclusion” (Anthias 2006, p. 21). What I will discuss below is the importance of location and power in the multilayered and even conflicting ways that home can be experienced, but also in the multifaceted manner that spaces as home can be created (*homemaking*).

POLITICS OF LOCATION

In addition to migration studies exploring ideas of home, critical and feminist studies have a long tradition of questioning the normalized aspect of home, even for those without migration experience. In the age of mobility, the idea of home undergoes dramatic changes regardless of one's physical displacement (Rapport & Dawson 1998). Feminist scholars have argued for home as sites of aggression on both national and domestic levels and have argued for the importance of safe spaces as sites of subversion of the status quo and belonging. Thus one might "be at home" but does not "feel at home" (Brah 1996). These studies have addressed the issues of home and belonging as "'politics of location' as locationality in contradiction" (Brah 1996, p. 180). Brah argues that self-reflexive autobiographical narrations provide specific insights into politics of location by showing the layered impacts of location in "how home can simultaneously be a place of safety and of terror" (Brah 1996, p. 180). Home can mean different things to various members of an assumed community depending on the level of advantage that a group or an individual has. Thus, locations of home are relational and sometimes contradictory but always power-related; however, the presence of power can differ in its level of visibility and intensity.

In the following section I will elaborate on two forms of location in which home is experienced in rhizomatic terms. The first form involves locations in which memories and experiences of alienation co-exist with feelings of attachment. The second are locations in which home is a safe enough space to dare to subvert the status quo through creating non-hierarchical connections. I will provide examples of both locations in the next section.

LOCATIONALITY IN CONTRADICTION

When thinking of places in which the feeling of home is experienced, one may think of locations in which multiple (and even contradictory) memories, senses and emotions overlap. The following excerpt comes from my notes taken during my fieldwork in California in 1997:

One of the sweetest memories I have from my childhood is our trips to my aunt's villa in northern Iran in the summers. I loved the green, the sea and the play with the children there. We went there with the whole family and many children. We woke up early in the morning with birds singing, rushed to the sea, and stayed there the whole day. We had the choice either to go to the sea or to the swimming pool. It was a marvelous time. We went there with our bicycles and the whole day was full of joy, playing, swimming, quarrelling, running and eating. During the night, another picture that I will never forget is the smell of barbecue in the garden and several tables set for adults to play cards. Almost all of our parents played cards deep into the night. We ate, played, and at some point just fainted from exhaustion. My nights mostly ended with the sound of crickets. The mornings started with birds and the nights ended with crickets. Of those memories, the sounds stayed a part of my life for a long time.

After the revolution, I did not hear those sounds any more. We went to northern Iran every summer, but the scene was completely different. The city of my memories had changed to a city full of Islamic police. That city, which was considered a base for wealthy people, became the center of hatred for revolutionaries. We were not allowed to swim, and having fun became a sin. At some point they said that biking was forbidden for women. I could not believe it and just took my bicycle as usual and headed toward the sea. An Islamist policeman who was hidden behind the trees jumped out and pointed his gun at me. I was totally shocked and just stepped off the bike and went with him to the police office. I was afraid of getting in trouble because of my political background, and for an unfortunate reason like getting arrested for riding a bicycle. So I stayed as polite as I could. They called my

father, and he guaranteed that I would not ride a bike anymore. This was one of the last pictures of the beautiful city of my memories before I left Iran as a refugee to the Netherlands.

During my fieldwork in California, I strangely felt at home within a month of my arrival there. The lost home that was neither Iran nor the Netherlands took on another dimension when I came to California. Iran made me homeless because of the violence I experienced as a political activist, and in the Netherlands I felt disconnected from the past and the present. One evening I was invited to a party at the house of a distant relative. Most of my cousins who had been living in the US since the 1970s were there too. When I entered the house, I was shocked by what I saw. The decorations, the tables ready for playing cards, the smell of barbecue and the big plate of fruit hit me immediately. It was such a familiar scene. My grownup playmates and I stayed inside and talked. I heard the sounds again. There were no birds or crickets outside, but I clearly heard them singing. I realized that the feeling of home has little to do with your country of origin, but very much to do with the place where you can revive your memories. I was not in Iran or northern Iran recapturing my memories; I was in Los Angeles as a stranger, and there I felt at home. It was a displaced home, in which objects, memories, scenes and emotions overlapped.

As this excerpt shows, feeling at home is temporal and situated in a simultaneous presence of displacement (being a stranger in the United States (US) and uprooted in the Netherlands) and intense feelings of homecoming (reliving sweet memories of the past). This agrees with Ahmed's critique of the dualistic approach to home and strangeness, which she argues "projects strangeness beyond the walls of the home" (Ahmed 1999, p. 34). Added to this doubleness of feelings of homecoming in a strange place there was also a feeling of discomfort, which I, as an activist and a feminist, had always felt with the traditional parties in Iran. It reminded me of feeling out of place or at odds when I had been part of those Iranian family parties, and that feeling co-existed with the strong sense of homecoming because of those same practices. This active invention of tradition in Los Angeles felt so familiar and close to me even though (and maybe even because) it raised such contradictory emotions. At the same time, this thoughtfully crafted reinvention of Iranian scenes and objects in Los Angeles was, for my relatives and many others, a foundation for a strong sense of security and belonging. In an earlier publication, I showed how the re-creation of the past (years before the revolution) in Los Angeles, an Iran outside Iran, has served as a source of belonging for many Iranians. For those with vivid memories from the time before the revolution, "Irangeles" felt more like Iran than did the Islamic Iran after the revolution. I argued then that feeling at home does not merely have to do with conscious choices that people make but also with surroundings where they feel familiar (even in contradiction): a known surrounding that is linked to the embodied past in the form of cultural/social habitus (Ghorashi 2003b).

The homecoming experience is quite different for an activist and feminist, for example, in traditionally reinvented locations compared to those who feel more comfortable with the mainstream culture. But group positions (being from majority or minority groups) can also make a strong difference in how the past is remembered and reinvented. Al-Rasheed (1994) compared two refugee groups in England (Iraqi Assyrians and Iraqi Arabs), showing how the position of being from a minority or a majority group in Iraq had been essential in connecting to memories of the past and experiences of home in the present. Thus, feelings of homecoming and homemaking are differential, sometimes conflicting and always relational. They influence how home is reconstituted, reimagined and enacted through ways involving materiality, memories and relational power (Boccagni 2017). It is this complexity of experiences of home that makes home impossible to capture in models or categories. This complexity and layeredness does also not allow for strict distinctions of the political, emotional, personal or cultural.

A non-dualistic and rhizomatic approach to home is then about the intersection of places, objects, memories, emotions, senses and politics that are embodied and enacted simultaneously. This experience can include feelings of belonging and strangeness at the same time, which I earlier referred to as “locality in contradiction.” A feeling of home is for that matter always temporal and fluid, never complete, always partial, changing and sometimes even conflicting.

POLITICS OF MARGINAL LOCALITY

This complex relationship with home is not only limited to those who experience displacement. It can also be the case for people whose positioning is at the margin of dominant cultures (like me being a feminist and activist in Iran) or for citizens in Europe opposing dominant discourses of injustice and the exclusion of less privileged groups. While much has been written about the first case by feminist and critical scholars, not much research has been done about progressive citizen minorities in national contexts and their experiences of home and belonging. An interesting example of this is when citizens of many European countries (with or without experience of physical displacement themselves) opened their homes to refugees who were total strangers to them (Bocagni & Giudici 2022; Ponzoni et al. 2020). What happens to home when you share it with strangers and by doing so provide an alternative to dominant discourses rejecting and humiliating strangers? This act of breaking the wall between home and strangeness is an act of homemaking for many citizens in Europe who feel out of place in a national context or in a world that is becoming more and more exclusionary toward strangers and cruel to refugees. In these cases home then becomes the site of subversion of the dominant discourse at the family level. But home can also become a site of subversion at the community level, “a community which ‘makes a place’ in the act of reaching out to ‘out of place-ness’” (Ahmed 1999, p. 345). This is a place that Brah refers to as “diaspora space”: a site “at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is contested ... a site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native*” (1996, p. 209, italics are original). The “out of place-ness” of diaspora space comes close to what Said (1994) refers to as the condition of in-betweenness for exiles, which can lead to a feeling of disconnectedness but also has great potential to challenge the status quo. Exiles do not have the privilege of taking their present context for granted. The simultaneous existence of often conflicting past and present contexts creates a condition of *forced reflexivity* (see also Ghorashi 2017) that is crucial for challenging the normalizing power of the status quo. If one can live only in the present, one risks disappearing in that present (Bauman 2000, p. 206). Forced reflexivity in in-between spaces helps people to “think in travel” by “being away,” by creating homes at the crossroads of differences (Derrida, in Bauman 2000) and by welcoming the challenge to create and live in a space that feels like home on the threshold of many discourses.

One of the inspiring examples of such in-between safe spaces comes from black women activists in the US who chose the margin over the center and took time (delay) and space (safe and brave) to subvert the status quo through co-creation of alternative narratives with new imaginings and inspirations for the future. In these *safe/brave/daring interspaces*, alternative narratives emerged in which there was room for self-definitions instead of reproductive or reactive positioning within the dominant discourse. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) argues that

interacting in such spaces enabled black activists to embrace the diversity and richness of their experiences and positioning to produce different stories without the pressure of conforming to the norm. They also engaged with a variety of means in those spaces, including music, particularly jazz and blues, literature and oral self-narration of the past (Collins 1991; Janssens & Steyaert 2001). Yet, by adapting Brah's notion of diaspora space, such an in-between space could also bring together different groups of people who, in their struggle for justice, are creating an alternative space to call home in a national or global context that makes them feel homeless.

In one research project, my colleague Christine Brinkgreve and I combined a life story methodology with creative writing and invited 17 women with different backgrounds to write their life stories in a relational manner (Ghorashi 2014). To create the safe space, we asked participants to enter the space without judgment, to allow *contiguity*, which in feminist literature refers to the conscious and continuous use of a non-hierarchical view on difference: "difference side by side, without sameness as the norm or the anchor by which difference is constituted" (Oseen 1997, p. 55). By doing so we aimed to create a space that was (forcefully) reflective about the hierarchical orders (fixed categories of self and other) that are informed by normalizing power. This enabled us to engage with the other in necessary openness so that the connection between the self and the other did not depart a priori from a hierarchical relation. This, in turn, helped us to think about the issues at play while allowing participants to travel to each other's horizons ("thinking in travel"). Feeling the safety of the space made it possible for some to share heartbreaking stories about how "the system" – as they called it – took away not only their agency but also their hope and dignity. Parwin's story is an example of this. Parwin is an Iranian who came to the Netherlands as a refugee in the 1990s. The first part of her story is about the political background of her family, especially the women, as politically conscious and as activists who created the path for her to become active in a leftist political struggle against the previous regime in Iran. She also writes about her experience of the 1979 revolution and the harsh suppression she faced after 1981. When listening to the part of her story that takes place before she left Iran, participants were amazed by the power of that generation of women (including herself) in her story. It was inspiring to hear about how she survived difficulties and about her motivation to contribute to making the country she called home a more just society. Once in the Netherlands, after living in an asylum seeker center for some time, she felt absolutely powerless for the first time in her life. In Iran, she remained a passionate activist until the last minutes of her stay. She knew the enemy and was sure of the cause. She expected better treatment from a democratic society like the Netherlands. In her view, this was supposed to be the country that would give her – as a freedom fighter and refugee – a new chance to live. Instead, she was treated as untrustworthy. Her spirit was broken by living for years in isolation from the rest of society, waiting in limbo, denied of her agency as a female refugee and activist. She did not know how to fight this invisible enemy. She could not deal with this unexpected situation and became depressed, losing her passion for life. After describing her experiences in asylum seeker centers, she asked herself: "Is this the freedom and democracy I was fighting for all my life?"

Later, Kiki (a native Dutch woman of around 65 in 2010), who was also an activist when younger, narrated her story by connecting it to Parwin's. She wrote:

During one of the sessions, the story of one of the participants who came as a refugee to the Netherlands touched me deeply. She wrote about all the things she left behind, all the things she strug-

gled and suffered for and all the family and friends who died for those causes. All of that for freedom and democracy, something that one would expect to find here. She wrote: “In all those asylum seeker centers you think to yourself: Is this it?” This line cuts through my soul. In my own country I have not felt at home over the last couple of years. (Ghorashi 2017)

This deep level of connection between Parwin’s and Kiki’s stories as female activists led to a profound discussion on the meaning of freedom and democracy and their relation to visible and less visible forms of exclusion and othering in the Netherlands. In this way, this project served as “diaspora space” in which the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of “us” and “them” were blurred. The project then became a site of belonging, a kind of home that was safe for many who felt homeless because of the political developments in their homelands (with and without physical displacement) and who felt uprooted in their present national locations (Ghorashi 2017). This sense of connectedness can also emerge within civil society in the form of newly formed neighborhood communities which function as in-between spaces experimenting with balancing familiarity and strangeness. In the next section I will present the promises and challenges of such initiatives in the context of democracies engaging with displacement and home.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF POLITICS

Beginning in 2015, with what was referred to as the “refugee crisis,” Europe observed a strong presence of civil society grassroots initiatives engaging with refugees (Ponzoni et al. 2020). One of the main reasons for this engagement from below was people’s frustrations with the top-down approach of formal institutions (Boersma et al. 2019) and their discomfort with the growing exclusionary and harsh rhetoric about refugees. Ataç et al. refer to the democratic potential of civil society initiatives challenging dominant institutions as “alternative imaginaries” (2016, p. 530, in Van der Veer 2020). This kind of politics from below, according to Mouffe (2005), shows the limits of institutional politics and recovers and extends democracy. Moreover, citizen initiatives unsettle the dichotomy of home and strangeness by literally bringing the stranger home (Boccagni & Giudici 2022). By creating experiential spaces, such initiatives can facilitate meaningful rhizomatic connections within fluid and temporal communities that feel like home.

One good example has been the neighborhood-organized initiative *Gastvrij Oost* (Hospitable East) in the *Indische* neighborhood of Amsterdam. The *Gastvrij Oost* initiative was built on years of investment in neighborhood engagement and participatory projects by a variety of actors (local government, professionals and neighborhood residents). One component of this initiative was *Hoost*, which provided alternative housing for asylum seekers. With the support of local government and a housing agency, a building was made available as a temporary residence for this group. The support for *Hoost* was quite strong, from the numbers of volunteers involved to the financial contributions gained through practices such as crowdfunding. It also received relatively high media coverage in the Netherlands. The project’s duration was six months, after which all *Hoost* residents moved into their own houses in Amsterdam (for more, see Younes et al. 2021). Then, a new idea emerged. *Boost* was started to provide continuity in the connections made during the *Hoost* period (Rast & Ghorashi 2018). A new building was made available for Dutch lessons, networking meetings and dinners for large groups.

These examples show the importance of an engaged, neighborhood-based grassroots foundation in providing alternative socially vibrant spaces of connection to counteract the dominance of fear and hatred directed toward new refugees. Instead of considering refugees as “space invaders,” these initiatives embraced the newcomers and invited them to come live in and share the space through engagement. These examples of solidarities “do not only generate feelings of togetherness and belonging, but allow for blurring the boundary of familiarity and strangeness and by doing so ‘subvert state-centered perspectives and act beyond the sovereignty of states and institutional contexts’” (Friese 2010, p. 329). These acts of civic engagement could be considered as a “critical cosmopolitanism” from below. This involves

a process of continuous redefinition and a search for a balance between a universal conception of humanity and solidarity, on the one hand, and local bonds, on the other hand, and its aim is to direct specific attention to marginalized actors and their ongoing struggles, which constitute what Ulrich Beck (2006) calls the really existing processes of cosmopolitanization. (Uhde 2021, p. 317)

Although the energy and commitment invested in creating these alternative and experimental homemaking practices has been impressive, it is challenging to keep them vibrant and sustainable at the same time. Often the visibility of such successful grassroots initiatives becomes their own worst enemy, with the danger of their efforts being co-opted through the process of “professionalization.” Friese shows how, in Lampedusa, “professionalization” changed the relationship to those who arrived there, and how the initial local solidarity and multiple gestures of hospitality were converted into institutional “reception” and “good practice” (Friese 2010, p. 333). In addition, it often seems difficult to find the right balance in reciprocal engagement when the idea of the locals helping the refugees is so dominant (Rast & Ghorashi 2018; Younes et al. 2021). Moreover, there is often a lack of necessary reflection on the expectations around engagement. Because of the normalized nature of certain assumptions, struggles between refugees and locals frequently occur as they try to shape the co-ownership of the space, which is essential for the process of homemaking. Yet, despite such challenges, refugees in these projects have often mentioned that being part of the initiatives feels like the home they had lost during the war and conflict in their country of origin. This is a feeling they had not felt in the Netherlands before becoming part of the warm welcoming space they created together with these initiatives (Ponzoni et al. 2020). These cases illustrate that feelings and narrations about home are always situated and political and, most importantly, that they are often conflicting and always multilayered. Hence, it is crucial to consider alliances and long-term investments that can keep such initiatives vital by increasing their reflective capacity to remain a kind of “counter governmentality from below” (Appadurai 2001, p. 35).

CONCLUSION

Going back to the quote by Hugo of St. Victor at the start of the chapter, I hope to have unsettled this hierarchical distinction between tender beginners who love their homeland, strong people whose home can be everywhere and the perfect person who has extinguished the necessity of home. I have shown in this chapter that there is no perfection in denying the feeling of home and embracing contradictory emotions based on memories from the past in the present. Adapting nomadology as a lens makes it possible to deterritorialize a rooted notion of home, with its dualistic hierarchy of self and others at its core and the need to claim the

superiority of disconnectedness from any territory as a given. I have argued that the experience of homecoming and the act of homemaking is fluid, layered and located through rhizomatic connections. To consider the complexity of home and belonging when one is displaced, it is necessary to consider the simultaneous presence of home and discomfort not only because of the physical displacement but also because of the mental homelessness of the ones who stay put. For many who find themselves confronted with the negative implications of a dominant discourse of othering (based on a hierarchical, rooted approach to home), in-between safe spaces as a site of subversion could feel like home. Engaging with forced reflexivity within these in-between spaces enables people to “think in travel” and to create routes that connect a variety of positionalities and locations with spaces and relationships that are meaningful and dignifying. In these kinds of communities, it is not the sameness and rootedness that is embraced but the connectedness through difference in travel.

These alternative forms of connectedness in society – where the wall between home and strangeness is down – could indeed broaden the imaginary to think of deeper notions of democracy in which there is space for non-conforming difference and non-conventional connections. This is what Beck (1997) calls the “invention of the political,” referring to the creation of societal spaces for reflexivity and forms of connectedness that are engaged, vibrant and dynamic. These spaces could be family homes that welcome strangers to cohabit with them or neighborhood communities that serve as diaspora spaces in which participants co-create home through a balancing act between strangeness and belonging. Such spaces prioritize imaginaries of a deterritorialized positioning of migrants and refugees who, by their mobility and multiple positionings, challenge legal and discursive bordering structures and practices. By doing so they show that home is not a point on a map that one has left behind but an actual space in which dignified relationships take shape to unsettle the undignified impacts of bordering structures and discourses of exclusion and racism.

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