



House and home

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If asked to imagine home, most of us will come to think of a particular house or building. And, for many of us, the quintessential image of home remains the place we grew up in. This close association between house and home has long marked anthropological literature. And yet, when we imagine home, it is often not the structures themselves but the feelings, practices, and relationships within familiar spaces which give home a powerful sense of belonging. Home may be the scent of a grandmother's cooking, the familiar fuzz of a worn cushion, the seemingly defiant thrill of hanging posters on the wall as a teenager, or the knot of tension in the stomach of a child listening to an argument in the adjoining room. Recent anthropological studies have hence looked beyond physical structures to understand home in terms of a diverse array of practices, meaningful and imaginative forms, and feelings which surround a sense of groundedness within the world. Understood in such terms, home becomes something much less solid than a structure of stone or wood. It tends to be contestable and fragile, a domain not only of belonging but also of potential alienation when attempts to make home fail or are subverted. This flourishing literature increasingly suggests that while physical shelter may be a basic existential need, it is houses and homes, wrapped up in the desire and struggle for belonging, which underpin human sociality.

Introduction

The study of home within anthropology, and within the social sciences more broadly, occupies a curious position. On the one hand, houses, homes, and practices of homemaking have been an inescapable background within anthropological [writing](#) throughout the discipline's history. Houses and homes have been recognised as an essential ground upon which many of the most prominent theoretical questions of social science unfold, from the nature of kinship, to the reproduction of class and gender differences, to the shaping of sensory knowledge. On the other hand, however, houses and homes often remain out of focus, with their ability to ground and shape social life simply taken for granted and lacking analytical elaboration. They tend to be the mere background to the 'real' objects of analysis. The intimacy and idiosyncrasy of home spaces can threaten to confound efforts to consider broader questions of [social reproduction](#) or social transformation. And yet it may well be that no one lives without a home, and that home plays an inescapable role in defining who we are.

This entry traces anthropological attempts to think through the significance of houses and homes in shaping our lives. Given the persistent gap between the centrality of home to most of human life, and its peripheral position within most social science, these attempts represent fertile analytic starting points for the study of social life more broadly. For heuristic purposes, this entry presents 'house' and 'home' as

distinct but related entities. It takes the 'house' to be the material and often-generic form of the home in a given society. Thus, the house points here to familiar physical structures in streets and neighbourhoods, which mainly take shape through the practices of planners, [architects](#), craftspeople, and builders. The house, however, also refers to the idea of houses or households as typical *social institutions*, defined by dominant norms. In contrast, the notion of 'home' emphasises the subjective sense of being rooted within the world. Both 'house' and 'home' exist simultaneously as physical entities, subjective feelings, and as objects of various discourses which seek to shape, reinforce, or contest the forms they take. Both entities do not always map neatly onto one another. 'Home' may refer more to imaginary spaces, or to bodily practices rather than physical structures, while houses, as sites of [labour](#), conflict, and tension, may be at times fundamentally unhomely.

The house: from symbolism to social reproduction

The conceptual distinction between house and home is a relatively recent one, and for many years anthropologists did not give much importance to either concept. Early scholars such as Lewis Henry Morgan (1981[1881]), writing on American aboriginal houses, or Bronislaw Malinowski, who defined the family as a group of kin tied to 'a definite physical space, a hearth and home' (see Collier, Rosaldo & Yanagisako 1987), saw the physicality and particularity of the home as secondary. When homes appeared within anthropological accounts, they 'tend[ed] to be thought of as a "case" of symbolism or cosmology rather than a subject in their own right' (Humphrey 1988: 16). In addition to being seen as a symbol indicating particular cultural beliefs, earlier generations of anthropologists also saw the house mostly as a container or setting for those social [relations](#), such as kinship, which were taken to be of primary interest (Carsten & Jones 1995). While the home environment certainly mattered in earlier anthropological work, it did so because it was seen as an important element within broader meaningful orders, or as symbolically-laden stages, upon which important social dramas such as marriage or initiation rites played out.

Two seminal works by Pierre Bourdieu and Claude Lévi-Strauss both reflect this approach, but also mark the beginning of a shift in focus towards unpacking the role of houses in fundamental social processes: Lévi-Strauss (1983) wrote on 'house societies', defined as societies where elite power was organised via the institution of often noble 'houses', which bundled together familial descent, land, power and wealth. In such societies, including the Native American Yurok and Kwakiutl as well as medieval European societies, Lévi-Strauss argued that noble houses played a critical role in sustaining society by encompassing forms of power that might otherwise be in tension (1983). For instance, marriages within noble houses turned allies into kin, reconciling the tension that might have existed between maintaining distinct family groups and interests, and the desire to build cross-cutting alliances (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 187). This approach continued to see houses as 'containers'. However, in contrast to earlier works, the act of containment itself was now highlighted as playing a critical role in sustaining the social processes it encompassed.

Meanwhile, Bourdieu's famous essay on the Kabyle house traced how corresponding distinctions of light/dark, public/private, and male/female sat at the heart how the Kabyle people, a Berber group living in the Atlas mountains, viewed the world (1992 [1970]). These distinctions not only shaped public conduct and religious belief, but were also manifest in the very layout, furnishings, and domestic routines which made up the Kabyle house, as well as in everyday domestic routines. In Bourdieu's account, the physical organization of the Kabyle house not only reflected this structured worldview, but was also responsible for reproducing it. This argument would find full expression in his later theory of 'habitus', which he came to characterise as 'a system of predispositions inculcated by the material circumstances of life and by family upbringing' (Bourdieu 1976: 118). Although Bourdieu's later work does not deal with the house at the same level of empirical or conceptual detail (Atkinson 2016), it is clear within his theory that houses are important sites for learning embodied habits and internalising specific [values](#). Thus, as anthropologists began to focus on the home itself, it was largely through physical houses. For Lévi-Strauss, houses literally and conceptually encompassed and mediated relations, while for Bourdieu the structured, material form of the house became the primary ground for [social reproduction](#).

In many ways, the first surge of attention flowing from the study of houses into the realm of homes has followed from the meeting of these two approaches, revealing that houses and homes are spaces where relations were not only reproduced, but actively mediated: a point made in an important volume by Stephen Hugh-Jones and Janet Carsten (1995). This new understanding of house and home has been illustrated in different ways. In her study of Malay domestic life, Carsten (1997) puts the hearth at the centre of the house: it is the place where the family meets, where food is prepared, and where kinship is made through the transformation and [sharing](#) of substances. She argues that '[h]earths are obvious sources of physical sustenance, but they are also often the symbolic focus of the house, loaded with the imagery of the commensal unity of close kin. Houses are material shelters as well as ritual centres' (Carsten 2003:55). By sharing food, kinship is made and reproduced (many Malay express the two concepts as being like siblings). Here, the physical and symbolic dimensions of domestic life are not easily separated. Rather, as other authors have also argued, it is the physical enactment of kin relations, and their direct involvement in sustaining life through forms of [care](#) and nourishment, which give these relations weight and reality, investing them with memory and feeling (see Martens & Scott 2006; de Pina-Cabral 1986). Such attention to care, unity, and togetherness also brought questions of homeliness into focus, alongside matters of material wellbeing, collective ritual, and social reproduction.

Likewise, the making of a house and the making of a marriage can often be closely linked, as was the case among the Zafimaniry in Madagascar when studied by Maurice Bloch (1995). As a married couple's house becomes stronger - 'grows bones', as several Zafimaniry put it - and transforms into a hardwood construction over time, the relationship of the married couple becomes more stable. No longer separating out broader social processes from the house itself, Bloch instead argued that house and marriage were

interdependent. For married couples, in fact, key moments and challenges in a solidifying marriage, such as the birth of the first child, were intertwined with on-going processes of renovating and decorating the house. As the family unit matured, and took on wider roles and responsibilities, the physical structure of the Zafimaniry house grew increasingly solid and ornate, both reflecting this maturity and significance and contributing to it.

Anthropologists have also highlighted the role played by houses in producing a distinctive mode of economic organisation, known as the 'house economy' (Gudeman & Rivera 1990) or the 'domestic mode of production' (Sahlins 1972). Following a theory developed by Alexander Chayanov in relation to peasant economies, Sahlins describes household production as defined by the needs of the domestic unit – and as such as relatively low. In a parallel way, Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera observed how their informants sustained their agricultural livelihoods in an increasingly market-driven world, drawing on fieldwork with [farming](#) communities, first in Panama in the late 1960s, and then in Columbia from the 1970s onwards. Here, material practices were organised through the house (Gudeman & Rivera 1990: 2). While 'both the house and the corporation are means for accomplishing material tasks', the house economy is distinct in that it is 'smaller, [...] locally based and wholly or partly produces its own means of maintenance' (Gudeman & Rivera 1990: 10). This organization enabled the household to pursue goals and modalities of mutuality, as well as individual well-being, distinct from but connected with the imperatives of the market. As such, Gudeman and his collaborators describe the house as the basic unit of economic life connected to others through bonds of exchange – while striving to be self-sufficient – and embedded in communities (Gudeman & Hann 2015). Again, the role of the house in mediating these relations and in the re-production of the family and the household is key.

Gudeman's work ties in with approaches that emphasise the house as a sort of technology, which brings people together and mediates their relations with others, far beyond the confines of their economic existence. This argument is set out by Donna Birdwell-Pheasant and Denise Lawrence-Zuñiga in the introduction to their volume, *Home life*:

Both households and families use houses more than as settings for activities of production and distribution or as consumer goods. They are also mechanisms of communication, which channel and regulate social interaction among family members and between separate households. [...] The house defines a place that belongs to a particular set of people and also defines, through co-residence and shared usage, the set of people that belong to a particular place. (1999: 3)

In each of these cases, although houses and homes are understood as playing an essential role in reproducing social relations, this reproduction cannot be taken for granted. Houses, homes, and those people within do not simply take up a pre-given place within an ordered cosmos. Rather, social reproduction is revealed as an often idiosyncratic process, where different individuals and families work to

take up, challenge, or reinterpret given and familiar social roles. Houses and homes play a key role in such processes, mediating between individuals and society. Their construction and arrangement, as well as the kin relations which come together to create a 'household', often follow and reproduce existing social patterns. At the same time, the material and social resources of households are taken up in creative ways. As such, houses and homes situate individuals and families within society: not identically, but always in particular locations.

Assembling home: materialist approaches

If one strand of anthropological attention focused on the role of houses and homes in [social reproduction](#), another strand has asked on how homes, and acts of homemaking, shape subjects themselves. Instead of examining the role of homes in sustaining or remaking key social institutions, the family, or [labour](#), these approaches have looked more closely at the variety of lives and relationships that unfold within the home. They have focused more closely on questions of what it means to eke out a sense of belonging, security, and worth within and through the home, but also on the tensions that can emerge between different members of a household when feelings of belonging, security, or value do not align. In highlighting the subjective stakes of homes and homemaking, such work also begins to suggest a contrast between the house and household on one hand – which might be understood as a social institution, reflecting dominant norms – and the home, which might be understood as including feelings of rootedness, safety, and value.

The contrast between a physical 'house' and a subjective sense of 'home', however, is not hard and fast. Instead, as work on the materiality of the home has shown, houses are often made into homes through the reworking of their material forms. Renovation, decoration, and furnishing, for example, help transform houses from generic expressions of familiar forms into places which tell the story of distinct, personal lives and relationships. This has been shown in a study of residents on a North London council estate (Miller 1988). Danny Miller documented how residents decorated and renovated their council flats in ways which both reflected their class position but also inflected this position with a personal sense of identity and belonging. Focusing not on homes themselves, but on the possessions and consumption practices that concentrate within their walls, Miller has continued to examine the importance of material objects for developing a sense of home. These objects include fitted kitchens, furniture, and knickknacks, but also the materials of the flats themselves such as concrete, wood, or brick which channel noise, light, and warmth. They allow homes to express not only given social meanings but the particularity of individual biographies and interpersonal [relations](#) (2009; 2001; 1998). As a result, the objects in one's home are simultaneously involved in placing oneself in broader society, creating relationships of [care](#), and developing a personal sense of biography, whereas the home both facilitates and reflects these interwoven processes. Together, home, the possessions which fill it, and the memories attached to both, shore up our sense of identity and belonging against the tribulations we might face in the outside world (Miller 2001). The physical

permanence of material objects, and their peculiar mode of assembly within the home, serve as durable sources of security (Petridou 2001). The subject, the inhabitant of the home, as Elia Petridou argues in her study of Greek students' homes in Britain, is advanced through the 'interaction with objects'. These objects could be furniture but also food, which is less place-bound; their totality and the security that accompanies them is in part based on an understanding of home as a 'sensory totality' (Petridou: 88). As such, for Miller (2009; 2001; 1998) and others (see also Gregson 2007; Dittmar 1992; Daniels & Andrews 2010; Cieraad 2006), creating a sense of home is directly linked to activities like shopping for material goods, arranging furniture in the rooms or narrating stories and memories of different objects. Shifting the focus onto materiality helps clarify a distinction between the physical house, whose forms often follow dominant norms, and a felt sense of home, which plays with and reinvents these forms, without necessarily subverting them.

On a more macro-level, anthropologists studying [architecture](#) and urban planning have highlighted that the material qualities of our surroundings work to shape bodies, habits, and mobility in line with broader social patterns (see Buchli 2013 for an overview). Following Bourdieu, they ask how houses impart particular social understandings and roles, often focusing less on individual houses or homes, and more on housing as a form of [infrastructure](#) (see Larkin 2013 for a review of infrastructural approaches). Thus, specific forms of architecture can give [colonial](#) aspirations physical form (e.g. Rabinow 1995 on France and its former colonies). In addition, specific features of houses, such as gates, tend to structure social relations. They may create class and [race](#)-based enclaves, as in American upper class suburbs, where segregated communities are established around singular houses or groups of them (Low 2003). On an intra-house level, Christine Helliwell (1996) studying the Dayak in Borneo, or the contributors to *Beyond kinship* (Joyce & Gillespie 2000) on various other house societies, go into detail of how houses and their architectural design restrict bodies, channel sensory awareness, produce sociality, or provoke interventions (e.g. in response to a quarrelling couple). While partitions – often flimsy and transparent – can create a division between private and public, they can also lead to forms of sociality. Likewise, changing housing conditions can be used to structure and sustain political outcomes. For example, moving Chicago 'project' residents into newer, mixed-income buildings led them to lose access to the free and effective heating systems of their former homes. Thereby, the residents were subject to a 'sensory push' towards becoming better workers and consumers, who bore the risks of their own survival individually (Fennell 2011). Many approaches which look at houses as infrastructure are grounded in actor-network theory, which in its most radical iterations refuses to see houses as stable objects at all, but instead approaches them as collections (or 'assemblages') of objects, materials, and processes, all of which exert [agency](#) and make demands on people in particular ways (e.g. Vokes 2013).

On the other hand, a range of works on the home has focused on emotion and [affect](#), where affect denotes forms of bodily perception that slip below conscious detection and are frequently hard to put into words.

Affects often have a strong material basis, which is why the material arrangement of homes can serve to suffuse them with specific [atmospheres](#) of feeling (Daniels 2015; Olesen 2010). For example, in Jordanian Bedouin homes, the profusion of green-tinted windows fills them with a radiant green hue which evokes a sense of divine presence (Bille 2017). Specific forms of light are not simply a religious symbol. Rather, for instance, green light's physical brilliance, immaterial nature and its ability to seep into spaces help construct deeply evocative feelings of piety and virtue. This helps householders make their claims to virtue visible to and felt by others, and it shapes domestic moods and interactions. As such, while the use of green light clearly reproduces dominant notions of piety and a public-private distinction, these [values](#) come to life in affective ways within individual households. They come about at the intersection of materiality, emotion, social relations, and the practices of dwelling, and they shape personal notions of home.

Re-making home: feminist and critical approaches

If homes have come to be seen as sites where people can negotiate and even contest their place in the world, then this is in no small part thanks to feminist writings on domestic labour and women's lives. While the universalism of the specific, often Marxist concepts used to theorise women's domestic efforts has often drawn criticism from anthropologists (Edholm, Harris & Young 1975; Strathern 1992), Marxist approaches, and the anthropological responses to them, have nonetheless productively focused attention on the domestic sphere as a domain of [labour](#) and creativity, as well as one holding the potential for alienation or exploitation.

For example, in her [ethnography](#) of a high-rise apartment building in Karachi, Laura Ring (2006) traces how inter-[ethnic](#) peace is the product of the relentless [work](#) of women's domestic labour. Peace prevails despite on-going tensions between different nationalist factions who share the building, including Sindhis, Punjabs, and Muhajirs. As they went about their lives together, the female residents would exchange gossip, share fashion and grooming tips and preferences, reflect on questions of religious practice and belief, or help one another navigate family tensions. These seemingly-mundane interactions worked to build bonds between households, offering both men and women a localised counternarrative to stories of irreparable political and ethnic divides. Ironically, the success of these small, everyday efforts could make the state of friendship, [care](#), and peace in the apartment building appear to some (including the ethnographer, initially) as if this were simply a natural state, rather than a product of sustained work.

In documenting the everyday labours involved in making a home, feminist scholars have also called for more careful attention to tensions between exploitation and belonging, and between social change and [social reproduction](#). For example, Lila Abu-Lughod, studying Awlad 'Ali Bedouin women in Egypt (1990; 1986) traces how ostensibly oppressive norms of public male honour and private female modesty are creatively taken up by women to claim power for themselves. By echoing men's insistence over strict separations between men and women within the home, women eke out space to smoke, scheme, and share

household secrets. They invert their formal deference to men, while retaining their claim to modesty and virtue. These practices can often become forms of [resistance](#), challenging power dynamics within households and potentially driving broader social change. Thus, traditional Bedouin marriage tends to involve elder relatives selecting a woman's betrothed, with little input from the bride herself, and with financial support for the couple expected to come from kin. However, women may resist such practices by asserting their own desirability, chafing at the obligations this practice produces, and remaining enchanted with the idea of a spouse with an independent income. Through buying lingerie or makeup, they assert a role for desire – both theirs and that of their husbands – in determining marriages. Such assertions reshape power dynamics within and between households, granting women more power over prospective and actual husbands, as orchestrators of desire. They also reposition the home as a more private space between husbands and wives, one shaped by consumer goods, and less [dependent](#) on kin.

Lives within the home can be constrained by multiple, intersecting forms of power, from gendered hierarchies to the power of the state. Yet, even under what may seem like desperate or desolate circumstances, home can serve as a site of creative response and as a repository for hopes and [dreams](#). This is illustrated in Clara Han's (2012) striking ethnography of slum households in Santiago, Chile, where she traces home as a site of 'active awaiting'. Living in a present where the possibilities for life are tightly constrained by [debt](#), gang violence, and the punitive force of the state, Han nonetheless traces how small interventions in the home – the pawning of a beloved music player, or the sheltering of a relative away from an abusive partner – create small spaces in which new, perhaps unknown possibilities can take root and grow.

This emphasis on interpersonal relationships, on belonging, security, and worth, and on power and contestation, remain rooted in the house, as a physical space, but move beyond it in emphasising the subjective dimensions of home. For instance, classic analyses of hospitality may focus on how, for hosts, acts of hospitality may serve to enact the authority and [moral](#) standing of householders, and how such domestic sovereignty relates to broader forms of cultural and state authority (e.g. Herzfeld 1987). In contrast, recent studies of homes on the margins (e.g. Han 2012) have come to ask how homes mediate and constrain the very possibilities of caring for others, as hosts or otherwise, as a fragile and often fraught enterprise. Even in studies focused on physical houses and other structures, home often comes to life not as a symbolic or material form, but as an experiential and relational category.

Supporting this shift in focus away from physical structures to lived forms have been critiques of western understandings of home, as a product of capitalist modernity. Over the course of the twentieth century, western understandings of home have centred around the idea of a privately-owned dwelling, occupied by a nuclear family (Dupuis & Thorns 1996; Madigan, Munro & Smith 1990). These have been coupled with philosophically inspired works drawing on [phenomenological](#) (Ingold 2011) or existential traditions (Jackson 2005) to ask what it means for people to have a place within the world. From these

impetuses, a growing body of work has approached the concept of 'home' not as a typical or identifiable institution, operating to reproduce given forms of authority, but instead as a name for the on-going efforts and dreams of people to secure a place or sense of belonging in the world, something felt, lived, imagined, or struggled for.

Home as a process and ideal

If the understandings of home explored above remain grounded in the notion of a physical house, occupying a fixed geographical location, a further set of perspectives engage with representations and practices of home more widely. Home and the processes linked to it are not necessarily material, and even when they are, they do not need to be linked to a house. Home may evoke the notion of a homeland, whose material basis lies in the smells of street foods, the cadence of a dialect, or the grand [architecture](#) of symbolic monuments. Yet, homelands may also be predominantly imaginative entities. This is the case, for example, with the Sikh 'homeland' of Khalistan, which exists as a yet-to-be realised nationalist vision, amongst local and émigré activists, who frequently discuss such visions online (Axel 2004). Linked to the imagination are the practical habits which produce and reproduce a sense of home, and which may persist in doing so, even in the absence of a fixed material basis. Particularly in situations where a material home is not immediately available, as in states of homelessness, refuge, or migration, the imagination, memory, and practices of homemaking become crucial to sustain a sense of stability and security. Homeless people, for example, may establish a sense of home in terms of their daily routines, moving through city streets, collecting new materials for temporary shelters, begging, and meeting with friends and familiar faces. In this way, they do not just structure their day, but also their surroundings (see Veness 1993; Lenhard, forthcoming).

Home may thus be seen as always in-between the real and the ideal and imaginative (Mallett 2004). It can relate to 'the activity performed by, with or in a person's things and places. Home is lived in the tension between the given and the chosen, then and now' (Mallett 2004: 80). As Shelley Mallett argues, 'people spend their lives in search of home, at the gap between the natural home and the particular ideal home where they would be fully fulfilled' (2004: 80). This analysis links ideas about home as a future (ideal) homeland inspired by past experience to notions of home in the present. It foregrounds that homes are made and have a procedural quality to them.

Catherine Brun and Anita Fabos (2015) position the idea of home-as-process at the centre of their work inspired by different contexts of migration. They describe home as a set of everyday practices, while 'such practices involve both material and imaginative notions of home and may be improvements or even investments to temporary dwellings; they include the daily routines that people undertake [...] and the social connections people make' (Brun and Fabos 2015:12). This view of home builds on Mary Douglas' (1991) classic minimal definition of the home, as the act of bringing a particular space under

control. For Douglas, a home is first and foremost a localised activity of ordering and control in the present, produced through accumulating meaningful objects and through enacting familiar routines in a certain space (see also Easthope 2004; O'Mahony 2013). Douglas continues her analysis in the following way:

home is always a localizable idea. Home is located in space but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar, it can be a wagon, a caravan, a board, or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control (1991: 289).

From this perspective, making a home is about finding a daily structure, regular rhythms, and constructing routines (Easthope 2004: 135; O'Mahony 2013). April Veness (1993), who worked with homeless people in Delaware in the late 1980s, stresses the importance of habits, rhythms, and routines for making home — often as mundane as routinely visiting certain neighbourhoods, shelters, and food kitchens. Veness found that installing a temporal order to the day as well as the environment was a key part of peoples' daily home-making.

Julie Botticello (2007) takes the notion of home further away from a fixed dwelling towards a 'site of practices where comfort, familiarity, and intimate sociality occur' (2007: 19; see also Capo 2015). In her study of Nigerians living in London, Botticello not only looks at a newly constructed home of immigrants but also at how a sense of home does not have to be limited to domestic, private space. Instead, home extends into the public realm of the street, of outdoor markets. The home-as-process, built on practices and routines, does not have to involve a fixed structure. It denotes a 'highly complex system of ordered relations with place, an order that orientates us in space, in time, and in society' (Dovey 1985: 39). All this takes us not just into the everyday rhythm of routine and practice, but to the ways in which such practices unfold over vaster spaces and longer periods of time.

Thus, imagined, in-process homes may be grounded in nostalgia – a feeling of reaching backwards in time that is already present in its Greek root (ὁμοιος [*homoios*]), which relates to homesickness. Memories and a yearning for a past home are often part of home imaginaries. Coming from the field of migration studies, Brun and Fabos (2015) define this idea of what they call HOME (in all capitals) as the 'geopolitics of nation and homeland' (13). It symbolizes an often idealised return to the cultural environment of one's past. Georgia Doná (2015: 69) analyses this nostalgia as the 'memories of, longing for, and imaginations of homes that are idealized', anchoring this longing in a conglomerate of sanitised prior experiences. The idea of home as 'homeland' figures strongly in the social science literature on migration and refugees. In her study of refugees in Georgia, Brun (2015) finds that return and repatriation are greatly important for the people she worked with who were escaping from the Georgian war in the late 1990s. Here, home has to do first of all with an 'absence' of 'social relations and practices possible to enact in the familiar home environment' (Brun 2015: 7). It is related to a feeling of nostalgia for the home of the past. Brun's

informants think of home primarily as a (lost) homeland, both in the sense of a country and a cultural routine that includes taste, language, people, and, particularly, family. Home might therefore be understood firstly as an imagined entity that carries what Liz Kenyon (1999) calls a right to return and a place of origin (Birdwell-Pheasant & Lawrence-Zuniga 1999). It is a place we depart from and have a desire to return to (Hobsbawm 1991). In their review of the literature on homelessness and home, Peter Kellett and Jeanne Moore (2003) position the concept of home in between personal and collective-cultural memory and desire: ‘certain aspects of home seemingly shape and motivate homeless people’s experience and behaviour [...] and the desire for [it] acts as a powerful personal and cultural objective’ (124, 128). Likewise, for people in situations of displacement, Brun and Fabos (2015) argue that ‘understandings of home are often based on the past: people long for the home they lost’ (7). In this sense, home is immediately connected to the yearning and desire for a better future.

Caroline Humphrey (2005), in her historical analysis of Soviet shared houses and apartment blocks, shows that the imagination of different futures is likewise part of making a home. In the Russian city of Magnitogorsk, near the border with Kazakhstan, where [workers’](#) dwellings were often built around a central public living space, workers would frequently adapt such public space according to their personal routines and imagination rather than necessarily follow Soviet collectivist ideals. Here, the ‘comforts of everyday domestic practices (*byt*) gradually invaded the austere spaces of even the exemplary Soviet Nakomfin apartment house’ (Humphrey 2005: 40). The [infrastructure](#) and built environment interacted with the ‘imaginative and projective inner feelings of the people’; together they were ‘mutually constitutive of fantasy’, pointing to a different possibility for living, for instance in carving out private spaces where quiet conversations could take place (Humphrey 2005: 40, 43).

The idea of home as something located largely in an imagined future is even more striking in Sara Ahmed’s (1999) study of migrants’ writing, particularly Asian women living in Britain. She found that home is often a destination, a place to travel to:

The space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitation — I am here — but the very space in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home. In such a space, the subject has a destination, an itinerary, indeed a future, but in having such as destination, has not yet arrived (Ahmed 1999: 331).

According to Ahmed, home is quintessentially not about the present, but about one’s hopes, about a future place where one has not yet arrived (also Bloch 1995) and which might be related to an idealised past homeland. This is particularly true for refugees, for whom idealised, imagined, or remembered homes play a particularly strong role, not simply in maintaining a sense or hope of rootedness, but in impelling their movement in search of such homes (Jansen & Löfving 2011; Doná 2015)

Jeanne Moore brings together this focus on an imagined future with the importance of daily routines in

discussing homeless migrants, arguing that '[h]ome is a powerful desire for many homeless people [...] this desire is shaped by particular goals and lifestyles' (2000: 212). Many homeless people continuously 'struggle along' in the present, longing for a better home in the future: a place to sleep and a way to have meaningful relationships, as well as objects (Hecht 1998; Desjarlais 1994).

For refugees, the homeless, and many others, remembered homes may lack a sense of homeliness and security all together. Cristiana Strava (2017), writing of life in the Hay Mohammadi neighbourhood in Casablanca, explores how histories of state violence create a sense of [precarity](#), uncertainty, and insecurity that gave homes an air of unhomeliness. Here, violence is marked in the remains of an old secret prison, or in the rebuilding of the neighbourhood to facilitate military control, dispossession, and enduring poverty. Strava traces the ambivalent responses to such feelings of unhomeliness. Residents of Hay Mohammadi sometimes strive to contain or move beyond such feelings through daily acts of [care](#), which push back on historic narratives of abandonment or unscrupulous landlords alike. Yet daily care can also become implicated in reproducing unhomeliness, such as when broken plumbing, or tiny spaces, both of which evoke continued abandonment or exclusion, nonetheless come to be accommodated within everyday routines. In such circumstances, lived experiences of dwelling may themselves not be the primary anchor for hopes, [dreams](#), or ideals of home. Speaking to such circumstances, Stef Jansen (2009) claims that, rather than seeing home as a 'remembered site of belonging', it should be seen 'prospectively as a socially constituted object of longing' (2009: 57; see also Jansen & Löfving 2011). Thus, as imaginative spaces that stretch out across time and are brought about through practice, homes are never static.

A final tension worth mentioning is that between alienated and unalienated characterizations of home. On the one hand, when explored in terms of familiar routines, closely held ideals, or a site of comfort or intimacy, home emerges as a domain where subjects' sense of who they are is bolstered and reproduced. Here, home is the space, the practice, or the imagined idyll where alienation might be undone. On the other hand, however, both imagined and physical homes may be sites of displacement: places where one is made to feel out-of-place or even threatened, places which evoke ideals that have not yet materialised, or something which is in need of continual, ungratifying labour. In these conceptions, home is characterised by a distance between subjects' sense of selfhood, and their experience of home. It can thus be a domain that contributes to a sense of alienation, experienced as exclusion, dislocation, instability, or simply a desire for something other than what is given. In many cases, alienation and its escape may be present in the same account. For instance, the migrant women whose lives Ahmed traces try to make home in the everyday even as their experiences are often characterised by a sense of unhomeliness. In spite of present alienation, they see in the future the promise of an ideal, unalienated home. Alienation and its opposite continue to remain in tension, negotiated across space and time, through contending imaginaries, or through differently oriented practices.

Conclusion

The house and the home have had a varied life in anthropological thought and observation. Developing from an early focus on the house as a social institution, it was first understood as a way of ordering society, a site of practice, and a structure of [social reproduction](#). Houses and homes have also been explored as sites of subject formation, of belonging and security – or the breakdown thereof. Shaped in part by their material underpinnings, domestic processes were constantly being rearranged, reworked, cared for, and reproduced through the efforts of various sorts of domestic [labour](#). Anthropological approaches have recently begun to develop and elaborate a distinction between the house and the home, wherein houses involve normative, widely reproduced, and often material forms, while homes centre around the subjective feelings of belonging and dwelling. This distinction emerged in part through a growing understanding of how households could be sites of unhomeliness, whether for women faced with unvalued domestic labour, or for those living with displacement or the everyday realities of poverty or state violence. Temporal dimensions, from an idealised past to an imagined future, have featured heavily in recent studies. At the same time, a processual notion of home, often as a form of ordering without necessarily being confined to localised spaces of houses, has also become important. The spaces brought under control, in processes of home making, do not however have to be precisely localised. Home-making stretches across time as well as space, and even in the blatant absence of a physical home, the act of home-making often remains a focus point of daily practice.

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