Making Home(s) in Displacement

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This volume brings together a wealth of material that ponders the making and unmaking of homes in displacement as a spatial practice. In this final chapter I am offering a concluding critical overview of the different contributions, which might work as a second bookend, counterbalancing while further complementing the introduction of my fellow editors.

My own interest in dwelling, home and homelessness goes back to my early work on architecture and modernity (Heynen, 1999). The literature I relied upon back then stated that the condition of modernity installs a sense of homelessness in all individuals subjected to it, since the pace of change is so fast that the sense of what is familiar continually withers away (Berman, 1985; Adorno, 1991). Because of that, modernity generates a massive longing for home as the site of belonging; a belonging that is situated either in the past (nostalgia) or in the future (utopia) (Lyotard, 1991; Bloch, 1986). Since that site of belonging is most often perceived as not present or in the here and now, this means that home and our experience of it are always already intrinsically displaced.

Taking up this line of thought, authors such as Rose Braidotti have argued for a nomadic way of thinking, one that would recognise this experience of homelessness as a point of departure (Braidotti, 2011). In such intellectual discourse, the figure of the migrant and the condition of exile have long been seen as metaphors, sometimes by authors (such as Adorno and Braidotti) who have themselves experienced exile or migration, but also by intellectuals who have the privilege of writing from the safety of unthreatened personal spaces of belonging. There is, however, a danger in this metaphorisation, as Sara Ahmed (1999) points out: “the act of granting the migrant the status as a figure (of speech) erases and conceals the historical determination of experiences of migration” (p. 333). Indeed, the intellectual nomad is most often a privileged one, who has choices and who is allowed legally to cross borders. That privilege is not afforded to everyone on the globe, and Ahmed’s warning rightly reminds us that migra-
tion as a real-life experience is about lived embodiment as well as storytelling, colonialism, racism, social antagonism, class relations, and about the politics of gender. For Ahmed, these elements have an enormous impact and the experience of migration thus evokes the transformation of the self: “[t]he gap between memory and place in the very dislocation of migration [...] becomes reworked as a site of bodily transformation, the potential to remake one’s relation to what appears as unfamiliar, to reinhabit spaces and places” (ibid., p. 344).

To reinhabit spaces and places – that is exactly what this volume seeks to examine; the practices of accommodating or appropriating spaces and places that are encountered during a journey in search of a better life, as a result of (forced or voluntary) displacement. Forced displacement, as in the case of refugees, is the focus of most chapters in this book, but some deal with a broader set of displaced people. We should be mindful, however, that there is not necessarily a clear dividing line between the migration of those who seek work and those who seek asylum. Voluntary and forced migration, rather, need to be considered as two poles in a politically constructed bi-polar constellation which does not adequately reflect the experiences and self-descriptions of the people involved (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 37). Hence the theorisation that I aim to provide by way of this coda seeks to address a wider spectrum of displacement.

The introduction by Luce Beeckmans, Ashika Singh and Alessandra Gola has already set the scene for this endeavour by unpacking some important themes: the assumed opposition between home and displacement; the importance of spatial agency; the impact of global politics; the merits of interdisciplinary research and of affective (rather than objective) writing. Here, I wish to corroborate and elaborate on the reflections of my fellow editors by pondering and comparing the different chapters from four different points of view. I will start by revisiting the geopolitical conditioning of the meaning of home, framing the longing for home within the politics of the nation-state, colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. A significant dimension in the experience of home-making in displacement is, besides and related to space, that of time. This will be the entry point for the second part of this coda. In the third section I will address the possible role architects and architecture play in situations of displacement. The fourth and last part of this coda will deal with issues of gender and feminism.

**Geopolitics of home**

The Western bourgeois idea of home, argues Maria Kaika (2004), is a social construction based on the exclusion of undesired elements both in the social realm (exclusion of anomie and social conflict) and in the natural realm (exclu-
sion of cold, dirt, pollution and sewage). The idea of the home as an autonomous, safe and private heaven is thus predicated on the ‘othering’ of nature: the bourgeois home is where nature is completely domesticated, where clean water and power are supplied through an invisible apparatus of pipes and cables, and dirty water and waste are likewise quasi-invisibly discharged. Whereas Kaika focuses on the historical-geographical processes that dealt with water – namely, the introduction of modern systems of plumbing and sewage – one could apply a similar analysis to socio-economic and political factors. Indeed, the bourgeois ideal of home, as famously formulated by John Ruskin in 1865, can be deconstructed to show how it is imbued with notions of gender, class and nation:

This is the true nature of home – it is the place of peace: the shelter is not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home. (Ruskin, 1901, p. 102).

In Ruskin’s depiction of the home a whole lot of things are made invisible: not just women’s work in maintaining the home, but also the possibility of domestic violence, as well as the economic basis of the home (earned by the man in the outer world) and the class oppression of industrial and domestic workers that makes it possible. Likewise, the entanglements of this bourgeois home, with its cult of domesticity, and the colonial enterprise are left untouched. Indeed, as Karen Hansen (1992) points out, the etymological nearness of “domesticity” and “to domesticate” is no coincidence: domesticity was often seen in the colonial discourse as part of the civilising mission of the West and the import of domesticity was a crucial factor in the colonial encounter. Hence, the very specific, gendered and class-based bourgeois idea of home was put forward in colonial discourse as universally valid. Anne McClintock (1995, p. 5) comparably argues that the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, element of the imperial enterprise, while Wendy Webster (1998) unravels the intimate connections, in films from the 1950s and 1960s, between the bourgeois ideal of home and whiteness.

Even though the 19th Century bourgeois cult of domesticity was taken to task by material feminists (Hayden, 1981) and by some Marxist critics (Teige, 2002), it nevertheless had a profound impact on 20th Century housing movements (Heynen, 2005). It is also an important ingredient of the global arrangement of nation-states and institutions that regulate people’s lives in displacement. In this global arrangement every corner of the earth is part of a nation-state that
gives certificates of belonging (such as passports) out to the people it recognises as ‘legitimately’ inhabiting its particular corner. With such a certificate of belonging (i.e. the claim to national citizenship) people can travel to other corners of the globe, although this freedom is, generally speaking, restricted to those who have a claim to a passport from the global North and/or can afford the conditions and costs of an entry visa from the country to which they wish to travel. It is this global regime of citizenship that aggravates and prolongs conditions of displacement, because it means that underprivileged people who leave their homes, forced or otherwise, tend to end up in camps or in refugee housing, or in illegal situations in which they are exploited, or in other unsavoury places where no one would wish to raise one’s children. Displacement in this sense is the mirror image of the politics of belonging, which symbolically separates the world population into an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 20), and which motivates political realities such as ‘Fortress Europe’ (or ‘Fortress Australia’ or ‘Fortress US’). This politics of belonging, I argue, is a further elaboration and extension of the gestures of exclusion that are fundamental to the bourgeois home (see also Brickell, 2012).

As we know, the bourgeois home is completely entangled with the mode of production called capitalism: the 19th Century bourgeoisie was the class of entrepreneurs and businessmen who made their fortunes as property owners and employers of an exploited proletariat, namely, through industries that often thrived thanks to the trade opportunities offered by colonialism (McClintock, 1995; Said, 1994; George, 1999). Colonialism, imperialism and capitalism have collaborated to ensure that in almost all countries across the globe a legal apparatus is in place that assigns ownership of land and buildings to specific individuals, companies or the state. Housing thus became a commodity, often unaffordable for large swathes of a population. In some countries, social welfare policies go a long way to counter the negative effects of this capitalist regime, but in many others social welfare cannot cope with the demand. The welfare state model has, moreover, lost its political appeal in recent decades due to the increasing dominance of neo-liberal ideologies (Cupers, Mattsson, & Gabrielsson, 2020).

All of these factors have been recognised by several authors as constitutive of a series of mainstream political outlooks that tend to conflate ‘home’ and the ‘nation-state’ (Duyvendak, 2011; Brickell, 2012; Davies, 2014; Walters, 2004). In a theoretical scheme referred to by many of our contributors, Brun and Fabos (2015) helpfully refer to this constellation as ‘HOME’. ‘HOME’ points to the broader political and historical configuration that embeds this specific notion of ‘home’ in global institutions and that is often evoked by the perpetrators of nationalist exclusion and violence. Next to ‘HOME’, Brun and Fabos also distinguish ‘Home’ as representing values, traditions, memories and feelings
of home, and ‘home’ as the day-to-day practices of home-making. In this volume the three constellations are at stake: the ‘spatial practice’ of our book’s title points at its core to everyday practices of inhabitation, while still, as evidenced by many of the discussions in individual chapters, seeking to account for how ‘Home’ and ‘HOME’ shape, complement and/or frustrate such practices.

The political dimensions of ‘home’, ‘Home’ and ‘HOME’ are perhaps nowhere as visible as in the chapters dealing with Palestine. In 1948 the Nakba destroyed Palestinian society, resulting in the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Palestinians from their homeland. Since that moment, many of these refugees and their offspring have continued to live in what were originally conceived as temporary camps and they still claim their ‘right to return’. This right to return is denied by Israel, hence many Palestinians live in a kind of limbo as de facto stateless persons. Although the Palestinian camps have undergone major transformations, and are now dense urban tissues rather than collections of tents, they are clearly places of ambivalence: for instance, improving the camps and making them more homely and more inhabitable might make a lot of sense from the point of view of ‘home’, but not from the point of view of ‘Home’ and ‘HOME’. Some Palestinians continue to feel that they should not settle – not make their home – because settling might be seen by others, including the rest of the world, as foregoing the right to return. This political omen is part and parcel of the lived reality of the residents of Nahr Al-Barid in Lebanon and it continues to impact on their every decision regarding their built environment, as explored and pondered by Ashika Singh (Chapter 2).

A similar dynamic played out in Sheikh Radwan in Gaza City, a neighbourhood planned and developed by the Israeli state between 1967 and 1982 in order to broker a ‘permanent solution’ for the residents of the nearby Shati refugee camp. By accepting a plot in the new neighbourhood these residents in fact gave up their right to return – which was clearly one of the goals of what Fatima Abeek-Zubiedat sees as ‘colonial urbanism’ (Chapter 4). Another version of Israel’s statecraft in unfair dealings with Palestinians is discussed by Wafa Butmeh (Chapter 16). This chapter focuses on Firing Zone 918, an area to the south of Hebron which includes Masafer Yatta, which is home to 18 semi-nomadic Palestinian communities. By declaring this area a military zone Israel imposed severe restrictions on these communities by, for example, forbidding the erection of new permanent structures as well as the inhabitation of existing ones. In the process, Israel made the continued survival of a traditional Palestinian way of living close to impossible.

In these three chapters, as in that of Alessandra Gola (Chapter 10), it becomes very clear that for many Palestinians the consistency between the three constellations of ‘home’, ‘Home’ and ‘HOME’ is non-existent and that this ab-
sence, this gap, is integral to their identity as Palestinians. They are forced into a situation where day-to-day home-making practices are necessarily at odds with the values and traditions of the homeland to which they cannot return and where geo-political conditions continue to disqualify them as equal citizens or even as citizens tout court. This is somewhat different in the Syrian refugee camps of Iraqi Kurdistan on which Layla Zibar and her co-authors focus (Chapter 3). Here, the authors describe the experience of their interlocutors as a “falling out of Syrian citizenship into a longed-for sense of ‘Kurdishness’ (one claimed in time and space)” (p. 81). Indeed, Syrian Kurds could flee from the civil war in Syria to Iraqi Kurdistan, and although the autonomy of this region is not fully secure from a geopolitical point of view, there is a shared language, a shared culture and a shared sense of welcome that foster the rapid transformation of these camps into ‘towns in the making’. In this particular case, therefore, ‘home’ and ‘Home’ can be practised and lived, even if ‘HOME’ is not lawfully recognised. In fact, one may even claim that the enactment of ‘home’ and ‘Home’ is made possible by the camp community’s exploration of the very potential of realising ‘HOME’ at some point in the future.

This point resonates with the way Iris Katz (Chapter 6), calling upon the work of Hannah Arendt, exposes the inherently political nature of any act of home-making in such conditions of displacement. Her argument shows how displaced people, by appropriating and beautifying their surroundings in daily acts of inhabitation, materially claim their right to citizenship by marking their presence and thereby making it visible. For Palestinians, the political aspect of dwelling plays out on different levels: many of them are acutely aware that each and every decision they make regarding the homes they build (or do not build), or regarding the structures they inhabit (or fail to inhabit), is a move in a power play where the state of Israel has the upper hand. Even the simple act of having a home and living an everyday life is experienced as an act of resistance, because it manifests Palestinians’ refusal to be over-determined by the conflict with Israel. Nobody thus needs to tell them that the political is in the everyday – they indeed live it every day (Feldman, 2006). Likewise, the active home-making practices studied by Layla Zibar in Iraqi Kurdistan play a political role in that they render visible the claim to citizenship and to a viable Kurdish state.

Huda Tayob’s chapter on ‘Somali malls’ in Cape Town, Nairobi and Lusaka (Chapter 15) outlines an even more hybrid configuration of domestic practices, which show how the lived reality of transnational movements in Africa ignores and combats the geopolitical reality of nation-states and their borders. Abdou-Maliq Simone (2011; 2012) has long argued that transnational movements and exchange are crucial elements of African urbanity, and that the assemblage of discrepant materials, sentiments, forms and efforts of various peoples in hybrid
configurations makes up for a messy reality that cannot be adequately grasped by the logics of economy, demography or planning. The Somali malls are such a configuration, made up of transnational trajectories, informal economies, commercial arrangements, domestic practices of hospitality as well as exchange between people from different backgrounds and in different stages of their lives. According to Tayob, these malls, which originated because of the mass displacements enforced by the civil war in Somalia, provide “an imaginary of provisional domesticity, producing a spatial intimacy across geographies and within contested realms” (p. 378). At the same time, Tayob recognises that they are often spaces of poverty and exploitation. Although they offer an alternative to the camps that are the global geopolitical institutions’ answer to crisis and displacement, they still should not be romanticised as adequate solutions for people on the move.

Exploitation is also a key term in Anna Di Giusto’s contribution on Borgo Mezzanone in South Italy (Chapter 12). This chapter shows the disastrous consequences of European asylum policies in combination with situations of social isolation, various mafia organisations and labour exploitation. In Borgo Mezzanone, official policies erected a reception centre for asylum seekers, but many more so-called ‘illegal’ migrants inhabit the informal settlement that sprung up next to it and that lacks basic infrastructure and security. Even in these dire conditions, Di Giusto argues, the inhabitants of Borgo Mezzanone demonstrate survival skills and home-making practices. In so far as these practices remain invisible to the surrounding context, however, they fail to realise the political dimension that Irit Katz recognises in the very act of making oneself visible to the outside world. Nevertheless, according to Di Giusto, through sheer persistence and by accommodating the needs and desires of its residents, this shantytown in some ways manages to recreate an environment that can be called home. Its inhabitants have, for instance, arranged for a mosque, and many of them recover objects from waste in order to beautify their respective shelters or set up cafés. These spatial practices and the material traces that they impart mark their aspiration to a sense of dignity as human beings. These efforts – even if invisible to the rest of the world – should be understood as politically significant as this is how the residents of Borgo Mezzanone enact resistance and resilience against a geopolitical constellation that would crush rather than support them.

**Arrows of time**

Home, says Mary Douglas (1991), “is located space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space.” Home also has regulated cycles of home life: when to rise, when to take meals, when to go to bed; hence, “a home is not only a space, it also
has some structure in time; and because it is for people who are living in that time and space, it has aesthetic and moral dimensions” (p. 289). This sense of home becomes more complicated in situations of migrancy and displacement. Migrants leave a home behind because it does not hold enough promise for the future, and they make a new home in a different country, which is – inevitably – discontinuous with the old home. This experience of disruption, states Mirjana Lozanovska, provokes many migrants into repetitive building, in their newly adopted country and in their country of origin, each time aspiring to build a dream house that embodies the idea of belonging. This process, however, can never be completed, because, she argues:

The objective to build a house is exceeded by a condition of serial house building, and repetitive and serial return travel to the homeland, which interfaces housing with acute displacement and (a lack of) settlement. Building a house becomes an endless ongoing process, a psychic journey that can never be completed because the migrant is unable to reconstruct the belief in the ‘wholeness’ of housing. (Lozanovska, 2019, p. 205).

In the experience of dwelling, multiple time frames are indeed at stake. There is first of all the linear time frame that speaks of the biography of individuals, and that is always already embedded in a collective imagination depicting the past and dreaming the future (Dossa and Golubovic, 2019). This collective imagination works as well on the scale of the family (e.g. the memory of a childhood home that one shares with one's siblings, the dream of the home-to-be made by newly-formed couples) as it does on the scale of the community (what one's town used to be and what it should become, the past or the future homeland of one's people). A second time frame is that of the cyclical time: the cycle of day and night, the cycle of work days and weekend, the cycle of the seasons and the holidays – all of which are marked by certain routines and rituals. For many individuals these time frames work well together, because they manage to deal with major changes in their life trajectory, marked by new home settings, by quickly building up new routines and new rituals, while not necessarily completely losing the old ones (think, for instance, of adult children returning to the family home for Christmas or Eid celebrations). In conditions of displacement, however, it is this smooth co-existence between linear and cyclical time that breaks down.

What is often mentioned as part of this disruption is the protracted sense of waiting that seems to be characteristic of displaced persons’ experience. Prospective migrants have to wait for visas; if they are already in the country where
they want to settle, they have to wait in order to attain the right residency status allowing one to work or to have access to social housing; one might have to wait at the border in order to clear administrative hurdles; one might have to wait in order for family members to be able to come over, etc. For those living under the humanitarian regime of camps or refugee shelters, this sense of waiting might seem endless. Elizabeth Cullen Dunn (2017) thus wonders, “How [do] the practices of international actors, the dictates and programs of nation-states, the politics of local government, and the beliefs and practices of IDP’s themselves intersect in ways that often trap displaced people in the suspended temporality of camp life […] in prolonged liminality?” (p. 7) For Dunn, this situation boils down to the impossibility of home-making, as indicated by the title of her book: *No Path Home. Humanitarian Camps and the Grief of Displacement.* In refugee centres in Western Europe residents are also seen as people-in-waiting whose material conditions boil down to the bare minimum (such as “bed, bath, bread”, as it is called in Belgium and the Netherlands) and whose agency is minimised in that they are not allowed to choose their own room-mates, to cook for themselves, or even to add pieces of furniture or decoration to their rooms (all in the name of efficiency and safety) (Beeckmans & Vanden Houte, 2019).

Alternatively, Cathrin Brun analyses how people involved in these extended periods of waiting for a ‘durable solution’ cope, usually by somehow making the best of the situation in which they find themselves, still without giving up hope of a possible, future return or resettlement. She considers this attitude one of ‘active waiting.’ Many of her interviewees reported periods where their thoughts and emotions were totally focused on the past, but many of them also managed to frame their future orientations in terms of hope. As Brun puts it herself:

*Agency-in-waiting requires an understanding of waiting as hope for the future. People use hope to cope with an uncertain future; they take on hopeful waiting in the positive anticipation that it will help them stay afloat. However, hope may also indicate resignation as an active strategy. In this case, it is often experienced as boredom and commonly results in less investment in the present. But it is when people stop waiting – when future time is delinked from everyday time and the past – that agency-in-waiting cannot be realized.* (Brun, 2015, p. 33).

Notably, what Brun here calls ‘agency-in-waiting’ often has to do with day-to-day practices of home-making: cooking, caring for children, cleaning, gardening, decorating a room.
Ilana Feldman (2006) elaborates on another understanding of the cyclical moments of home-making. In a contribution aptly called ‘The Refrain of Home’, she analyses narratives and practices of Palestinians who had been displaced to Gaza and detects how re-connecting with ‘home’ takes form in rhythmic moments of repetition. These cyclical moments are found, on the one hand, in the repetition of narratives related to the loss of the former home during the Nakba and survival strategies in its immediate aftermath. On the other hand, Feldman makes note of the back-and-forth movements between Gaza and the places people originate from – whether this be to retrieve possessions, to steal from Israeli settlements, or to stage fida’iyyin attacks. She observes how in these repetitive tactics a sense of home is reproduced, but also transformed, and how these repetitions, incantations and circulations introduce a kind of security in a world that is otherwise full of disruption, if not chaos.

Several of these threads come together in the contribution of Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi and Somayeh Chitchian (Chapter 1). They stress the importance of time in emergency environments, where, they argue, time shapes space. Time shapes space because inhabiting a camp after displacement involves a “malleability that makes tangible the accompanying liquidity of time, of pasts, presents and futures. […] It is simultaneously of here and there, of then and now, of that which is yet-to-come” (p. 41). Like Lozanovska, they insist that the experience of (the lack of) home involves recalibrations of past, present and future; like Brun as well as Feldman, they show how the protracted temporality of waiting does not imply a freezing in time, but rather a constant renegotiation of the home yet-to-come, anchored in the past yet projected into the future, and partially realised in the present through the agency of inhabitants of the camp.

The last chapter by Wafa Butmeh (Chapter 16, already mentioned) further develops the idea of rhythmic gestures as constitutive of dwelling. Her case is rather unique in that she deals with what she calls ‘static displacement’ – the dispossession of a group of semi-nomadic dwellers whose practices of inhabitation are severely hindered by the Israeli military, without them being officially displaced. Butmeh discusses how this community manages to resist the spatial logic imposed by the military (namely, that their area is turned into an uninhabitable firing zone) by cleverly playing upon different temporalities. They ‘buy time’ against the demolition orders by going to the courts; they figure out at which moments of the day and the week the military conduct visual control of their area; they use the downtime of Israeli soldiers for sheep grazing, agriculture and even construction. They thus create a cyclical rhythm that counters the linear rhythm imposed by Israel’s military. Whether such tactics are effective against military strategies in the long run may be doubtful, but they remain lasting proof of the active agency and the resilience of this oppressed group.
Alessandra Gola (Chapter 10) shows how the geopolitics of home intersect with the arrows of time to produce divergent socio-spatial realities in urban Palestine. The West Bank, occupied by Israel but also home to a nascent Palestinian State, consists of a patchwork of areas with different political status—some under the control of the Palestinian Authority; some under the control of Israel; some under the control of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency); and some that fall outside these demarcations. This patchwork generates very different conditions on the ground with respect to economic opportunities and building codes. While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still has no lasting solution after more than 70 years, life went on: refugees had children; farmers went on farming; villagers moved to the city; young men and women decided to move country for work and send money back; some families stagnated while others became wealthier. All of them needed homes and all of them somehow dealt with the exigencies of daily life, even while Israel was building a Wall and the conflict continued. In the process they transformed the landscape, the towns and the villages: Ramallah, for instance, became a big city with sprawling outskirts that in the south touched Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem. Gola describes this complicated inhabited landscape with great sensitivity for the interplay of different temporalities—the political one that plays out over decades; the economic one that differs over years; the biographical ones marked by births and deaths as well as by the home-making routines that make up the everyday.

The role of architecture and architects

The world of architecture and that of displacement do not often encounter each other, except in the stories of displaced architects who supposedly took modernism from Europe to other parts of the world, such as Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lina Bo Bardi. The standard histories of 20th Century architecture, however, barely mention refugee housing or emergency shelter. It is rare that, for example, Le Corbusier’s Maison Domino, known to every architectural student, is correctly put in its historical context by being discussed as accommodation for bombed-out refugees in World War I. In the interbellum period there were also other architectural projects explicitly meant for refugees, such as refugee housing built by Ernst May in Silesia in the early 1920s (Herscher, 2017, p. 51–59) or the so-called prosfigika or refugee housing-blocks from the early 1930s in Athens, designed by architects Laskaris and Kyriakos. As Andrew Herscher argues:
After World War II, however, refugee housing disappeared from architectural agendas. [...] In the interwar period, in those situations where refugees were recognized as conationals, the accommodation of refugees was a housing issue; after World War II, when refugees became a humanitarian problem, permanent housing would be replaced by seemingly temporary camps. (Herscher, 2017, p. 70–71).

At the end of World War II (WWII) there were an estimated 11.5 million displaced persons in Europe (Shephard, 2012, p. 59). The allied forces managed to repatriate many millions of them in the following months, but there were still considerable numbers of those who found themselves unable or unwilling to ‘go home’, because their ‘home’ no longer existed. These people left no traces in the architectural history books, although they continued to be around in Europe for a very long time – until the end of the 1950s. They were accommodated in barracks and camps, which were transformed or dismantled after their inhabitants were finally absorbed into the general population or left, whether that be for Israel, Latin America, Australia, Canada, the USA or for a country to which they supposedly belonged based on ethnic identity or racialised perceptions (Shephard, 2012; Gatrell, 2019).

There are only a few exceptions to the rule that post-WWII refugee housing is absent from architectural history books. One such exception is the refugee centre in Banja Koviljace designed by Mihajo Mitravic in 1964, the focal point of Aleksandar Stanicic’s contribution to this volume (Chapter 7). Commissioned by the United Nations, it was a prestige project meant to highlight the global relevance of Yugoslavia’s non-alignment movement and to showcase Yugoslavia’s hospitality towards foreigners in need of assistance. The centre is a very elegant building with a welcoming and open atmosphere – especially in the wing with communal spaces. Its use of local materials and its formal references to vernacular traditions render it part of a regionally inspired soft modernism that manages to combine local anchoring with international significance. According to Stantic, the architect managed to resolve the contradictions inherent in humanitarian architecture – the tension between lofty ideals and down-to-earth necessities, or between the architect’s intention to provide a home in the here-and-now and the refugee’s awareness of temporality and insecurity.

Yet, it is doubtful whether architects can manage that tension. Aikaterini Antonopoulou (Chapter 11) compares the formal, top-down approach to refugee housing exemplified in the already mentioned refugee housing – the pros-fygika, purpose-built in Athens in the early 1930s with the ad hoc, informal and bottom-up accommodation provided by City Plaza, a former hotel occupied
and used during the 2015 European refugee crisis. The prosfygika was part of official welfare state policies, and was built according to very low Existenz-minimum standards, offering 30m² two-room apartments with kitchen and toilets. It never became popular as a housing type, and in fact fell into decay from the 1960s onwards. Alternatively, City Plaza was not purpose-built to house refugees, but functioned very well as such, operated by a cooperative with refugees and activists living together and participating in decision-making and in its maintenance. Because it was centrally located and because of its community life, the refugees that it (unlawfully) accommodated found a good foothold in the city. Their very presence and visibility, argues Antonopoulou, made the building into a tool exposing exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation. Athens’ much-contested urban informality thus offered these migrants more agency and equipped them with more resilience than any ‘official’ solution might have done.

There is a certain tendency among our contributors to consider the official commissioning of architects by the state as part of the problem rather than the solution. That is certainly how Fatina Abreek-Zubiedat (Chapter 4) interprets the work of architects, urbanists and planners who worked on the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in Gaza City between 1967 and 1982. Her understanding is that the Israeli occupier promoted ‘normalisation’ as an instrument of control. Palestinian refugees were offered the opportunity to acquire a plot for a self-built house in the new neighbourhood, but only on the condition that they demolished their house in the refugee camp. In this very cost-effective way, Israel managed to combine economic development with the cultural-political assimilation of Palestinians, while remaining in sync with architectural strategies and forms promoted by well-known international architects, such as those of Team X. Through this colonial urbanism, the architects and planners actually collaborated with the Israeli oppressors.

Iyer Siddiqi and Chitchian (Chapter 1) seek a way out of this conundrum by turning to the residents of the camps as co-producers of its architecture. They call for “an epistemic shift of both the site, the time, and the subject of knowledge production” (p. 39). Spatial authorship, they argue, is performed not only by professional architects or planners. Many camp residents themselves take up the challenge to arrange, de-arrange and re-arrange the fabric of the spaces they inhabit, and deepen their spatial knowledge in the process. It is their continuous negotiation of these entanglements that defines the space of the camp, and not just the professional interventions of emergency architects or humanitarian officials. By offering this other reading of authorship, Iyer Siddiqi and Chitchian in fact contribute to a re-conceptualisation of what architecture is all about: not just the specialised field of knowledge in which only professional architects
are initiated, but rather a much larger endeavour in which many different layers of spatial knowledge come together, including the everyday, hands-on spatial knowledge of inhabitants and users.

Such a reconceptualisation of architecture is also at stake in Esra Akcan’s chapter on immigrant agency in urban housing in Berlin (Chapter 13), based on her book, *Open Architecture* (Akcan, 2018). Open architecture refers to the idea that architecture does not coincide with the design and construction of a building. Rather, states Akcan, architecture pertains to the lifespan of a building – including its use and its appropriation by inhabitants. Moreover, residents often develop and apply spatial knowledge, and their dealings with interiors are often crucial in order to make these spaces more comfortable and more functional. Architects would therefore do well to anticipate, welcome and accommodate the changes residents might bring to their buildings.

Akcan’s discussion of the immigrant inhabitation of the postmodern IBA housing of the 1980s might be compared to a recent article on ‘Architectures of Asylum’, which focuses on the more recent production of collective accommodation for asylum seekers in Berlin (Steigemann & Misselwitz, 2020). Although they do not use this particular term, Steigemann and Misselwitz point out that the architecture of container housing is not ‘open’. This is not due to any intrinsic characteristic of the design of these temporary homes itself: three interconnected containers with kitchen, toilet, bathroom and a small porch in front. Rather, it has to do with the bureaucratic rules imposed by the administration, which forbid, for instance, inhabitants to add or remove furniture, or restrict the cultivation of a garden near the container. These constraints tend to be justified by the administration with reference to fire hazards and security issues, but at the same time they install a regime of disciplining and control. Through their fieldwork and community activities (such as workshops), the authors and their students mitigate the tension between the administration’s code of conduct and the residents’ tactics of personal appropriation, but their discussions clearly reveal that architects can only do so much, and that the housing regime in which refugees or immigrant find themselves is composed of more than buildings alone.

That is also the point made by Paolo Boccagni (Chapter 5), who recognises that in many temporary housing situations residents develop practices of homemaking that help them to negotiate complex interactions between their past, present and future. The materiality of refugee centres or other forms of refugee housing therefore matters, because some organisational and built forms are more beneficial for these practices than others. Whether or not residents have cooking facilities, whether or not they can host visitors, whether or not they can plan gatherings in semi-public spaces, whether or not they can change the furniture or decorate a room – all of this matters because it allows residents to regain
a certain control over their lives. All of this nevertheless matters only ‘so much.’ Indeed, what is in the long run most important for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants is whether or not they will be allowed to stay in their arrival country. Hence, the architectures of the accommodating buildings are important because they might be part of a longer trajectory towards making-a-new-home, but they alone cannot solve the existential and political questions that are crucially at stake in this trajectory (see also Boccagni, PéRez Murcia & Belloni, 2020).

**Home, displacement and gender**

In recent decades migration flows have changed in terms of gender. Where men used to make up the bulk of migrant workers until the 1970s, there has since been a huge increase in migrating women. Right now over half of all migrants worldwide are female, and they usually take up jobs as domestic workers or as care-workers in the health sector (Gündüz, 2013; DeParle, 2020). Furthermore, women and girls make up around 50 per cent of refugee populations (UNHCR, n.d.). The UNHCR prides itself on explicitly taking their specific needs into account: by providing reproductive health services; by individually registering them as eligible for food rations and other benefits; and by designing and implementing educational and empowering programmes (Buscher, 2010). Still, the UNHCR acknowledges that refugee women who are unaccompanied, pregnant, heads of households, disabled or elderly are especially vulnerable (UNHCR, n.d.). Refugee women in Europe too are exposed to risks of sexual exploitation and/or gender-based violence (Freedman, 2016). Gender is thus an important factor in the lived experience of displacement.

Jennifer Hyndman and Wenona Giles (2011) argue that refugees in situations of protracted waiting are subject to what they call “a feminization of asylum”. They contend that such refugees are positioned as helpless victims, who need humanitarian aid but receive it only on condition that they give up their right to mobility. Thus, they are put in a position of dependency, first of all by the charitable systems that manage them and secondly by the way they are not entitled to any legal status anywhere (although they may receive one in the long term if they behave well and are elected in a relocation programme). This feminisation is thus “a material condition, a representational issue and a political dilemma” (Hyndman & Giles, 2011, p. 369). However, if refugees leave their camps and try to enter countries in the global North as asylum seekers, they are framed and masculinised as security threats. It is thus a gendered dynamic that makes up the global refugee regime as “a matrix of exclusion and containment” (ibid., p. 374).
The bourgeois notion of the home that we encountered earlier is also thoroughly gendered. It comprises the idea of the husband and father as breadwinner and the wife and mother as ‘Angel in the House’, the one who manages the household and makes sure that it is a heaven for all its (other) occupants. As Susan Fraiman (2019) reminds us, the Angel in the House is still with us – as the housewife representing ‘family values’ or as the symbolic icon of a domesticity that coincides with tradition and conformity (p. 3). Many sociological phenomena indeed prove her continuous impact: the gendered division of labour, the glass ceiling, the pay gap, etc. (see also Heynen, 2005).

All of this means that gender matters when we are discussing practices of home-making in displacement. Thus, one might expect that there are significant differences in the home-making practices of men and women in displacement. This difference is rarely thematised in most of the chapters, perhaps because fieldwork research focusing on material practices is so thin on the ground that it has not yet dealt with this issue. Generally, however, contributors do recognise that an intersectional approach is necessary, because there is a variation in lived experiences of displacement in terms of gender, age, culture, religion, class, caste, etc.

Romola Sanyal (Chapter 9) explicitly develops such an approach, working with upper-caste, middle-class women refugees who, after Partition, settled in self-built colonies in Calcutta’s periphery. With fieldwork done in the 2006-2007 period, the women she interviewed were advanced in age and their memories had become somewhat unreliable. Nevertheless, Sanyal was able to piece together significant narratives of women’s role in the heroic struggle to construct the colony spaces: they acted as guards to protect the plots against eviction; they carried sacks of soil and other building materials; they formed women’s committees to organise the community; they made homes habitable despite enduring poverty and they engaged in waged labour to help support their families. They thus actively participated in the construction not only of a material home, but also of a future where the state acknowledged their right to belong and their right to housing.

Menna Agha (Chapter 14) also explicitly addresses issues of gender in her contribution on the Nubian house. She argues that the displacement enforced upon Nubians in 1963 because of the Egyptian government’s construction of the High Dam not only caused economic hardship, but also disrupted a long matriarchal tradition that had materialised in the Nubian vernacular. By imposing ‘modern’ houses and ‘modern’ spatial dichotomies between public and private on the community, the Egyptian state transformed the built environment in such a way that it was difficult for families to continue traditional practices of co-habitation and hospitality. For Agha, “the state-designated dwelling unit
thereby destroys the Nubian house as a cultural institution and its constitutive powers” (p. 364). She nevertheless observes in the current situation in the displaced villages certain instances of cultural resistance and resilience (such as communal houses) that might contain the promise to give the power back to the Nubian house – and in that gesture empower the women who preside over it.

Several of our authors intentionally position themselves within feminist scholarship. That is the case for Siddiqi and Chitchian (Chapter 1) as well as Akcan (Chapter 11), who advocate an epistemic shift in the conceptualisation of architecture and authorship. Traces of the impact of feminist scholarship are also found in other contributions, which carefully reflect on issues of positionality and situated knowledge. Most explicit in this respect is Maretha Dreyer, who calls her contribution ‘a feminist ethnography’ (Chapter 8). Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s post-colonial theory on representation of ‘others’, she uses participant observation, self-reflection and architectural analysis as research methods in her study of an institutional accommodation for asylum seekers in Dublin. Acutely aware of the legacy of colonialism, she ponders how the neo-gothic character of this building – that she herself experiences as rather pleasant – might evoke quite different feelings in the refugees it houses. Her fieldwork furthermore reveals how the residents’ movements are determined and controlled through rules and surveillance, and how little opportunity they have to modify or personalise their living spaces. Her research thus intensifies and substantiates her awareness of her own privileged position as a white, highly-educated South African woman engaged in research in Ireland, vis-à-vis asylum seekers (possibly from the same continent) who are ‘othered’ and largely stripped of agency and self-determination.

**In conclusion: inhabitation as political praxis**

In her book *Extreme Domesticity*, Susan Fraiman (2019) freely acknowledges how she struggles with the Victorian-age ‘Angel in the House’. She wishes to sever domesticity from its conformist overtones and to kill the Angel once and for all – not, however, by shunning houses and housekeepers altogether, but rather by valuing feminine domestic practices that also can be lived and cherished outside the heterosexual norm and outside patriarchy (p. 3). Critical geographers and urbanists are likewise rethinking ‘radical housing’ (Lancione, 2020) and ‘practices of inhabitation’ (Boano & Astolfo, 2020) in order to strip the idea of ‘dwelling’ from its Heideggerian conservative overtones, and to open up these concepts in order for them to include liberation from oppression and care for the planet. Indeed, these critical interpretations take their cues from
marginalised urban practices, where people are inhabiting places that seem uncanny and uninhabitable from a mainstream point of view. Boano and Astolfo (2020) thus propose to expand “the notion of dwelling to include intersecting forms of caring, repairing and imagining the future”, substantiating the concept of ‘inhabiting’ “as a relational practice occurring in marginal and fragile environments, constituted by multiple incremental and transformative acts with the ultimate purpose to hold and resist marginalisation” (p. 555)

Mariana Ortega (2014) also offers an interesting approach through her conceptualisation of ‘hometactics’. Recognising that ‘home’ can become a space of exclusion despite its many possibilities of providing nurture and inclusiveness” (p. 180), she proposes to negotiate home’s ambiguities and contradictions through tactical moves in space and time that can be spontaneous and provisional yet offer a sense of familiarity in an environment to which one cannot fully belong. Seeing that, from an intersectional perspective, individuals inevitably have multiplicitous selves and that there often are cracks and paradoxes between these selves, home is to be negotiated again and again in a rhythm that refuses to crystallise into a final and fully accomplished sense of being-at-home. The mobility that characterises the life of migrants and refugees accentuates this condition, and brings into sharp relief the provisionality of any sense of home, as became clear in many chapters of this book. Through their practices of inhabitation, they moreover challenge the ideas of home and belonging that their host countries try to impose on them – which is why habitation can be called a political praxis.

This means that there is – inevitably – a certain uncanniness to the home, even to the most bourgeois of homes as described by Ruskin (Leach, 1998; Kai-ka, 2004), since home is as much a place of restriction and control as it is a place of nurture and care. Often it is through the unmaking of home that individuals emancipate themselves: adolescents leaving their childhood homes; husbands or wives leaving an abusive partner; villagers leaving the countryside to explore life in the city; migrants seeking a better life elsewhere. In all these cases people are unmaking their home of old in order to make room for a new and (ideally) better one. Home is a continuous process of becoming, rather than a stable situation of being.
References


