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Cover Photo: Home by Farah Alrajeh

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Foreword: Locating Home

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Home has long carried connotations of safety, comfort, warmth and familiarity. It is often seen as a shelter from the confusion of the outside world - a sacrosanct space in which individuals can express themselves freely, in private, and without interference. Home is deeply connected to our sense of who we are and where we come from, thereby becoming, if not an extension of the self, then at the very least an expression of the self. Nowhere is this more evident than in the numerous online magazine articles going by the title 'what does your home reveal about you?' and proliferation of social media accounts in which users provide tightly curated access into select parts of their homes. Thus, while the idea of home traditionally goes hand-in-hand with that of sanctuary, home can also be read as performative; a link between the self and the outside world, a status symbol, a medium through which one conveys an identity.

The arrival in 2020 of a pandemic led to the emergence of new relationships between homes and their occupants. Within the UK context, the until-then mostly covert intersections between the public and private aspects of home were suddenly brought to the foreground. Almost overnight the meaning of home moved beyond the traditional associations with

comfort and security, and came to incorporate aspects of work, schooling and healthcare. With the widespread introduction of online meeting spaces in order to accommodate this change, for many, the performative aspect of home was thus unwittingly embedded into daily routines. In an attempt to maintain a degree of separation between the traditional notion of home as private and the openness now required, many would strategically rearrange the furniture framed in their computer's cameras so as to appear as professional as possible in online work meetings, often to comedic effect. The Bookcase Credibility Twitter page (@BCredibility), created during the first UK lockdown, exemplifies how public figures, politicians, and celebrities, forced to give media appearances from within their homes, would deliberately set up their camera in front of books in order to convey a sense of seriousness (even if the books were sometimes their children's) and to recreate the relatively neutral but studious and respected atmosphere of the office. The frequent interruptions by children or pets, the obvious planting of material designed to convey a sense of authority, or the occasional unintended visibility of items otherwise considered very personal exemplify the status of home as a territory which reflects the interactions and intersections between the public and the private.

Adopting a wider lens, home is also frequently taken as synonymous with nationhood. To quote Susan Stanford Friedman discussing the U.S. context, "[t]he nation too is home - the homeland as fatherland or motherland to be defended by Homeland Defense and Patriot Acts. Domestic politics is national politics, the government within, at home. The nation is family, the imagined community of Us against Them" (2004, p. 193). In the UK, home to *Excursions*, similar kinship images abound with the country being defended by the Home Office led by the Home Secretary (responsible for immigration, security, and law and order). With the nation often conceptualised as a form of home, there are questions to be asked about who is entitled to access this home and why. Widespread media coverage of mass

migrations resulting from political turmoil (with, most recently, the crisis in Ukraine) shed light on alternative understandings of home, with issues of statelessness, national identity, forced relocation, longing/belonging, acculturation, and assimilation becoming increasingly pressing. Home can thus be problematised as a site of inequality; inequality in accessibility, inequality of ownership, and inequality in the division of domestic responsibility, as the articles in this issue will demonstrate.

Regardless of the lens adopted, it is clear that 'home' is a complex signifier. It is a space which every individual will experience differently, imbued with contradiction, and deserving of academic attention. This complexity is captured in the beautiful cover designed by Farah Alrajeh. During the process of commissioning the work, lengthy conversations took place between members of the editorial board and the artist in which we tried to translate 'home' (both visually and linguistically) so that it was somewhat consistent across the languages featured. What seemed like a simple task quickly enabled us to see the nuance of meaning contained within the word - meaning that generally lies unexamined in its day-to-day usage, but which very quickly manifested itself when we tried to unpack exactly what it meant in the different languages featured.

For instance, in French, there is no immediate translation for the English-language concept of 'home'. While the commonly used word *maison* does somewhat retain the larger connotations of home, it refers more specifically to the actual house. The French *domicile*, which dictionaries often offer up as the first translation for 'home', translates as 'residency' and has a more administrative ring to it which does not convey the sense of belonging and warmth often associated with the concept. Perhaps the translation closest to capturing this sense is *chez-soi*, which translates literally as 'at self', thereby highlighting the conceptual relationship between home and identity. Furthermore, its lack of specificity means that it can designate both the house and the home country depending on the context,

thus retaining the idea of belonging that is lacking from *domicile*. Such interrogations into the language of home show that, whilst it may seem like a universal concept, a true understanding of its meaning requires an appreciation of the notion as both culture- and language-bound.

In our first article of this issue, through his critical evaluation of the experience of homelessness within contemporary neoliberal society, timothy martin[1] undertakes a direct problematization of the disparate and often conflicting meanings of home. According to martin, we are confronted with a political malaise which can be seen to perpetuate a systemic process of 'dehousing', and this often renders its victims without recourse to participate in either public or private spaces. Drawing on the political theory of Hannah Arendt, martin highlights how the blurring of the public/private dichotomy for those experiencing homelessness enables a critical reimagination of the political sphere in which such dehousing is made possible. For this, martin argues, we need to look no further than the opportunities for subversive resistance offered through art and storytelling. Drawing on the work of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo and the cult TV series *The OA*, martin shows how art and storytelling offer the possibility of emancipatory public action - action which can recapture some of the participatory elements lost under the market-based rationale of the neoliberal political system. It is in this space, martin shows, that we can find the opportunities to make the unseen visible again, and thereby provide the means with which to amplify the political voice of those experiencing homelessness.

The relationship between power and home is further confronted by Yusuke Yasuda in his article focusing on the experience of unskilled labour immigrants working in Japan. At odds with a growing elderly population and the need to increase the labour force, Japan's emphasis on ethno-cultural homogeneity has created hostile political and societal attitudes towards

[1] The author publishes with his full name in lowercase.

immigrants. Indeed, despite being needed, Yasuda argues that foreign workers are not so easily accepted as residents, and although the government has introduced schemes such as the Technical Intern Trainees Program (TITP) and Specified Skill Worker (SSW) to meet the labour demands, they refuse to acknowledge the schemes as 'immigration policies' in order to uphold Japanese nationalist ideals. Yasuda notes how these schemes deliberately limit the extent to which unskilled labour migrants feel at home – migrants are often subject to poor working conditions and remain dependent on their allocated employers to remain in the country legally. Despite attempts to improve assimilation of immigrant workers, the country often remains unfamiliar, the schemes remain insecure, and the relationship between immigrant workers and Japanese residents remains uncomfortable, leading Yasuda to question whether such migrants can ultimately call Japan home.

Yasuda's article highlights how the idea of home is broadly tied to a feeling of belonging, where conceptions of one's identity are derived from and shared with those who inhabit the same or similar physical and representational spaces. In her critical engagement with Albert Memmi's *La Statue de Sel*, Valeria Giudici asks us to consider the rupture that can occur when one's identity comprises multiple elements, and therefore occupies a liminal space between belonging and alienation. Giudici guides us through this reading through a comparison of the book's author and his protagonist – an Arab Jew growing up in French-ruled Tunisia. Her article tracks the narrator's encounters with the personal and social barriers that are both challenges to and derived from his sense of identity – he is neither French, nor Tunisian, he is neither Jew, nor Arab, yet he is also all these things. Drawing on the theoretical lenses of Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida and other cultural theorists, Guidici invites us to consider the fragility of belonging associated with this liminality, and thereby forces us to confront our conceptions of the universality of what we mean by 'home'.

The complex relationship between identity and home and performativity is further explored by Raissa de Albuquerque Gameleira. Beyond the idea of home as a location, home can also serve a performative function; home is where one creates and expresses intimate memories, it is a medium through which one conveys an identity. Gameleira explores this idea through a focus on the Historic House Museum Casa Guilherme de Almeida in São Paulo, Brazil. Historic house museums like this one form narratives of a home in relation to their former inhabitants, by preserving their memory and functional habits. Casa Guilherme de Almeida offers a curated narrative of de Almeida's life and personality through its architecture, interior design, and displays. The author convincingly discusses spatial poetics and interior design as means of communication and performing a sense of authenticity which enables the visitor to be transported into the past.

During the pandemic, the experience of home was transformed as professional lives were forced to intertwine with domestic roles. However, in practice, this change was by no means uniformly experienced. In the autoethnographic essay 'Home - Between Screens', Shellie Holden examines the gendered experience of home under COVID-19 and employs an interdisciplinary practice in which the blurred boundaries of professional and domestic life are interrogated through textile theory and digital assemblage. Drawing on Chantal Akerman's 1975 film, *Jeanne Deilman 23 quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles*, Holden explores the process of art-production as a medium to critically reflect on the philosophical and political aspects of gendered domestic roles within the context COVID-19, arguing that such an approach can be read as a catalyst for political action.

Likewise, in an intimate autobiographical essay, Lindsey Moser engages with homemaking as something potentially liberating, especially in transitional and changing environments. Encouraging us to think carefully about the feelings embodied by the home, Moser draws on her own

experiences of moving to a new house, in a new town, to undertake a PhD in literature before the pandemic hit and she found out that she was pregnant, that her body was housing another. Engaging with a wide corpus of literary and critical texts ranging from Louise Erdrich's novel *Future Home of the Living God* to Tsh Oxenreider's autobiographical travel narrative *At Home in the World*, and twelfth-century monastic literature, the essay highlights, both in its form and content, the refuge/home that can be found in writing, reading and words. The essay's surprising ending, with Moser's being required to move houses once again reminds us that home is less a fixed space than a constant act of home-making, of making oneself home.

This focus on the 'feeling of home' is further engaged with in Chitrangada Sharma's photo-essay, in which she shares snippets of everyday life of the women in her ancestral village, Ahun, in India. The photos and stories speak to the women's negotiations within their homes and reframe the domestic as a space animated by stories of everyday struggles and resistance against strict gender norms, conservative community values and patriarchy. In what is ultimately a homage to these women, the Bobbos of Ahun, Sharma respectfully and tenderly brings to light the tales of resistance and self-assertion that reveal the emancipatory potential of home as a complex and shifting space of both obedience and transgression.

In an exclusive for *Excursions Journal*, this issue also contains a podcast interview between two Pakistani authors, Saba Karim Khan and the award-winning author Mohsin Hamid. Hamid opens up about his successful career, his new novel that published this August, and his literary relationship to home. In resonance with Albert Memmi's liminal positionality as explored by Giudici in our issue, Hamid discusses the difficult position of the diasporic writer as a sort of hybrid who threatens a traditional understanding of identity, belonging, and home. For migrant writers such as himself, there is no place that feels truly like home is supposed to feel. The novels of migrant writers, in fact, tend to be heavily criticized in their homeland for unethically

pandering to the West, an issue that Hamid discusses at length. Home, in this context, is to be found in the imagination. Fiction and writing allow multiple spaces and cultures to come together and in so doing, enable liminal identities to escape and feel at home.

Like most previous issues, this issue's editorial board comprises a mix of nationalities, languages and disciplinary backgrounds. Some of us have grown up in different countries and cities to the ones we currently find ourselves in, and vastly different experiences have led us to where we are now. These differences are the backdrop to our understandings of the meaning of home - laden with a multiplicity of complex emotional responses and difficult to articulate feelings, but all of which speak to some ineffable conceptual sharedness. Our discussions on the topic, complex and meandering as they were, ultimately led us to a singular truth upon which we could all agree – there is no single meaning of the word home, but its complexity and unequivocal importance to the human experience warrants the detailed examination and theorisation that our authors begin to undertake in this issue.

Reference

Friedman, S. (2004). 'Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora.' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 23 (2), pp. 189-212.