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Advancing transnational migration studies through home: a conceptual inquiry

Abstract

This chapter provides a conceptual overview of the social experience of home and of its significance for transnational migration studies. Home, as a material setting, a special relationship with place or a source of distinctive emotions and social practices, is significantly affected by human mobility across borders. It is also a unique research venue to investigate and compare the transnational side of migrant everyday lives. Much transnational literature argues for migrants' unprecedented connectedness with home (societies), or for their novel scope to retain a sense of home across borders or to emplace it in several locations simultaneously. However, these evocative claims are often disconnected from empirical research. The very notion of home has been subject to relatively little elaboration in a transnational optic. Yet, there is a remarkable potential in using home, literally and metaphorically, as a prism to investigate migrant ability to retain, circulate and emplace significant aspects of the "other worlds" they are connected to, while being physically away from them. The typical dilemmas of migrant transnationalism and some new conceptual developments out of a homemaking lens are eventually discussed.

<a>Introduction

Transnational migration occurs, Levitt (2004) once wrote, 'when "home" means more than one country'. Indeed, migrant transnationalism has fundamentally to do with the location(s) and distribution(s) of home, both in a symbolic sense and in a literal one. Hints to home and homemaking, and (less frequently) explicit reflections on this specific topic, can be found all across transnational migration studies in the last three decades. Yet, and despite the burgeoning literature on transnationalism, the heuristic potential of home as a lens on cross-border migration is yet to be fully appreciated. The same holds for the social study of home as a place or an infrastructure, a set of relationships associated with it and a critical indicator of the distribution, persistence and consequences of migrant transnational ties. Against this background, my contribution aims to analyze the main ways of using home as a category in transnational migration studies. It also presents the reasons why a more consistent focus on homemaking across borders can advance research on migrant transnationalism. In doing so I draw on a variety of empirical examples, including my current research within ERC HOMInG.[1]

<a>1. On the home-migration nexus: a background

Migrants may have a plurality of homes as places of residence, as sources of identification and emotional attachment, even as housing infrastructures. However, how do the views, feelings and practices of home evolve under circumstances of transnational migration? This question requires some conceptual work on the notion of home and on the ways it is used in migration studies. Whether for migrants or for anybody else, discussing what home means and how it is experienced makes for a fundamental reflexive exercise into one's biographical trajectory and living conditions.

Over the last decades, a large interdisciplinary literature has shown that the notion of home conflates a spatial and material dimension with an emotional and ideational one (Blunt and Dowling 2006). From a sociological perspective, home can be seen less as a house or a place as such than as an attempt to emplace a sense of security, familiarity and control on a socio-material setting, on a variety of scales (Boccagni 2017a). Home is a fundamentally relational experience (Nowicka 2007) that covers all *attempts* to make oneself at home, as long as they are driven by a 'homing' need and desire, although their empirical outcomes are significantly diverse and uneven.

Research in migration studies has moved well beyond the view of the migrant condition as ontologically opposite to being at home. Rather, migrants' life experience exposes in a particularly vivid way the tension between the ascriptive dimension of home as place of origin and all that comes afterwards – which is marked, in this case, by an unusually high degree of geographical, and possibly socio-cultural discontinuity. Under circumstances of migration, home may be less a matter of full-fledged domesticity than an experience being cultivated from the margins, from far away or from the outside, thus illuminating questions of broader societal significance. *Questions of home and migration* (Ahmed et al. 2003) can be investigated all across migration systems, casting light both on migrants' experience and on the social consequences of migration.

Having said this, the notion of home can be used for substantially different definitional purposes and empirical phenomena. What do people mean – researchers and their migrant interlocutors alike – whenever they use the word home, or its equivalent, across languages? By way of generalization, and for need of analytical clarity, three conceptual dimensions are worth distinguishing.

The first designates the *ascriptive* side of home as a point of origin: the place, and the biographical and family circumstances that lie behind each of us in time (and, for people on the move, in space). Home is often used as synonym for place of origin. This raises the question of 'what' of that place and of the related ways of living persists over time, after displacement. For sure, home as 'where I come from' is important for purposes of self-identification, no less than external categorization. Asking immigrants 'where they come from' may be a problematic question, as it unnecessarily privileges ethno-national background over other axes of identifiation. Yet the question does resonate with the weight of people's past life experiences, and with their need to come to terms with it. For first-generation immigrants, in particular, home as ascription and birthplace keeps operating as a cognitive anchor and reference for identity and self-understanding, as I illustrate below.

Simultaneous with the previous understanding is another constellation of meanings, which regards the *socio-material* side of home: a dwelling, or a functional equivalent for it. The place(s) and households in which people live are the most obvious marker of home in a descriptive sense, although not necessarily the most meaningful in an emotional

sense. The migration experience, in particular, is a major source of discontinuity in housing and household conditions and pathways. By definition, migration entails physical (possibly forced) detachment from the previous dwellings; hence, different degrees of separation, temporary or otherwise, with household members and domestic structures, as well-discussed in the literature on transnational family living (cf. Bryceson, this volume). Moreover, home as an infrastructure can hardly be disjointed from the domestic routines and material cultures associated with it as a lived space, whether in proximity or, for a number of migrants, over a distance.

Last, there are many ways of understanding home that refer primarily to its *practical* and *performable* dimension, as an emplaced social experience. The emphasis shifts to the influence of different settings, infrastructures and socio-emotional conditions on home*making,* i.e. on the ways of attaching a positive sense of home to particular portions of space. This is the context-dependent side of home, the latter notion being assumed in a normative, emotionally driven and morally shaped sense. In this optic, home can be made, unmade and remade again, on a variety of scales and rhythms, parallel to the life and migration course (Freund 2015; Ni Mhurchu 2019). As a social process, homemaking is temporally patterned and can rely on meaningful connections with the past (mediated by home-like memories and emotions), and/or with the future (in terms of projections, imaginaries, fears and desires). As important, the meaning of what should be made 'home-like' varies over time and across social groups and cultural contexts.

Against this background, migrants' transnational engagement opens up a wide research field to investigate questions of plurilocation, portability, immateriality and rootedness of home. In approaching these questions, I privilege a relatively narrow definition of transnationalism, focused on cross-border transactions that can be empirically observed and exert distinctive social consequences (Boccagni 2012; 2017b). This leaves in a more peripheral position the ways of reproducing past or ethnic-related attitudes and practices that do not result in substantive connections with a transnational 'elsewhere'. While I do consider transnationally-oriented memories, imaginaries and emotions that have no direct influence on transnational social fields, I tend to focus more on migrant ways of bridging migration-related distance, and on the forms of homemaking that underpin them.

<a>2. Why defining and researching home matters to transnational migration studies

At its core, a transnational optic subverts the commonsensical view of home as a single place, or a relatively fixed and unchanging life environment associated with it. As long as migrant individuals, families or groups are engaged in more locations far away from each other, they may have no inherent reason to call home any of them in particular, including those where they used to live in the past. They could indeed construct or even 'have' multiple places as home, and make themselves at home in more than one national context. In this sense, the transnational perspective is an invitation to move beyond a dichotomous view of the world along a neat division between one fixed and exclusive place that is called home, whatever the scale, and all that lies outside or far away from it (Rapport and Dawson 1998; Ahmed 1999; Al-Ali and Khoser 2002). Deconstructing the essentialized representation of home, along a pathway informed by the critiques of sedentarism (Malkki 1992) and methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2003), means to open up a large, potentially indefinite space for the social definition,

experience and study of home. What are the main characteristics of this space, and how far it can be appropriated through migrants' transnational relationships, is the question to be discussed here.

Home, to repeat, is not always the place in which one resides. Rather, as the migration literature revealed, it can go transnational. People on the move can frame as home one or more locations simultaneously, including places that are geographically remote from them. These multi-sited ways of framing have significant and real consequences, as I illustrate below. Some form of home dislocation, as part and parcel of migrant transnational engagement, can be appreciated at four analytical levels: *i*. Labels and metaphors of home, *ii*. Emotions and identifications associated with it, *iii*. Practices of homemaking and *iv*. Settings and ways of emplacing home. The discussion that follows relates home to the *transnational,* meaning by this the reach and impact of social action *over a distance* (Giddens 1990) – in this case, the ways of distant interaction between migrants and their points of reference elsewhere.

In all of these respects, migrant transnational engagement is typically selective and time- and context-dependent (Boccagni 2012; Werbner 2013; Waldinger 2015). Moreover, it proceeds in parallel with a variety of trajectories of incorporation into receiving countries (possibly fragmented ones, all the more so in the case of transit, circular or step-wise migration). Put differently, the transnational facets of migrant everyday lives are neither the only relevant nor, generally speaking, the predominant ones. Rather, they need to be appreciated in the economy of their patterns of local incorporation, as individuals and members of families and larger social networks.

<b>Calling a place home and appealing to it, transnationally

Under conditions of large-scale migration, the notion of home can be associated with a variety of extra-domestic scales, including a country as a whole – and including migrant countries of origin. This dual process of *scaling up* and *reaching out* of home, as a metaphor and a way of claiming control over space, raises interesting questions on the entanglements between migration, international relations and diaspora politics. What place is called home, why, and which actors are entitled to do so are issues that deserve in-depth discussion (Brickell 2012).

For someone who has been living far away from the country of origin, calling the latter home is an apparently obvious and natural act. Affective, identitarian, moral and mnemonic aspects of home are all conflated in it. Several case studies suggest that the home-homeland equation tends to be prevalent among first-generation migrants, especially at the early stages of their stay abroad (e.g. Wiles 2008). This is only one of the several ways in which the notion of home, once seen from a distance, 'scales up' from the domestic space to an aggregate entity in the public domain – a country, but potentially also a city or a neighbourhood of origin.

A parallel conflation underpins diaspora-reaching appeals from the countries of origin. It is not uncommon for them to stress migrants' attachment to their national homes as a device to cultivate nostalgic allegiance and, more pragmatically, to attract money and human capital investments (Ralph 2009). In a similar vein, policy schemes to encourage return migration, often under the aegis of migration-and-development, may evoke migrants' supposedly unabated sense of home (Flahaux 2017). However, the top-down discursive manipulation of home is instrumental to all sorts of political agendas. Home sounds in an equally evocative, vague and unproblematic tone in the wording of programmes for voluntary assisted return, including those supported by the European

Union. Even the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-driven initiatives for refugee return, portrayed as a sustainable and inherently desirable solution, appeal to the evocative and morally cogent power of *home*coming. The same rhetorical device can be used to announce deportation plans against undocumented migrants or failed asylum seekers, like in the famous 'Go Home Van' campaign of the United Kingdom (UK) government in 2013 (Lowndes and Madziva 2014). In this case, constructing the country of origin as home is instrumental to depicting it as the natural and right place for migrants to stay, all the more so if they do not comply with a given legal status.

The labeling of migrant countries of birth as home, whether from above or below, has both symbolic and concrete consequences. However, several studies suggest skepticism on the actual persistency of the homeland-home equation over time. From the perspective of immigrant newcomers, all that the previous home stood for may become more blurred and discontinuous as a result of their extended mobility and the socio-legal, cultural and psychological aftermaths (Fitzgerald 2014; Waldinger 2015). How the bases of their past home experience are then reproduced and distributed on a local and transnational scale is critical to migrant identification with their host and home societies, from an often marginal position vis-à-vis both contexts (Boccagni 2017a).

Indeed, the experiential bottom-up side of the homeland-home conflation is existentially ambiguous (Tete 2012). Instead, the top-down side can easily be exposed as instrumental to restrictive or downright hostile political agendas. It is no exaggeration to conclude that refusing the automatic overlapping between *country of origin* and *home* is far more than a lexical argument. Rather, it is foundational to a critical research agenda on the manipulation of the moral power of home, as a metaphor in the international debate on immigrants and refugees (Dovel 2010; Davies 2014).

<b>Feeling at home, transnationally

There is more than instrumentalism, however, in the homeland-home conflation. Migrants' projection of a sense of home towards some physically remote space varies along the life course and generally tends to fade over time. Nonetheless, it is enough as a social fact to warrant more reflection, as it purposefully combines two analytically distinct meanings of home, such as *normality* and *belonging*.

What matters here is first of all the use of home to designate an ordinary and 'natural' state of things. Even long-settled migrants may keep referring to home to define their 'normal' ways of doing things; that is, the life styles, values and expected patterns of behaviour to which they were socialized in the countries of origin, depending also on their demographics (class, gender, urban or rural background, age at departure, ethnicity and so forth). Even people with little residual attachment to the country of origin may retain the latter as an implicit frame of reference to see and judge things in the place where they 'actually' live. This is no simple matter of cultural continuity or ethnic retention. Deeper than that, the question is how past life experiences, embedded in specific and meaningful places called home(s), are a term of comparison for what comes next – with all the revisits and selective memories of the past that follow. In this sense, home embraces memories of the past life in the country of origin, but also cognitive schemata and scripts of behaviour with a resilience and a life course of their own. Ways of eating, dressing, or spending leisure time include many cases in point. So do the the ordinary rhythms of everyday life, which may significantly differ between 'here' and 'there'. Feeling some aspects of (life in) the country of origin as home, then, is an exercise in biographical

continuity with the past. It is a routinary act with affective, cognitive and moral bases; indeed, an emotion one should feel obliged to nourish or at least display, particularly upon return visits (Baldassar 2000).

In another, more explicit and intentional sense, feeling home (also) 'there' is an act to claim belonging and membership in a distinctive territorial location, on a continuum of scales between the entire country of origin and a particular dwelling. Along the early course of migration, the centrality of home as the community and family left behind is part of the moral repertoire of justifications of migration itself. If leaving home tends to raise high emotional and material risks, asserting its unabated centrality fulfills a number of functions. It is a form of sense-making, a source of solace and emotional compensation, but also a matter of concrete obligations and investments, like remittances. As far as so-called labour migrants are concerned, there may be little more generalizable than the initial reported view of migration as the way, and the price, to achieve a better future *back home*. While the following developments often reveal this attitude to be irrealistic, the construction of the context of origin as the 'real home' may persist further. At some level, this is indeed a mechanism of compensation. Under conditions of socio-legal marginality, or at least of decreased social status, the place a person comes from *is* home, as long as migrant identity and belonging are not in question there; in 'the place', quoting Robert Frost (1914), 'where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in'.

As long as migrants attach a sense of home to that particular place, the pre-conditions exist for a range of cross-border practices, or at least for a perceived need to enact them. However, the need or desire to locate home in a place that is emotionally close but physically distant has a temporal dimension, no less than a spatial one. All that has to do with projects, fantasies or myths of return can be appreciated as a way of projecting a sense of home towards the future, by deferring the actual enjoyment of a place that should feel like home (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004). The construction of the country of origin as home, then, has a future dimension – entangled with return – but also a past one, whenever migrants retain something of 'what' used to be their home place through ways of sociability and cultural activities.

Whether a displaced sense of home is cultivated towards the past or towards the future, it may keep informing the intergenerational experience of so-called diasporas. This is often informed by an ambivalent fascination with an ancestral homeland, which may take the shape of an evocative and indeterminate 'homing desire' (Brah 1995). Among first-generation migrants, instead, return may well be a real fact, possibly resulting in circular mobility patterns (Anghel et al. 2019). Foundational to return is not only the persistent construction of the local community of origin as home, but also some investment in tangible practices of homemaking – even home building – to prepare it, successfully or not. This calls for more attention in its own right.

<b>Making home, transnationally*

Whenever migrants are engaged in transnational relationships with their dear ones elsewhere, they articulate a view of home as more than an ascriptive state of things, even when it does overlap with the community of origin. Rather than simply lying there, home needs to be (co)produced anew – it demands some meaningful attachment and investment from the migrant. In this optic, cross-border transactions between migrants and left-behinds, such as those related to remittances, transnational caregiving and cross-border investments, are also forms of transnational homemaking (Sandu 2013).

The notion of homemaking has multiple meanings. A sociological way of understanding it emphasizes 'the active work of stabilization required to produce a reliable base, made up of repeated configurations of people, places and things, around which both habits and meaning can form' (Lauster and Zhao 2017: 499). Importantly, such an 'active work of stabilization' can also be taken up across borders – in order to safeguard the preexisting 'reliable base' – although at a higher cost and with more uncertainty. In this sense, *transnational* homemaking alludes to all forms of material, relational and emotional work whereby migrants reproduce and substantiate their attachment to at least another place, and / or a set of people, far away from them.

Whether transnational homemaking results in sending remittances, in patterns of circular mobility or in sustained communication over a distance, it is meant as an attempt to bridge the physical distance between the relevant parties, or to counter the possible downsides of their long-term separation. Moreover, migrants' dislocation of a sense of home is a temporal matter, no less than a spatial one. If all forms of transnational caregiving can be seen as a reaction to the *spatial* dislocation of home, long-term homebound investments (in housing, land ownership, microbusiness etc.) have rather to do with a *temporal* dislocation of home. Their enactment follows a deep-rooted expectation that the communities of origin will return being home in a literal sense. As such, they lie at the core of a special investment, although this may be discontinuous and does not necessarily end up in homecoming. Migrant transnational housing investments, in particular, are an obvious example of a transnational social practice *stricto sensu* – one that, besides its intended function, is also a vehicle of cultural diffusion or of social remittances (López 2015). In both respects, transnational housing deserves more attention under the rubric of the transnational emplacement of home.

<b>Emplacing home, transnationally*

Home, as an optic and a set of place-related views, emotions and practices, involves also the infrastructures on which cross-border transactions rely. A significant part of transnational relationships involves primarily the family life of those concerned, and therefore everyday interactions in, or close to, the domestic space. Migrants' houses, then, are both a privileged setting to research their connectedness over time, and one of the desired outcomes of their transnational investments. The process of improving or building anew migrants' houses, dependent as it is on remittances, is an ideal subject to investigate the ebbs and flows of their transnational engagement. Whether such houses are completed or not, taken care of or not, inhabited or not, they have something to 'say' on the reach, contents and durability of the transnational ties of their owners (Boccagni 2017a).

A 'remittance house', as the recent literature shows, is central to the material, affective and moral economy of the interactions between migrants and their close family members, as long as the latter live in the context of origin (López 2015; Schaab and Wagner 2020). Its very existence testifies to migrants' economic and moral engagement to 'be there' in some way, and possibly return in the future. Whenever, instead, a remittance house is left incomplete, abandoned or ruined it convenes the opposite message: its owners abroad have a decreasing interest, or maybe just decreasing resources to reach out to the community of origin. Indeed, once there are no more close family members living there, the very sense of home associated with that place loses much of its emotional and moral power.

Even in that case remittance houses are a privileged research venue for two fundamental reasons. First, they are exemplary of the frictions, dilemmas and limitations that migrants'

transnational action encounters. From the very outset, an investment in transnational housing reflects a decision to allocate savings in a housing arrangement where no migrant lives at present – in a sense, a second home. No wonder that such expense may clash with the ordinary housing costs in the context of settlement; all the more so if migrants opt to invest in home ownership abroad. Relatively little research has been done on the interaction between house-related expenses here and there, in the light of migrant housing strategies, preferences and resources (among exceptions, van der Horst 2010; Kuuire et al. 2016). However, there is no reason to expect that this interaction be exempt of trade-offs and dilemmas.

In the second place, remittance houses could be expected to be a channel of transnational cultural diffusion. This may occur wherever the ways of building, furnishing, decorating and using them reproduce the infrastructural or aesthetic patterns that migrants noticed and appreciated abroad. Nonetheless, the bulk of ethnographies conducted so far suggests a different story (e.g. Klaufus 2010; Byrne 2016; Pauli and Bedorf 2018). Leaving aside basic infrastructural differences, the lived experience of these houses shows rather the diffusion of migrants' own tastes, memories and claims for status. This is something far more selective, piecemeal and context-dependent than any distinctive cultural pattern being imported from elsewhere, whether this regards façades, interiors, or the allocation of domestic space. In an optic of cultural circulation, then, remittance houses are primarily a form of embodiment of migrants' personal and family histories. In all of these respects, what a remittance house lacks or does not show – unfinished parts, deteriorated infrastructures, decorations left half-way – is as telling as what it displays or even shows off.

<a>3. Revisiting the transnational after 'home': (un)portability, (im)materiality, and beyond

Little of the argument made so far is totally new to transnational migration studies. Nonetheless, a comprehensive understanding of the ways of claiming, feeling, making and emplacing home casts new light on the interdependence between scales and locations of migrant's multilocal ties. It also provides a background to appreciate their variable reach and intensity over time. Furthermore, a home optic facilitates critical and reflexive elaboration on transnationalim in several respects.

The first of them is *portability* (Smith 2014; Andersen and Pedersen 2018). Once we assume a multidimensional and flexible view of home, a question soon emerges – one that conjugates research interest with existential significance: what is fixed and what is portable, or in any way mobile, in the social experience of home after migration. The question is which material, relational or emotional elements of erstwhile home travel or circulate parallel to migration, and which stay put, or behind; parallel with this, what of the past home migrants are willing to carry with themselves, and what they end up carrying anyway, regardless of their intentions. This leads to yet another question, namely, how the infrastructural, relational and emotional bases of home change along the migration process and after it.

There are obvious infrastructural limitations to the portability of home in a physical sense. Part of the significance of transnational object circulation (Povzranovic-Frykman 2019), as well as the consumption of food or other cultural items evoking home (Bailey 2017; Kim 2019), has precisely to do with their being attempts to bridge this distance. These

forms of material culture create settings or atmospheres that evoke the material or natural environment of past home, sensorially or mnemonically. Likewise, the growth in accessibility and use of ICT-based interactions can facilitate communication and perceived proximity with a place or a group of people that keep feeling home-like (e.g. Cabalquinto 2018). Yet, this can hardly replace bodily proximity and co-presence. A short vignette from my fieldwork in Ecuador illustrates this point.

Upon my last revisit there, I had the opportunity of a short stay at the newly built house *(in absentia)* of my Italo-Ecuadorian friend Miriam. Once I was back to visit her in Italy, we watched together a video I had taken inside her refurbished, clean and empty dwelling. This turned out to be a remarkably reflexive and moving experience. 'It's there, and I'm here', whispered Miriam at the end, in an inadvertent overturn of the 'I'm here, but I'm there' that underpins, at least as a deep-rooted desire, transnational caregiving practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). There was something uncanny in the distance between that place and her present life as an Italian citizen who had reunified her family and had no particular reason or interest to return. While that video was enough to give her some virtual co-presence, it seemed to articulate a twofold distance in front of her: in space, as the materiality of the building in which she had invested several years of remittances was simply un-portable; and in time, as the video was enough to highlight the distance between her early aspirations and imaginaries (i.e. a relatively short stay abroad and return into the new house), and all that had happened afterwards. While the spatial distance could still be bridged at the price of costly return visits, the distance in time was simply there to stay – or indeed, to increase further.

Another broader question illuminated by migrant homemaking practices regards the working balance between the *material* and the *immaterial* side of home, and between the *ascriptive* and the *achievable* one. At the end of the day, (re)producing the past home, only to find out that this is possible in some respects but not in others, is not necessarily the most important question. More crucial is whether migrants are in a position – i.e. with sufficient resources, opportunitites and rights, *or not* – to make themselves at home again, in the sense of attaching security, familiarity and control to their life circumstances; and what is the role of the transnational repertoires accessible to them, relative to the structure of opportunities they encounter abroad. Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2017) study of Latinos in Los Angeles urban gardens is a good case in point. By cultivating familiar plants in a context of joint sociability, her informants make themselves at home in ways that interweave senses, memories, tastes, bodily practices and even a deep-rooted connection with the earth. There is much more to this than a mechanical reproduction of their group identities, locally or transnationally articulated. It is then important to investigate how far forms of transnational homemaking – including those mediated by object circulation – have to do only with the *ascriptive* dimension of home, which may be a source of solace but also of oppression, or also with the *performable one,* i.e. with attempts to make oneself at home regardless of their (dis)continuity with the past, as discussed in the first section.

At either analytical level, something deeply ambivalent occurs whenever home, or at least the need for it, tends to be de-materialized – i.e. associated with emotional repertoires of people and things far away in time and space, based at best on online interactions, but not with the place where people physically live. The de-materialization of home may not be an inherently desirable development. Wherever migrants feel at home – if they do at all – only in online interactions or in 'bubbles' of past-related domesticity, rather than in the place where they live, this has to do with marginalized housing and living conditions more than with 'grassroots cosmopolitanism'.

A strong sensorial investment into some (imagined) home elsewhere can be a way to counter the lack of any material space that meets the minimal requirements to be called home in the here-and-now. In other words, cultivating home on the move, through all sorts of portable or immaterial means and routines, is a remarkable social fact in itself. However, it is not necessarily an emancipatory one. Moreover, as the existing research shows, the lack of a comfortable material infrastructure to be called home, or the distance from a fixed place that used to be called home, does not eliminate the need and desire to achieve that infrastructure or recover that place (Miller 2008; Brun and Fabos 2015). If anything, the more vulnerable people's life circumstances, including on the move, the greater the need for some fixed place to be called home – whether that already exists or not. Ironically, research across non-material homemaking practices suggests a creeping urgency for materiality – even for rootedness – that should not go unnoticed. The very existence and maintenance of 'remittance houses' points to the retention of highly localized forms of place attachment, at least among first-generation migrants.

Overall, migrants' experience of home under conditions of transnational connectedness may not fully overlap either with the place they live in or with the one they come from. Yet, what stems from this is not necessarily a bi- or multi-location of home. The latter may be hard to sustain over time, given the attendant material, relational and emotional costs. A case could rather be made, broadly speaking, for the persistence of some particular places and contexts – whether proximate or distant – as the predominant, or even exclusive sources of a sense of home for migrants. It is ultimately an empirical question, which has much to do with the opportunities for integration abroad, whether this potential bifocality ends up in a dual presence or, instead, in Sayad's (1999) double absence. A pragmatic and intermediate arrangement, with the bulk of homemaking practices being concentrated 'here' while leaving some symbolic and affective intermittent connection with 'there', may well be the more sustainable and prevalent one over time. In this respect, it is probably better to have at least one place to call home, than having none.

<a>Conclusions

There are many ways to use the notion of home in a transnational framework, as this chapter shows. One of them follows the idea that the social experience of home has gained increasing autonomy from the material and contextual physicality of any particular place, as it would operate primarily through different features – such as online connectedness and the reproduction of a sense of home through the senses. This would make a notion of localised and contained place irrelevant, or anyway of little analytical purchase. In fact, it is my argument that for most international migrants this approach is overly simplistic. As much research shows, migrants' home-related views, emotions and practices do rely also on non-material and non-proximate bases, which have a potential to convey meaningful emotions, attachments and relational engagements. Yet, this does not eliminate their need to bring the connections down to the ground and materialize them at some point, possibly within a (fixed) house. Whenever this is not achievable, major questions of social (in)justice and of denial of the right to make oneself at home are at stake (Kim 2019) – not celebrations of free-floating post-home cosmopolitanism. In short, political questions of access to, and control over, some material home-like space are crucial to transnational – no less than local – migration studies.

Migrant views, emotions and practices about home are indeed fluid and always in the (un)making – a 'lifelong project' that 'requires constant work' (Freund 2015, p. 66). That said, their need to tie them down to specific material locations, or at least objects, should not go unnoticed. Emphasizing the need for some degree of fixity helps also illuminate another major point: the path-dependency of home-related views, emotions and cultures. Home is also a matter of connections with the past, whether people wish to reproduce them or not. It is not just something to be recreated from scratch, wherever and with whomever. There is a tension between ascriptive and open-ended dimensions of what home means to people, and migrants' transnational engagement makes it only more visible and complex.

To conclude, it is worth drawing a distinction in the home and transnationalism debate, and leave it open for further elaboration, between two fundamentally different concepts: migrant homemaking as a strictly *transnational* development, which connects two or more different locales and groups herein, as a source of social change within the different parties in a transnational social field; and migrant homemaking as a *transtemporal* development, i.e. all the practices that involve a sensorial recreation of past life memories, stories and styles, without necessarily affecting the country of origin or other meaningful places in migrant lives. While the former version of homemaking is central to the life condition of first-generation migrants, the second home illuminates the societal consequences of migration over time, across countries and generations. A transition from a transnational optic (on the here-and-now) to a diasporic one (in a longer time perspective) could then be a valuable way ahead to make the most of a homemaking lens into migration studies.

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