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Review
Where is home? Why home is not at the same place in the USA and Europe

Melissa Ley-Cervantes and Jan Willem Duyvendak

Home: international perspectives on culture, identity, and belonging, edited by Margarethe Kusenbach and Krista E. Paulsen. Peter Lang Academic, Frankfurt am Main, 2013, 314 pp., ISBN 3631620098, £37, US$60.95.

A new book providing theoretical and empirical insights to a relatively new but burgeoning field of study such as home is always welcome. *Home: International Perspectives on Culture, Identity, and Belonging* is a collaborative effort of 16 contributors of 14 chapters that deal with the topic of home from a variety of approaches, from urban and community sociology to social psychology. The common thread between the authors and their chapters is the reliance on interpretative sociology and qualitative methods that include in-depth interviews, participant observation, textual analysis and visual methods. The majority of the case studies are set in the USA and there are also some very enlightening contributions from the UK, Canada, Germany, Russia and the Netherlands. Although the effort to gather such a rich variety of geographical areas and perspectives is outstanding, it would be more appropriate to describe the book's perspective as Western and not 'International'.

The various contributors to the book depart from a common understanding of home as a set of practices that can be performed in multiple locations and thus can be 'strived for and accomplished to greater and lesser degrees' (11). As Kusenbach and Paulsen note in the Introduction, in (some) Western societies there is an ideological connection between home and house. Moreover, they claim that 'home becomes by and large "community" when places larger than dwellings are considered whereas the use of "belonging" for these contexts is more popular in Europe' (16–17). We really wonder whether the claim regarding Europe makes empirical sense, since in both the public and political debate in Europe, spaces at all scales are labeled in terms of 'home'.

The book, in the main, is marked by a constant dialogue with a concept of home that not only is bound to the domestic and private sphere, but it has a very particular set of characteristics. In addition, there is an ongoing discussion around the weight that 'ownership' has in the home experiences of a diverse range of people, particularly set against the constraints of contemporary real estate markets and the cultural expectations around what constitutes a proper place to build a home. This dialogue evidences a very interesting tension between what home 'should be' according to the mainstream Western ideal and what home really becomes in the context of everyday life (Figure 1).

As a constant, the standard upon which this broad range of home experiences is measured against is sketched in the first

Figure 1 Krista Paulsen, Florida, 2003

chapter 'Modeling Home: Ideals of Residential Life in Builders' Show Houses'. By analyzing builders' show houses in Florida, Paulsen manages to unravel the cultural expectations behind the American ideal house and how this very model evidences the process of meaning making of home in the USA and an important portion of the Western world. Ultimately, house and home become conflated and a series of expectations around social class, family composition and gender, make up for the ideal home: single family, detached and more importantly privately owned houses. The pristine and carefully crafted 'ideal' homes described by Paulsen make a stark contrast with the messy business of making homes that is described in the later chapters. The inclusion of a broad range of people in different places and their experiences of home, allows the analysis of home beyond the physical aspect of it by discussing its role in identity formation and expression, and the feelings of belonging in different life cycles and places.

The most obvious examples of real estate markets and housing prices determining to great extent the home feelings of people are the chapter by Strom and Greenbaum about the views on homeownership in the wake of the foreclosure crisis and Lauster's chapter on the intersection between housing and family plans, in the context of the steep housing prices of the Vancouver metropolitan area.

Two chapters come to mind when thinking about the home-making experiences in different life cycles and the way in which the physical aspect of home has to be negotiated and

people find ways to adjust their expectations around housing and thus, home. The first one is the chapter by Warren and Williams, 'Displaced People in Assisted Living', analyzing the home-making strategies of elderly women experiencing a 'displacement from home', understood as the loss of the physical structure that provided the basis of a great part of their identities. The second one is Zavisca's chapter 'A Home Not One's Own: How Young Russians Living with Extended Family Negotiate Space', which provides an in-depth insight into the intergenerational struggles over the domestic space in post-Soviet Russia. One of the highlights of this chapter is the way in which it portrays intergenerational struggles by examining contemporary 'modern' taste vis-à-vis Soviet 'old fashioned' taste.

Two more chapters analyze the experience of people living in 'stigmatized' home environments and the way in which the lack of privacy and ownership is negotiated. 'Homelessness and Conceptions of Home', written by Borchard, explores the link between the physical and cognitive/emotional aspects of home and underlines the importance of the latter aspects. In turn, the chapter by Kusenbach, 'Place Feelings and Life Stories in Florida Mobile Communities', shows how personal feelings of home are aligned with general ideas and expectations, such ideas not only permeate the domestic sphere, but larger areas such as the communities where these spheres are located.

Ultimately and perhaps because to greater or lesser extents the homes in this set of chapters are being compared to an 'ideal' standard of a safe haven that is private and personal, the general feeling is that although people manage to find ways to make homes through certain discourses and practices, such homes are incomplete shadows of what home was, or even worse, of what it never was (Figure 2).

There are two visual chapters that feel a bit out of place not only because of their methods but also because of their focus. Gayotto's chapter on dual belongings in the USA and the auto-ethnographic piece by Humphry focusing on the way in which feelings of belonging to a London neighborhood happen over time, deal with very important aspects of home that deserved a more thorough discussion in the book. Although the general message is well received, particularly 'Somewhere in Between: Chicago' by Gayotto stands alone in providing insight in another important aspect of the way in which many people living in the USA experience home: through a multiplicity of identities and links that bind them to different countries.

Four chapters set in Europe look at home beyond this idea of a private haven and start their analysis by focusing on the role the public and semi-public sphere might play in the home feelings of people. Particularly, Wästerfors' 'Fragments of Home in Youth Care Institutions' in Sweden and its much needed focus on the ways in which people make (or unmake) home instead of taking for granted the 'homeliness' of the settings. Such focus allows the analysis of the 'inconspicuous and colorless' home practices that can create a personal space—either spatial, symbolic or both.

Watt's chapter, 'Community and Belonging in a London Suburb: A Study of Incomers', explores the link between place, mobility and belonging through 'elective belonging', understood as a conscious and individual choice to create an attachment to place. In the case of these middle-class incomers they might choose the place for better housing while keeping their surroundings at arm's length. The chapter reflects one of the primary debates around home and belonging in Europe: whether a feeling of belonging is granted by rootedness or if it can be purposefully constructed and chosen by the individual. This discussion is followed by Christmann's chapter 'Belonging and Home: The Perspective of Urban Pioneers in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods' set in two Berlin neighborhoods. Christmann rightly points out that in contrast to Watt's middle-class newcomers, urban pioneers

Figure 2   Bia Gayotto, Chicago, 2011

interact with the more 'rooted' residents and see themselves as part of the community. The last chapter by Binken and Blokland, 'Everyday Encounters and Belonging in Public Spaces: Findings from Rotterdam and Utrecht', provides a detailed analysis of forms of urban encounters in the public space of two Dutch cities.

Overall *Home: International Perspectives on Culture, Identity, and Belonging* is a solid contribution to the research on home and it is a book worth reading. To our surprise, however, the authors don't theorize the remarkable different foci of the North American vs. the European chapters. As the book itself proves, there is a huge difference between the study of home, focused on the private sphere in the former and the public sphere in the latter. This is no coincidence. It shows how the politicization regarding home diverges between the continents: the lack of home feelings is mostly experienced and framed as a public issue in (Western) Europe, whereas the crisis of home manifests itself most clearly at the household level in the USA (see Duyvendak 2011). Dealing with 'home' at various scales, on various continents, at different times is always welcome but it has additional value to actively compare, analyze and understand these differences and/or similarities across time and space.

Reference

Duyvendak, Jan Willem. 2011. *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

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