J Hous and the Built Environ
DOI 10.1007/s10901-015-9492-z

ARTICLE

At home in generic places: personalizing strategies of the mobile rich

Melissa Ley-Cervantes[1] · **Jan Willem Duyvendak**[2]

Abstract In the literature it is often suggested that mobile people, like their non-mobile counterparts, look for *particular places* to connect with. This has been documented in research focused on the way in which migrants (re)create *particular places* in their countries of destination (i.e., the formation of ethnic enclaves). However, our extensive fieldwork among Mexican professionals in Madrid, such as postgraduate students, academics, IT professionals, journalists, and others, point toward the opposite direction: for the very mobile and the recently arrived *particular places* matter little (Duyvendak in The politics of home. Belonging and nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011; Ley-Cervantes in Stuck in the middle: home-making strategies of Mexican Middling Migrants. Ph.D. Thesis, Autonomous University of Madrid, 2012). Instead they rely on *generic places*, such as airports, chain restaurants or hotels to feel at home. Instead of taking for granted the homeliness of certain places, this paper aims to inquire the role of *generic places* in the home-making experiences of a small and rather privileged portion of the moving population.

Keywords Chronically mobile · Generic places · Home · Madrid · Mexicans · Personalization

✉ Melissa Ley-Cervantes
melissa.ley@uam.es

Jan Willem Duyvendak
Duyvendak@uva.nl

[1] El Colegio de la Frontera Norte-CONACyT, Calle Técnicos 277 Esq. Río Pánuco, Col. Tecnológico, 64700 Monterrey, NL, Mexico

[2] University of Amsterdam, PO Box 15508, 1001 NA Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Published online: 04 November 2015

1 Introduction

Many of our era's leading sociologists (Bauman 1998a, b; Beck 2000; Calhoun 1991; Giddens 1991; Hannerz 1996; Harvey 1989; Urry 2000), and prominently Castells (1996), have placed movement as a central concept in their understanding of the modern world. They agree that this heightened spatial mobility has changed the meaning of place and space, notwithstanding, several positions regarding the importance of place can be identified in this debate. They range from the total relativization of the meaning of places in our mobile era to the very opposite idea that local places have grown more important due to globalization (Robertson 1995). In this setting, *generic places* have become the backbone of globalization as they represent the infrastructure that sustains the enhanced mobility of goods, people and information. Such places are the product of a process of standardization that facilitates communication and movement across physical and cultural borders. These places feel immediately familiar and because of their generic qualities, they provide certain 'cognitive assurances' that have the potential of fostering feelings of home independently of their exact location. In words of Delalex, "the recurrence of motorways, service stations, hotels, and restaurant chains act like a semantic and spatial Esperanto, allowing foreigners to feel at home no matter where they are" (2002, p. 108).

Much of the inquiry on *generic places* has been focused on urban re-structuring processes that, more often than not, displace disadvantaged populations from the places they call home and *in lieu* create rather homogeneous urban landscapes "through professionally designed and commercially constructed spaces and places whose invented traditions, sanitized and simplified symbolism and commercialized heritage all make for convergence rather than spatial identity" (Knox 2005, p. 4). In the wake of the proliferation of generic places all over the world, Beatley and many others argue for the importance of *particular places* and highlight that "we need places that provide healthy living environments and also nourish the soul-distinctive places worthy of our loyalty and commitment, places where we feel at home, places that inspire and uplift and stimulate us and provide social and environmental sustenance" (2004, pp. 2–3).

The reaction against the proliferation of *generic places* is exemplified by the 'Save the Castro' project, which was aimed to protect the process of identity-building and spatialization of gay experience in the famous San Francisco neighborhood. This project was launched in the face of an impending change in the demographic makeup of the neighborhood: migration of straight couples into the Castro, suburbanization of some gay couples and a decline in the influx of gays and lesbians from the Midwest (Duyvendak 2011, p. 81). One of the focal points in the heated debates was the proliferation of *generic places* across the neighborhood; such places were not only attracting more tourists and other 'outsiders' but there was a fear that they were eroding the traditional meanings associated with the neighborhood. What is interesting about the case of the Castro is that it was a product of the mobility of LGTB populations leaving traditional rural communities to inner city neighborhoods in the hopes of finding a better life. In this sense, Castro is an example of a place constituted by a complex network of flows and a process of identity formation through mobile practices that inherently changed the character of the place and that apparently keeps on changing it.

Although indeed, the familiarity of *generic places* produced by repetition of physical settings, social structures and standards is not enough to foster feelings of home, it is important to understand that we might be underestimating the potentialities of such places

"both as a social environment of meaningful interaction but also as a new public domain creating cultures of movement" (Jensen 2009, p. 146).

This paper argues that for the construction of 'home' more is needed than what *generic places* have to offer, because home involves a process of personalization that reflects the identity of an individual or a collectivity. Such processes involve drawing physical and, more importantly, symbolic boundaries in places at different geographical scales, and they might take different shapes and degrees depending on the characteristics of the place. *Particular places*, for example, are places that are already highly personalized and reflect the identity of an individual or a collectivity and as such can be a home for some (varying from the house, the neighborhood to the nation). In the case of the experiences of migrants and other moving populations, the literature shows that feelings of home might be achieved overtime and through a great deal of personal engagement with the new place of residence (Abdelhandy 2008; Andrews 2005; Bozkurt 2009); and/or by sustaining and (re)creating links with past home-places by acts of imagination (remembering and story-telling), the recreation of habits and traditions, and actual physical travel (Ahmed 1999; Rapport and Dawson 1998). In turn, the role that *generic places* have on the home-making experiences of people, is underexplored, perhaps because the unhomeliness of such settings is assumed a priori (some exceptions include: Lewinson 2007; Nowicka 2007; Sleegers 2008; Tandogan and Incirlioglu 2004).

Instead of taking for granted the homeliness of places, this article will critically explore how personalization of different places interlocks with the feelings of home of the mobile and privileged, in relation to the following categories: generic versus particular and private versus public. One of the objectives then is to provide a preliminary framework to understand why and how different places might foster feelings of home. The second objective is to explore the home-making strategies of those whose lives are marked by travel and movement, instead of focusing on those migrants who look to resettle in their countries of destination.

The paper builds on a larger ethnographic study that took place between 2008 and 2011 and was focused on the home-making strategies and feelings of belonging of a group of relatively privileged Mexican migrants in Madrid. The research is based on an inductive approach where informants could talk about their 'homes' and other places of belonging and the way they experienced them while moving. It departed from a transnational perspective, problematizing the traditional associations of 'home' with fixity and stability, allowing for the exploration of the experience of home at different geographical scales: from the global, to the national, to the local. As part of the methodological design, the informants were asked to choose a place where they felt comfortable and 'at home' to do the interviews. Somewhat to our surprise, and this only highlights the proclivity to link home to *particular places*, many of the informants chose places like Starbucks and chain restaurants for the interviews. This was more salient in two subgroups of the studied population: those who had recently arrived and those who were chronically mobile. Which begs the question: What is the role of *generic places* in the home-making strategies of these people?

Although in general our informants identified some *particular places* in Mexico as part of their homes, the findings reveal that there was a strong variation in the strategies and kinds of places that fostered feelings of home in Madrid. The re-settlers (those with long-term stays in the city) were able to re-construct their homes in the private sphere via a process of personalization and, in some cases and overtime, they were able to participate in processes of collective meaning-making of some public places such as certain neighborhoods or the city itself. However, for the recently arrived and those who were chronically

mobile, *particular places* in Madrid were rarely regarded as home and in some cases even fostered feelings of alienation. Instead, they relied on *private generic places* to feel at home in a new city. In such scenarios, personalization occurs through things that do not require an investment of time in a place nor require permanently altering the actual physical space to create a feeling of home.

In Sect. 2 of the paper, the data and methods used for this exploratory work will be described in detail. In Sect. 3, we will develop a framework to understand how the process of personalization worked in the case study in the following places: the private and the particular; the public and the particular; the private and the generic; the public and the generic. At the end of the article some final remarks will be presented.

2 Data and methods

The majority of the Mexicans living in Madrid could be described as "neither elite nor extremely poor or in dire straits but very much in the middle" (Wiles 2008, p. 117). 'Middling migrants', a term recently coined in the field of migration studies, are usually skilled workers, holidaymakers, students, retirees and adventurers and their main characteristics are that they occupy a middle status position in their countries of origin and that they are usually well-educated (Conradson and Latham 2005; Favell 2009; Wiles 2008). For these middle-class migrants, international mobility can be used as an exit strategy from harsh conditions in their own countries or as a strategy of class reproduction in a world where traditional means of distinction, such as having secondary and tertiary education, are blurring (Bourdieu 1987; Scott 2006).

Choosing to focus on Mexican 'middling-migrants' was convenient for the study since they were not only highly visible, accessible and representing the majority of the Mexican population in the city, but also because the migration of Mexican middle classes is (understandably) understudied. More importantly, in the burgeoning but relatively new field of studies on 'home', focusing on a relatively privileged population that was in control over its own mobility (legal recognition and access to various means of communication and transportation) and had its immediate needs covered (shelter, basic income, access to health services) provided greater analytical leverage and theoretical insight.

Between 2008 and 2011, we interviewed 34 Mexicans in various points of their stay in Madrid; their time of stay varying between 5 months and 16 years. We identified three subgroups: the recently arrived (RA) who were mainly postgraduate students who had spent less than 1 year in the city, and whose stays were determined by the length of their programs; the chronically mobile (CM) who were professionals that because of their jobs or lifestyles were travelling constantly and at the time of the interviews were using Madrid as their home-base (between 1 and 4 years); and the re-settlers (S)—who are not the subject of this article—were people that opted to put down roots in Madrid, and in many cases had started off as students or as highly mobile people.

Seventeen were women and 17 men, all of them had at least a bachelor degree and most of them were pursuing or had already obtained postgraduate education. They were born between 1966 and 1984 and at the time of the interviews the youngest was 24 and the oldest was 45 years old. They grew up in the context of a neoliberal restructuring process in Mexico that started with the liberalization of the economy in 1982 and reached its peak with Mexico's entrance into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. According to Hiernaux and Lindón (2004), the new enterprises linked to international

capital and markets in Mexico City, fostered the creation of a new managerial middle class with very distinctive spatial practices. Such practices range from an adjustment to the homogenization of different places, to the appropriation of traditional spaces in the city and the subsequent processes of gentrification. Overall, they pinpoint to the identification with 'American culture' as one of the main components of this new middle-class identity. Although their study is limited to Mexico City, other urban areas in the country experienced this same process. Moreover, this was a generation of middle-class Mexicans that experienced the democratization of higher education. As a strategy of class reproduction, they had access to schemes of international mobility for higher education, scholarships, loans and international networks that facilitated their mobility, not only as students but also as professionals.

More notably, when we describe these Mexicans being relatively privileged, we are not only talking about levels of education, spatial practices, access to travel and other goods. Although in discourse Mexico identifies as a nation of mestizos, in practice the social stratification is deeply imbricated with the ethno-racial stratification produced during the colonial era, which placed those descending from Europeans at the top of the social ladder and Indigenous people at the bottom (Bonfil-Batalla 1996). In this sense, along with identifying themselves as relatively privileged or middle class, our informants pointed out that they did not look 'like your typical Mexican', implicitly re-asserting their place within the ethno-racial stratification prevailing in Mexico. The few exceptions were an informant of Japanese descent, and three informants who described themselves as looking 'very Mexican', which meant they identified as mestizos. In some of the interviews issues surrounding racism and discrimination were raised. When asked for concrete examples, they generally talked about being mocked because of their accent, recalled some 'jokes' regarding Mexico being a former Spanish colony or cited events in the newspapers about racist incidents against the Latin American community at large.

At the time of the interviews they were living in Madrid, a city that went through a process of restructuring and rebranding that intended to reposition the city as a global and interconnected capital. The ambition to reposition Madrid was visible between the incorporation of Spain into the European Union in 1986 (then known as the European Communities) and the start of the global financial crisis in 2008, the time frame coinciding with the period of arrival of the informants. In those years, the city started to attract multinational companies, got involved in a serious process of infrastructure construction and attracted people from outside Spain to participate in this process of restructuring. Although the Spanish labor market tends to attract a low-skilled immigrant population, it was through a mix of entrepreneurial activities, transnational links and enhanced mobility that our informants were able to build careers in their fields of expertise, either in Spain or Mexico (or yet another country).

3 Space for personalization?

We argue that the potentiality of a place to foster feelings of home depends on the possibility of personalizing it, of achieving some sense of control over the space and imbue it with meaning, this is to say, to incorporate some elements that satisfy our 'personal' needs and preferences in a given point in time. Since personalization of a space can function as a territorial marker that draws symbolic boundaries by displaying the identity of an individual or a group, such boundaries might have the effects of actual walls.

According to Omar et al. (2012), personalization can be achieved by various means: modification of structural elements (such as walls), decoration, or preservation of the order and cleanliness of the place. This classification shows that the personalization of a place—in the literature too often conceptualized as private and particular—can range from making permanent alterations, changing the ambience of a place, to maintaining its order. In other words: personalization strategies can have permanent, semi-permanent or temporary impact on places. Uncovering the possibilities of personalization beyond the idea of altering the visual and/or structural aspects of a space, Tian and Belk (2005) develop the notion of "fields of privacy". Examples range from use of headphones that build "walls of sonic texture to shut out noise pollution and the unwelcome contagion of others' conversations that otherwise invaded their cubicles"; to the use of scents and aromatherapy to alter the ambience of a generic office space (p. 300).

In this sense, the personalization of *private generic places* involves a temporary way of drawing symbolic and sometimes even physical boundaries. This does not mean that these places therefore become 'particular': they are still predominantly generic—and recognizable as such for others—but in order to feel as home, people give them a 'personal touch'. In turn, *private particular places* are almost by definition 'personal'. This is less true though for *particular public places* that can be rather un-homey for those who do not identify with the public, collective identity (see the example of the Castro). *Public generic places* are also more difficult to 'personalize'—a condition to feel at home—than those who are private.

In the following table, we present a general classification of particular and generic places and how personalization works. With this in mind, in the next sections we further develop these categories by analyzing how migrants relate to various places and how different degrees of personalization impact on their ability to feel at home.

	Particular	Generic
Private	*Haven. Particular and private* Generally we understand home as particular and private place. It is expected to reflect someone's identity and in this sense the personalization of such places is *encouraged*	*Harbor. Generic and private* Such places (hotels, coffee shops, et cetera) are made for people that either do not have their own place to personalize and make a home or do not need a high level of personalization to feel at home and in contrast feel at home with little particular things. Personalization of such places is *allowed* to some degree
Public	*Heaven. Particular and public* Such places tend to reflect the identity of a collectivity—a nation, city or neighborhood. In this sense, monuments, parks, museums and buildings can be designed to reflect certain histories and collective identity, constituting a 'collective home'. An individual personalization of these places is *prohibited* and in some cases penalized by the law; collective 'personalization' may be fine	*Hub. Generic and public* Mostly comprised of transitional spaces that are supposed to be just crossed or passed by. Motor highways, metro stations and some public squares or streets come to mind. Personalization of such places is often *discouraged* but they might present temporary forms of personalization exemplified by graffiti, flash mobs and alternative ways of using them such as waiting, gathering, sleeping

3.1 Haven: private particular places

'Ideal' homes are expected to be *private particular places* and to have a high degree of personalization that reflects the identity of its inhabitants and satisfies their needs for security, permanence and privacy. In addition to the need of privacy—understood as freedom from surveillance—and depending on the social and cultural expectations around what constitutes a *haven*, traditional homes might also include other dimensions, such as "privatism (home centeredness, or the tendency to enjoy leisure time inside one's dwelling rather than in the public sphere), and privatization (the move toward private ownership)" (Paulsen 2013, p. 28). But as Williams and McIntyre (2001) note, in the majority of the cases the dwellings we inhabit are selected from a small set of show models and option packages that are personalized over time and become homes. In this sense, the personalization of a *particular private place* requires the investment of time, commitment with a place and in most cases, money.

For the recently arrived (RA), moving to Madrid involved leaving behind their family homes. Given the real estate prices in the city, they had to share apartments, where personalization was difficult.

> How were your first months in the City?
> The first months I shared an apartment with a couple of Spanish guys (…) we were sharing the apartment, but in the living-room there were pictures of one of them and his family hanging on the walls and it was weird… the idea of sharing an apartment is well SHARING. (Diego, Chef, RA).

Although many authors deplore the loss "of our ability to connect with particular places" in general, what it is not often thought is that such particular places might be alienating for some and that what can be home for some, it is not for others. The family photos hanging on the living room (a shared space in the apartment) drew clear symbolic boundaries regarding the ownership of the place, of whose home it was and who had the right to feel at home there.

Moreover, in the words of Blunt and Dowling (2006), "ideas of home become attached to physical structures we call dwellings, (…) an imaginary of home that casts the social relations of middle-class, white, heterosexual, nuclear families, and its material manifestation in the form of the detached suburban house, as an ideal, or homely, home" (p. 132). For the chronically mobile (CM), the experience of migration had changed what was seen as the expected (hetero-normative) lifecycle: settling down, getting married and having offspring. In this sense, constructing an 'ideal' home involved either the return to Mexico or it meant that they could construct homes under their own terms and at their own pace, but frequently away from their country of origin.

> Would you go back to Mexico?
> I mean I don't see the point of going back to Mexico. Why should I go back? If I have to start from scratch I rather do it somewhere else. My friends are still there, but they are living another life stage, they are having families and becoming fathers… and the thing is when I go to Mexico I feel old and here, here I am still a young dude and I might not want to start a family yet, or at all. Here I have met so many people that are jumping from one place to the other and, why not? I intend to live a life full of new experiences (Eduardo, IT consultant, CM).

While many of our informants eventually returned to Mexico—or were highly invested in Madrid—and were able to build a *haven*, others kept on moving long after our fieldwork had finished. Whether this mobility was a temporary life stage or a permanent lifestyle, the fact was that the home-making strategies and experiences of "people that are jumping from one place to another" do not involve the notion of the highly personalized private place.

3.2 Heaven: public particular places

Public particular places in contrast are designed to reflect a collective identity and might engender feelings of home and belonging in those who identify with the history and meanings attached to the place by the collectivity. As such, they are subject of stricter regulation, can become a battlefield for contending definitions of the character of the place and can be alienating for those who do not align themselves with the public and collective identity. Monuments and historic buildings are the epitome of such places; but also some neighborhoods such as the example of the Castro since the campaign to limit the presence of *generic places* can be conceptualized as an attempt to 'collectively personalize' a public place and 'stabilize' its meaning and thus fighting against the empirical reality that many places' meanings are fluid and can change overtime.

Another fine example of the 'collective personalization' of a neighborhood—and how *particular public places* can be un-homey for some—is provided by Ong (1999) in her depiction of the "public battles over race/taste" that "have revolved around the transformation of middle-class neighborhoods by rich Asian newcomers" in the San Francisco Bay Area. In contrast with the "Save the Castro" project, what the (white) long-time residents of such neighborhoods were fighting against were the ways in which (Asian) newcomers personalize their homes. In the surface, the issue at stake is the types of houses that affluent Asian newcomers are building to accommodate multigenerational families in upper and middle-class neighborhoods, characterized by low density, single-family detached houses and a Victorian or Mediterranean aesthetic. However, at the core of the discussion the problem was more about race and class than about aesthetics since "by locating themselves in white suburbs rather than in Chinatown (…) well to-do Asian newcomers breach the spatial and symbolic borders that have disciplined Asian Americans and kept them on the margins of the American nation" (Ong 1999, p. 100).

The relationship that this group of Mexicans in Madrid, had with 'ethnic' neighborhoods was ambivalent at first. For many of the recently arrived choosing a place based on the ethnic affinity they had with the larger population, was a common strategy because of their lack of inside knowledge about the city. Although they were familiar with the dynamics in the Madrilenian neighborhoods that housed the large Latin American community in the city, for them such places eventually created feelings of alienation.

> How were your first months in the City?
> My first place was in what I call the 'Madrilenian Bronx'… You know that we feel closer because of the geographical and historical links, but the lack of common sense in all of us (Latin Americans) can be really bothering. The guy driving with really loud music, people drinking on your doorsteps (…) In all of Europe there is respect for the pedestrian, but you just step in the neighborhood and they just bully you with the car. It is like Latin America's branch in Spain. So I thought, why did I come here? To get more of the same? (Andrés, Student, RA).

In contrast, those who had spent a long time in the city were able to locate *particular public places* to identify with. Frequently they mentioned the same neighborhood: "I like

the fact that many of its neighborhoods—but specially the Salamanca neighborhood—looks like Mexico City" (Cristina, Physical Therapist, S). When they associated the Salamanca neighborhood in Madrid with Mexico City, they were referring to neighborhoods inhabited by people with high incomes such as *Polanco*, *Coyoacán*, *San Ángel*, *Condesa* or *Roma*. This demonstrates how, for these privileged migrants, being able to reproduce a class identity was more conducive to home-feelings than ethnicity, for example. The chronically mobile, in turn, highlighted the qualities of the neighborhoods where they lived based on 'functionality and location'.

> What do you like about the place where you live?
> I like the neighborhood, it is not that it 'caught my eye' but it is clean, connected and well located. If I move out it would be because I found an apartment with a more functional set up. Since I live and work in the same place I would need something more functional: a specific place to work and a place to make the rest of my life. (Julio, Journalist, CM)

This is not to say that this sub-group of people did not feel the need to reproduce a class identity or that they did not identify themselves as Mexican or Latin American, but that for their lifestyles and preferences they did not need to identify with the history and meanings attached to the place by the collectivity; what they highlighted about a place was its location and its connectivity.

3.3 Harbor: private generic places

Research on the corporate employees' personalizing habits in the work-place, has shown that as a by-product of technological advances, certain types of employees are now expected to work away from an established place of business, with the aid of cell phones, laptops, and remote technology (Duyvendak 2011; Tian and Belk 2005; Wells 2000). As it was shown in previous sections, the notion of home as a place for privacy, relaxation and intimacy begins to dissolve as remote technology allows the work sphere to intrude the domestic sphere.

As the boundaries of home and work are constantly blurred for a great part of the professionalized working force all over the world, in the universe of the chronically mobile, the boundaries between home and away become blurred as well. The standardized practices in *private generic places* such as rental apartments, hotels or university housing, where functionality prevails over any other quality, provides a familiar setting where the landing for the chronically mobile is as seamless as possible.

> What do you need to feel at home?
> Well I need social relationships, freedom, a space with certain conditions: a nice Wi-Fi connection, books, newspapers… good food and people who love me (Carlos, NGO worker, CM)

Home then, becomes the place where a multiplicity of spheres connect—often with the aid of technology—and become territorialized in a place that might not be particular, but that is personalized by the interests, needs and affections of the dweller. In this sense, what becomes really important in the home-making strategies of highly—and not so highly—mobile people is the ability to remain connected. It is no wonder that one of the main characteristics of private and some *public generic places* catering to mobile professionals is that they all offer free and immediate Wi-Fi connection to all its users and that these places are set up for people that are 'ready to go'.

Sofía, a Mexican-Brazilian filmmaker that had been travelling around since she was a child, was interviewed around the time she moved in with her partner. She lived in 6 different countries in the past ten years, and because of her work, she had to travel constantly.

> What do you do you need (to feel at home)? Or put?
> I don't put (up) anything. I mean maybe a poster, but, you know what? For example, in Cuba I lived in a dorm-room and everyone was living like that…I always insert myself in a half-made reality and make a home with my little personal belongings. Now that we are moving in together (she and her partner) we went to IKEA to buy things and it was a special day in my life… to buy forks together, it was like: WOW! Weird! But in general, to be honest I don't need to put things up… (Sofía, Filmmaker, CM).

Being able to insert in a 'half-made reality' is the essence and the allure of some private generic places catering to people whose lives are marked by a great mobility. Of course these 'half-made realities' had to be somewhat generic and not to involve high degrees of personalization in order to foster feelings of home; for the 'little personal belongings' might lose their meaning when displayed in a place highly personalized by someone else.

This preference for the *private generic place* to dwell was shared by many of the recently arrived, who were more able to pin point the exact things or activities that made them feel at home in a *generic place*, like short-term rentals. Many of the recently arrived talked about feeling 'transported back to Mexico' by the sounds, flavors and smells produced by personalizing habits that were linked to Mexico and performed in the private sphere.

> What do you need to feel at home?
> I live with my sister, and we are hunkered down in the apartment because we cook Mexican food, and watch Mexican TV, and we feel at home because it feels so familiar (Ana, Student, RA).

This need to 'hunker down' in a private place was partly caused by the quite intimidating character of Madrid for outsiders. Madrilenians frequently use the term *de toda la vida*—lifelong and traditional—to describe one of the most positive qualities of their relationships with certain people and places. For them, it means that these relationships are characterized by reliability and quality and, above all, by tradition and history. Such relationships exist with a wide range of people and places: from friends to the butcher and the apothecary, from the hospital to the dry cleaner and the bar. For newcomers, forming such relationships in the city can be hard, not only because it implies a huge time investment but also because interactions with 'the natives' can sometimes be disconcerting.

Semi-private generic places such as Starbucks (or the Spanish versions *Café y Té*, *Vips*, *Gambrinus*) attracted many of our interviewees for different reasons. One of the reasons is that such places capitalize on the constant blurring between domestic, leisure and work-related spheres and provide a place specifically designed to host some of the intersecting activities that once were performed in separated spheres. Also, the design of these places actively seeks to foster a feeling of belonging and a sense of community through corporate and standardized practices that imply a balance between conversation and familiarity between the barista and the patron and a quick and efficient service (Bookman 2014, pp. 90–91). Since they allow the performance of a multiplicity of tasks beyond just drinking coffee—gathering with friends, conducting business meetings, working alone, watching people, et cetera—through an extended period of time, they provide a safe place

for informal interactions between strangers. And finally, such businesses share similar characteristics and standardized procedures, that somewhat dilute the particularities of the places where they are located.

3.4 Hub: public generic places

Public generic places are the most diverse category we have defined. They range from highways, metro stations, some public squares to airports, showing the ambivalence about how personalized they can be. One can think about flash mobs described by Lavrinec (2011) as a way to establish an alternative 'choreography' in what she calls transitional spaces that are supposed to be just passed by in the achievement of specific goals. Although there is little research on the personalization habits on airports, for authors like Iain Chambers (1990), such places embody the ethos of the chronically mobile: "a collective metaphor of cosmopolitan existence where the pleasure of travel is not only to arrive, but also not to be in any particular place" (57–58 cited in Cresswell 2002, p. 16)

As it has been shown, location, connectivity and functionality are the central elements that are valued in the places catering to the lifestyles of this group of people. Although the feelings experienced in these places have more to do with the places of departure than of the destination, in the biographies of the mobile, airports generate strong feelings. They are associated with feelings of coming (or leaving) home, as in the case of this informant who was recalling his earlier years in Madrid.

> My family is not here and I felt lonely, it is more noticeable when you go to Mexico for the holidays and then back at the airport there is no one to pick you up, there isn't a welcoming committee with *mariachis* (laughing), those kinds of things do affect me. (Fernando, Publicist, S)

For the chronically mobile, Madrid was seen as a *hub* that connected Mexican professionals and worked as an ebb and flow for those people and places important in their personal biographies (before the economic crisis Barajas Airport connected most of the flights from and to Latin America).

> What do you like about the place where you live?
> I think Madrid is like a neuralgic point for those who come to Europe or live within Europe. It is easy to get here, or out of here depending on the mood. This is one of the things I like the most (Santiago, Journalist, CM).

While the access to modern means of communication and travel have changed the way in which privileged movers relate to places and people, this does not mean that their homes are completely detached from *particular places*, just that their attachments are no longer 'given' but purposefully constructed and maintained, in words of Savage et al. (2005): "Belonging is not that of an individual to a fixed community rooted in place, but rather, one in which the place becomes valuable to the individual" (p. 80). Of course, because of their access to certain goods and means of communication, privileged movers have the possibility of opting-out from several aspects of place that might not provide them comfort or a homey feeling, or simply moving elsewhere.

4 Conclusion

Although the article is focused on a tiny fraction of the moving population and the findings are therefore not generalizable, we can pinpoint some findings that might be useful to expand our understanding of what home entails, at least for the very mobile. Although many of our informants were in temporary situations (the recently arrived), others had actually been moving around for years and this mobility was part not only of their job, but of their lifestyle as well (the chronically mobile). They were not 'homeless' in a symbolic way but their homes were territorialized differently and what was sought after was a place to connect, to relax and ultimately, to move on.

While significant relationships with meaningful places were maintained in spite the distance, their reaction to particular places in Madrid evidences that, in some cases, the romanticization of roots, stability and a highly personalized place, might actually hinder the home feelings of the moving population. This is because the heavy personalization of different places has the function of a territorial marker drawing physical and, more importantly, symbolic boundaries that indicate the 'ownership' of the place and indicate who has the right to feel at home there. However, 'lighter' processes of personalization allow people to take the initial steps to feel at home in a place: bring some space under control. Obviously, and especially in the experiences of migration, not everybody has the same resources to do so. Identifying with the collective and feeling at home in a *public particular place* might prove difficult for migrants, notably those in the earlier stages of re-settlement or the chronically mobile, and this might hold true for migrants from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

Although some migrants might be able to build homes in *particular private places* (havens), such homes involve a financial and, more importantly, a time investment that many immigrants cannot or will not afford. In this sense privileged migrants might have the economic resources to create and sustain private particular places (individual homes or gated communities), but sometimes the ways in which they personalize their homes and display their identity are not in tune with the collectivity, as shown by Ong (1999) and her depiction of the battle surrounding the transformation of middle-class neighborhoods by rich Asian newcomers. However, as we have shown, (some) privileged movers are able to 'control' and, therefore, feel at home in *generic places*, especially private ones.

In sum, *generic places* are not all inherently un-homey. In fact, *private generic places* offer a blank canvass for people to lightly personalize and thus achieve a feeling of home, depending on their needs, lifestyle and life cycle. From the houses sold from option packages and show models, to the short-term rental apartments, hotel rooms or even university housing, a light personalization of places can engender feelings of home even in conditions of temporality and movement. Even though their homogeneity and standardization might be the central reason for which they are defined as void of meaning and a threat to particular home-places, such standardization provides familiarity and cognitive assurance, not only for international movers, but for many who move inside city as well.

References

Abdelhandy, D. (2008). Representing the homeland: Lebanese diasporic notions of home and return in a global context. *Cultural Dynamics, 20*, 53–72.

Ahmed, S. (1999). Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement. *International Journal of Cultural Studies, 2*(3), 329–347.

Andrews, H. (2005). Feeling at home. Embodying Britishness in a Spanish charter tourist resort. *Tourist Studies, 5*(3), 247–266.
Bauman, Z. (1998a). *Globalization: The human consequences*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Bauman, Z. (1998b). *Postmodernity and its discontents*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Beatley, T. (2004). *Native to nowhere: Sustaining home and community in a global age*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
Beck, U. (2000). *What is globalization?*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home (Key ideas in geography)*. London: Routledge.
Bonfil-Batalla, G. (1996). *México Profundo: Reclaiming a civilization*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Bookman, S. (2014). Brands and urban life: Specialty coffee, consumers and the co-creation of urban cafe sociality. *Space and culture, 17*(1), 85–99.
Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 32*(1), 1–17.
Bozkurt, E. (2009). *Conceptualising 'Home': The question of belonging among Turkish families in Germany*. Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag.
Calhoun, C. (Ed.). (1991). *Social theory and the politics of identity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society* (Vol. 1). Massachusetts: Blackwell.
Chambers, I. (1990). *Border dialogues: Journeys in postmodernity*. London: Routledge.
Conradson, D., & Latham, A. (2005). Transnational urbanism: Attending to everyday practices and mobilities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 31*(2), 227–233.
Cresswell, T. (2002). Introduction: Theorizing place. In G. Verstraete & T. Cresswell (Eds.), *Mobilizing place, placing mobility: The politics of representation in a globalized world* (pp. 11–32.) *Thamyris/ Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race, 1*(9).
Delalex, G. (2002). Non-places: The everyday experience of flows. *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory, 11*(9), 101–115.
Delalex, G. (2006). *Go with the flow: Architecture, infrastructure and the everyday experience of mobility*. Helsinki: University of art and Design.
Duyvendak, J. W. (2011). *The politics of home. Belonging and nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Favell, A. (2009). *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free movement and mobility in an integrating Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Hannerz, U. (1996). *Transnational connections: Culture, people, places*. London: Routledge.
Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
Hiernaux, D., & Lindón, A. (2004). Metropolitan deterritorialization and reterritorialization: Mexico City [Desterritorialización y reterritorialización metropolitana: la ciudad de México]. *Documents d'Analisi Geografica, 44*, 71–88.
Jensen, O. (2009). Flows of meaning, cultures of movements: urban mobility as meaningful everyday life practice. *Mobilities, 4*(1), 139–158.
Knox, P. (2005). Creating ordinary places: Slow cities in a fast world. *Journal of Urban Design, 10*(1), 1–11.
Lavrinec, J. (2011). Revitalization of public space: From "Non-Places" to creative playgrounds. *Philosophy Communication, 19*(2), 70–75.
Lewinson, T. (2007). Extended-stay hotel as home: An exploratory study. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Georgia.
Ley-Cervantes, M. (2012). Stuck in the Middle: Home-making strategies of Mexican Middling Migrants. Ph.D. Thesis, Autonomous University of Madrid.
Nowicka, M. (2007). Mobile locations: Construction of home in a group of mobile transnational professionals. *Global Networks, 7*(1), 69–86.
Omar, E. O., Endut, E., & Saruwono, M. (2012). Personalisation of the home. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences, 42*, 328–340.
Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Paulsen, K. (2013). Modeling home: Ideals of residential life in builders' show houses. In M. Kusenbach & K. Paulsen (Eds.), *Home. International perspectives on culture, identity, and belonging* (pp. 25–48). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Academic Publishers.
Rapport, N., & Dawson, A. (1998). *Migrants of identity: Perceptions of home in a world of movement*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity–heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Global modernities* (pp. 25–44). London: Sage.

Savage, M., Bagnall, G., & Longhurst, B. (2005). *Globalization and belonging*. London: Sage.

Scott, S. (2006). The social morphology of skilled migration: The case of the British middle class in Paris. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 32*(7), 1105–1129.

Sleegers, F. (2008). The limits of feeling at home: On home feelings of transnationals [Grenzen aan thuisgevoel: Over het thuisgevoel van transnationalen]. MA-thesis, University of Amsterdam.

Tandogan, Z. G., & Incirlioglu, E. O. (2004). Academics in motion: Cultural encapsulation and feeling at home. *City & Society, 16*(1), 99–114.

Tian, K., & Belk, R. W. (2005). Extended self and possessions in the workplace. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(2), 297–310.

Urry, J. (2000). *Sociology beyond societies: Mobilities for the twenty-first century*. London: Routledge.

Wells, M. (2000). Office clutter of meaningful personal displays: The role of office personalization in employee and organizational well being. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *20*(3), 239–255.

Wiles, J. (2008). Sense of home in a transnational social space: New Zealanders in London. *Global Networks, 8*(1), 116–137.

Williams, D. R., & McIntyre, N. (2001). Where heart and home reside: Changing constructions of place and identity. In Luft, K., & MacDonald, S. (Eds.), *Trends 2000: Shaping the Future* (pp. 392–403). Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.