Immigrants and home in the making: thresholds of domesticity, commonality and publicness

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Abstract The search for home as a material and symbolic space is an increasingly salient social question across contemporary multiethnic cities. The boundaries between what is public, communal and domestic are increasingly contested and yet remain a crucial issue, especially for minority groups such as immigrant and ethnic communities. The domestication of everyday living spaces carried out by immigrant and ethnic groups entails a variety of ways of ‘cultivating home’. In a context characterized by transnational mobility, ethnic segregation and social marginality, domesticity—understood as the potential to enact a domestic dimension in meaningful places—is an important asset to resist present hardships, cultivate memory and lay out projects for the future. In this Editorial, we seek to untangle the multiple stakes entailed by the practices of ‘making home’ and ‘feeling at home’. We invite scholars to observe how, even in minute and mundane details, dwelling places and the built environment come to be imbued with social and cultural meanings, which are pivotal to survival and social recognition. The articulation of domesticity, commonality and publicness can be fruitfully mapped through the concept of ‘thresholds’, which brings together the case studies that follow. By doing so, this Special Issue as a whole lays out a new research agenda at the intersection of housing, urban and migration studies.

Keywords Migration · Home · Thresholds of domesticity · Commonality · Publicness · Urban space

1 Introduction

The attempts made by immigrant and ethnic communities at finding a sense of home and living spaces suitable to underpin it, within increasingly multiethnic urban areas, are an emergent theme for the sociology of home and domesticity (Ralph and Staeheli 2011;

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Ho and Kissoon 2012) as well as for housing and built environment studies (Bolt 2012; Basco et al. 2012). While a wealth of case studies now exists on the topic, a broader comparative and theoretical framework is still missing. This Special Issue of the *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, as a whole, aims to start filling this gap and invite further research in this vein.

Building on the intersection between our own background in migration studies (Boccagni 2014) and urban studies (Brighenti 2013), in what follows we aim at a conceptual refinement of the notions of home and domesticity as they intersect the urban experience of immigrant and ethnic minority groups. This way of framing the immigration-home nexus traces a *file rouge* across the individual contributions to this Special Issue.¹ In doing so, we proceed in three argumentative steps: we begin with a few illustrations which we take as invitations to rethink the theme of domesticity ‘from the margins’ (Sect. 2). Upon this basis, we reframe the debate on home-making through the notion of ‘thresholds of domesticity’ (Sect. 3). An extended review of migrants’ ways of re-emplacing home in, and across, public, private and communal urban spaces (Sect. 4) helps us to sketch out a comparative ethnographic research agenda on migrant home-making (Sect. 5), grounded in both our own reflections and our contributors’.

Overall, the papers of this Special Issue result in a micro-understanding of broader processes of housing inclusion, exclusion and creativeness in the context of receiving societies. The notion of threshold emerges in various ways from each article. The first contributions focus on Latin American immigrants in large US urban areas. Hondagneu-Sotelo illustrates how domestic thresholds are negotiated in an urban semi-public realm through community gardening; Kusenbach explores the significance of home ownership, as a critical threshold for Latinos to gain access to the mainstream society. The articles that follow are all from immigrant receiving contexts across Europe. In the case of Cancellieri, the domesticity threshold is embedded in a specific building—a large housing project in Central Italy where the use of living spaces is negotiated interethnically on an everyday basis; Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak focus on highly skilled immigrants in Madrid, revealing how the use of ‘generic places’ as domestic environments shifts the threshold of domesticity into mobile and relatively standardized settings; Bilecen, instead, brings this threshold back into the domestic realm, highlighting its multisited articulation through migrants’ houses in Turkey and Germany; last, Smets and Sneep provide a case study on the embodiment of a complex and evolving threshold of domesticity between long-established dwellers and newcomers in a Dutch urban neighbourhood. Cross-cutting all articles, a view of migrant domesticity emerges as an incremental and negotiated process *from the outside-in* which, as discussed in Sect. 2, is deeply ingrained in the urban narrative.

2 Home and domesticity from the margins

Between 1899 and 1913, the French photographer Eugène Atget took a series of documentary tours in the surroundings of Paris, just outside the city gates. At that time the city was encircled by a *zona non aedificandi*, a largely unbuilt space located beyond the urban walls, traditionally an immunity belt where outcast population had been put. Today, this

¹ The majority of pieces included in this Special Issue were originally presented at the World Conference of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in Yokohama (2014), within the Research Committee on Housing and the Built Environment (RC43). The session, convened by the two Guest Editors, was entitled *Home-making practices and the domestic spaces of immigrant and ethnic minorities*.

space is better known as the *banlieu*, the boroughs surrounding the city of Paris (and of course, besides its technical definition, the term carries a lot of emotional resonance). In the first half of the twentieth century, these places underwent a process of urban development into residential and light manufacturing areas. When Atget visited it, the *zona non aedificandi* looked like a *terrain vague*, a *brousse* (prairie) where a new wave of immigrants to the capital city was disorderly settling. Accordingly, they were known as *les zoniers*, the inhabitants of the zone. Caravans, huts and improvised shelters of all sorts, as well as heaps of garbage and production scraps, were common view in this metamorphic, dangerous zone. The novelist Bram Stoker set there one of his late short stories, *The Burial of the Rats* (published posthumously in 1914). In the story, we follow a respectable British visitor taking a long walk through *the zone* and, at dusk, getting lost in the loose and unwelcoming maze inhabited by a threatening lumpen underworld.

Of course, Stoker was playing on the frightening and grotesque registers, evoking the haunting presence of human wretchedness just outside of major capital cities at his time. However, besides social and economic hardships, Atget's photographs also reveal to us the peculiar lifestyle that contradistinguished the new immigrant settlers of *the zone*. In one picture, for instance, it is possible to notice, parked next to a caravan, a lavish movable ice cream stall with a beautifully decorated *vaniglia e cioccolato* writing on it. It is not difficult to imagine that the stall owner would have pushed his cart daily down to the bourgeois boulevards of the city centre, which is where ice cream would have been sold. In other words, these new apparently outcast immigrants were in fact integrated into the urban economy of the capital, providing manual and artisanal labour for its material necessities.

In the process of becoming urbanites, the *zoniers* were experiencing a lively and swiftly evolving way of dwelling and belonging. In areas of incipient urbanization—what we might call a 'half-built' environment—it becomes particularly evident how urbanity itself, understood as the cultural counterpart of material and functional urbanization, is a process on the making.

3 Home and the thresholds of domesticity

Around the mid-twentieth century, the urban fringe across a number of Western countries looked like a scenery of illegal self-built houses and streets without names, weed fields and vacant lots, dumps, as well as relic and scraps of waning shepherd-agricultural activities. Such is the context where the inflowing groups attempted to make themselves at home in the process of becoming incorporated into the industrial society—that is, in the process of turning into blue and eventually, if ever, white collars. We believe it is particularly stimulating to observe home-making practices by taking such an unconventional perspective on the life experience of immigrant newcomers. A large chunk of social science literature on home tends to adopt unstated assumptions about what counts as home and which functions home is supposed to carry out. Now, such assumptions are in fact grounded in a specific experience of home (Mallett 2004). Unsurprisingly, most research about home tends to mirror a typically Western middle-class experience (Hollows 2012). Such an experience is premised upon the sharp distinction between the private domain of home, understood as safe haven, and the public domain of urban space, understood as a space of appearance and interaction between strangers (Sennett 1978).

By contrast, the dwelling styles of freshly immigrated communities—such as the *zoniers*, yet arguably many more contemporary examples exist²—raise the issue of the *thresholds* of domesticity. In other words, rather than starting from the alleged ‘central functions’ of home (protection, order, intimacy, etc.) and see how specific socio-economic arrangements cope with those functions—and certainly, without denying that anthropological knowledge of such functions is important—we propose to reverse the perspective. Particularly for immigrant newcomers, domesticity could be reframed less as an accomplished state of things *from within* than as a processual and interactive endeavour *from without*—indeed, as a matter of thresholds to be crafted, enacted, negotiated, and if necessary, struggled upon. We would like to remark the difference between a boundary and a threshold. In our understanding, thresholds, or zones of passage, are peculiar boundary formations. They create potential spaces of transition, which mark—if and once they have been passed through—some sort of qualitative difference for those involved (for an early, neglected elaboration in this vein, see Trumbull 1896). Migrant incorporation itself can be appreciated as a pathway through a number of thresholds: a negotiated process of place-making which opens up new social as well as conceptual spaces in the mainstream city. Thus, thresholds create a variable geography of access to, identification with and recognition within public spaces that are traditionally framed and managed as a preserve for the ‘natives’. Notably, threshold processes are not linear. Rather, they can be fragmented, discontinuous and even reversible, as migrants’ dwelling conditions and housing trajectories often attest.

Once we ask, in a provocatively naïve way, ‘Where does home begin, Where does it end?’ a number of relatively neglected phenomena, issues and problems can be revisited. Since home is a relational, incomplete achievement rather than a pre-given and unproblematic domestic place, even from a merely spatial point of view, the separation between domestic and non-domestic space can be marked, asserted and experienced in radically different ways. The fixation—not to speak of the obsession—with a sharp outline of home boundaries is simply unknown in many contexts of emigration, as well as in different civilizational patterns. For instance, Europeans and northern-American visitors of Arab and Asian cities often remain puzzled by a spatial articulation of the private/public boundary which is deeply different from the one they are used to—one which is much more alveolar and molecular than the dominant Western urban one. In many cases, there are actually no boundaries but rather smooth, porous thresholds that progressively lead the visitor towards increasing levels of domesticity (Kostof 1999). Smoothness and porousness may vary—hence, domestic spaces can be differentially accessible—along lines of gender, ethnicity, social class and so forth. Even so, the thresholds of domesticity embody a specific type of spatiality, which does not simply differentiate between public and private spaces but rather articulates them and provides the germ from which new spatial as well as social modulations may emerge.

² The situation of the so-called *baraccati* (hut inhabitants) in post-WWII Rome shares several resemblances. These hut-dwellers featured in many neo-realist movies ranging from De Sica, through Germi, to Pasolini. For instance, the movie *The roof* (1956) by Vittorio De Sica recounts the story of a couple of inner migrants who move to the city of Rome, where they experience the hardship of not having a place on their own. After sharing for a while the house with relatives, in a condition of chronic overcrowding, lack of privacy and escalating interpersonal tensions, the couple finally moves out. In the face of the risk of remaining homeless, they take the bold decision to illegally self-construct a hut in the largely unbuilt area of Pigneto. But such a house must be built literally overnight, and it is really a struggle against time, for the early morning policemen patrols will tear down every house that has not a finished roof.

Consequently, we need to inquiry into the following question: ‘From which other types of spaces do thresholds separate home anyway?’ Once we raise this latter question, we are reminded that the great divide in urban space cannot be reduced to a dichotomy between the private and the public. Rather, at least a tripartite image of urban space needs to be taken into account, where *communal* forms—in their many embodiments—represent a third crucial articulation that is added to and interspersed with the public and the private (Gans 1962; Suttles 1968; Hannerz 1969; Lofland 1998; Brighenti 2014; see also Duyvendak 2011, for an understanding from within home studies). These three types of space—the private, the communal and the public—form three interlocked social territories, each of them grounded in norms, regulations, requirements, expectations, etiquettes, interaction formats and registers, etc. Such a tripartite image may not be sufficient in itself, but it certainly provides a better starting point than the early-Bourdieuian sternly dualist structuralist view on home space (Bourdieu 1977 [1970]).

Notably, each of the three domains is not peaceful—rather, it is crossed by a number of inner tensions and frictions. The unsettled presence of scattered communal elements infused into public space also explains the current attempts at multiplying the analytical categories to describe contemporary accessible places, such as the notion of ‘quasi-public’ space (Smets and Watt 2013) and of ‘particular/generic’ place (Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak 2015). How is it that different groups of people gain differential access to spaces within the urban built environment, according to whether they are ‘natives’, locals, grown-ups, ‘regulars’, immigrants, newcomers and so on? Similar questions can be meaningfully addressed ethnographically, as the articles in this Special Issue aim to do. For instance, Hondagneu-Sotelo reveals the peculiar dynamics of local appropriation in the case of *Latino* community gardens in Los Angeles, while Kusenbach emphasizes how the meaning of home ownership is quite specific in the context of *Latinos* living on mobile home parks in Florida. In a different context, Cancellieri documents how a large high-rise housing project in Italy might function as a complex territorial formation where the three mentioned types of space meet and mix, whereas Smets and Sneep explore the nexus of belonging at neighbourhood level in a multicultural context in the Netherlands.

4 Home-making across the private, the communal and the public

In modern history, *public space* has been configured and conceived basically as a space of circulations which need to be governed (Brighenti 2012). This space forms an urban connective environment, which is constitutively both political and economic. In particular, in the modern Western experience, the public city has developed as a marketplace (Weber 1966). The contemporary global corporate city represents a prolongation of such a large-scale enterprise. The dynamics of the market entail setting in motion both goods and their carriers. That is why migrants constitute the prototypical figure of the unstable, mobile and thus unruly urban social subject (Simmel 2009). Since economic exchange breeds social mixture, the crucial tension inherent in public space lies precisely in the friction between the mixture and social heterogeneity generated by economic life and the search for social homogeneity carried out through policing and the eviction of the social subjects perceived as ‘excessive’. Put differently, a fringe of marginal and deviant subjects, including immigrant newcomers, was the inevitable counterpart of the same recipe that fuelled the success of the urban machine in terms of increasing human density. In a sense, the public city embodies the achievement of a human dream which Elias Canetti, in his analysis of

mass formations, depicted as ‘the tendency of all human crowds to become more and more—the blind, reckless, dynamic movement which sacrifices everything to itself and which is always present in a gathering crowd’ (Canetti 1973: 231).

By contrast, *communal space* has been classically associated with a kind of ‘spontaneous’ social territorialization that led to the establishment of ‘urban communities’. In the case of immigrant colonies, a feedback loop between spatial concentration and social solidarity, which gave rise to urban villages, was pointed out by classical sociologists (e.g. Whyte 1943; Gans 1962). Such communal spaces seemed to retain pre-modern local-based forms of organization (village life) in the heart of the modern metropolis (urban life). Independent, self-generated structures of authority and control were also described as overseeing and ensuring the closure and fixity of communal spaces. More recently, empirical research on ‘ethnic enclaves’ (e.g. Waldinger 1993), spatial segregation (e.g. Denton and Massey 1998; Caldeira 2001) and ‘bounded solidarity’ (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) has expanded further on the multivalence of neighbourhood segregation for the prospects of migrants’ collective action and mutual support.

Interestingly, though, communal space should not necessarily be equated with whole neighbourhoods and city sections. Communal spaces are also produced and sustained at smaller scales of belonging and practice. In immigrant settlements, the space surrounding homes entertains a completely different relation to the communal and the public than the one which is possible to encounter in the official city. Such molecular communal spaces are explored, for instance, in the contributions by Hondagneu-Sotelo, Kusenbach and Cancellieri in this Special Issue. Whatever the scale of reference, the communal domain can be helpfully unpacked in the light of the inner tensions, which pervade it. Such tensions are located in three crucial sites: first, within each community, second, at the interface across different communities and third, between each community and the larger public sphere. The ‘organic’, inner structure of endogenous authority is constantly challenged by the establishment of new networks of alliances deriving from the ongoing transformations, from the new needs and aspirations that stem from urban interaction within the public domain of the city at large. Communities and networks thus form a complex topology of identification, desire and friction (Hannerz 1980). The fourfold framework developed by Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak (2015), which cross-articulates the private/public divide with the particular/generic places distinction, also aims to highlight such slant-wise social forces which put commonality under strain, given that generic spatial formations can be seen as the outcome of smooth capitalist economy (for a philosophical layout, Deleuze and Guattari 1980; for an urban-architectural reading, Koolhaas and Mau 1995).

Finally, the *private space* has often been placed under the aegis of the domestic; a notion that may, in turn, be revisited from the outside. This is evident in right-wing political nativist and xenophobic agendas and discourses, where the entire space of a nation-state is made to coincide with the ‘home’ of the ‘native inhabitants’ (Art 2011; Duyvendak 2011). Not incidentally, much research has been devoted to understand precisely what *kind of space* is home (Douglas 1991), especially in relation to other established collective spaces (Easthope 2004). Observed from a relational point of view (Kusenbach and Paulsen 2013), the demarcation of the domestic domain and its positioning vis-à-vis the public and the communal domains vary greatly according to two major axes. On the one side, the variety of family structures points to the ways in which family itself extends into the community and public life. No perfect matching exists necessarily between home and the household. In migration literature, notions such as migration networks and chains provide researchers with ways of making this insight empirically operational and observable (Boyd and Nowak 2013). On the other side, as major social

movements from the 1960s on have repeatedly asserted, many issues that had been traditionally located inside the invisibility of the private domain—such as the spheres of gender and sexuality—are, in fact, political. This also holds for the domestic sphere (Hollows 2012). Hence, the positioning of the private space with respect to the communal and the public clearly generates a number of tensions that cut across the private domain itself.

The tripartite image we have presented here does not claim that the three social territories are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, networks and chains make the three domains always stratified and mutually criss-crossing. Thus, our theoretical approach ‘from the margins’—or threshold approach—is meant, in the first place, to overcome the idea that domesticity, commonality and publicness form concentric spheres demarcated by given boundaries. A more complex social topology needs to be taken into account. To this aim, the study of migrant home-making provides a number of poignant cases. For instance, whenever home is associated by immigrants and their descendants with the ‘homeland’ (Ali and Koser 2002; Abdelhady 2008), the most private space is directly connected to the most public one.

How and to which extent such spaces are mutually combined in migrant and post-migrant life, as more or less accessible and meaningful proxies for *home*, is then open to empirical inquiry. The papers in this Special Issue provide a variety of responses to it. Based on specific case studies, they also bear a strong potential for mutual dialogue, with a view to developing further the research intersection between migration and home studies.

5 Mobile social topologies, the play of thresholds and the cultivation of home

As we have seen above, home feeling seems to be primarily a matter of everyday practices enacted in local urban ethnic and interethnic contexts. A threshold approach to domesticity, such as the one we have so far argued for, points to fundamental methodological implications concerning the fine-grained observation of lived interactional spaces which can be revealed in single case studies. The articles presented in this Special Issue of the *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* aim to explore ethnographically the configurations of the different kinds of domestic spaces located across the thresholds of the private, the public and the common. At the same time, the notions elaborated in this Editorial introduction support a critical comparative reading of cases, whose number may be extended further.

In the opening article, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2015) provides an original understanding of urban community gardens as unique venues for marginalized Latino immigrants to feel at home in Los Angeles. Community gardens where mothers, fathers and children meet, play and socialize can be regarded as ‘third places’ across leisure and work settings (Oldenburg 1989; Stavrides 2011). Hondagneu-Sotelo examines how familiarity, protectiveness and inclusiveness come to be inscribed into such spatial locales by acts of appropriation and long-term loyalty to micro-territories. Appropriation is conveyed through an intense energy investment in terms of its maintenance, beautification and securitization. Her ethnography highlights three kinds of home-making functions enacted in such hybrid domestic places: social reproduction, recreation of homeland atmosphere, and local leisure sociability. Altogether, she makes a case for the study of immigrant home-making capacities also as a way to move beyond the stalemate of assimilationism versus transnationalism in migration studies (c.f. Boccagni 2012).

Another interesting Latino social formation is the one examined by Kusenbach (2015) in South Florida. She analyses the meaning of home ownership in the context of stigmatized mobile home communities (a phenomenon which is also quantitatively relevant, given that, according to estimates, over 20 million people live in mobile homes across the USA). If, on the one hand, homeownership is a social attainment, on the other, mobile home parks are usually associated with a lower-class precarious achievement that only approximates from afar the middle-class suburban dream of single-family dwelling, 'typically with a front and back yard, a large garage, and personal spaces for all family members'. However, in her research, Kusenbach finds that newcomer Latino mobile home dwellers have developed an interesting counter-narrative to contrast the 'trailer stigma' of mobile living and enhance their sense of social accomplishment. In doing so, they have elaborated their own specific way to the 'American dream' which turns them into proud home owners. This situation is particularly noticeable in connection to our notion of thresholds of domesticity. Indeed, the pursuit of autonomy associated with home ownership conflicts with the set of rules and restrictions enforced by the mobile park owners and managing authorities. Once again, the question concerning 'Where does home begin, Where does it end?' resurfaces. While a set of legal contracts and power relations underlie these arrangements and constrain the possibility of renegotiating them, factors such as the neighbourhood feeling in connection to the tripartite urban texture described above are crucial to make sense of the social dynamics at play. A difference between recent immigrants and native-born Latino/as is also palpable, as the latter seem to perceive more clearly the limits of their current situation (a situation which echoes the notion of the 'glass ceiling' effect).

The remaining contributions shift the focus across the Atlantic, towards Europe. In a prolonged, in-depth participant observation study, Cancellieri (2015) has observed a case located on the Italian Adriatic coast in Italy. The 'Hotel House' is large high-rise housing project inhabited by no <2000 people belonging to about 40 ethnic groups (with Italian nationals amounting to just about 5 % of the total population). Such a complex territorial formation provides for almost endless possibilities in which the three types of space discussed above meet and interact. Besides the striking macro-level segregation of the whole building vis-à-vis the overall urban structure, many other levels of analysis emerge. For instance, the ground floor of the condominium, where, besides a Mosque prayer hall, stalls and shops run by Pakistanis, Moroccans, Bangladeshis and Nigerians are located, forms an extremely rich contact zone where the three social domains intermingle. In such a space, just as in the parking area and the courtyard, the role played by threshold making is particularly evident. Another intriguing instance is the case of the circulatory territories of the Mourides diaspora. The Mourides are an Islamic Sufi brotherhood, widespread in Senegal. Thanks to a social institution known as the *dahira* (communal house), the Mourides set up a space in which more apartments can be connected into a single unit, or *foyer* (Diop 1981; Riccio 2001; Volgger 2015). Senegalese community living is thus flourishing, as they 're-organized and appropriated their home interiors, marking them with elements of personal and collective identities'. But Cancellieri also calls for an intersectional approach, which is sensitive to the role of minorities within minorities. From this perspective, the very social density of communitarian living is Janus-faced, as it also entails a constant social control on subordinate members, which ends up reinforcing segregation and hierarchy.

Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak (2015) contribute with an article on Spain. Here, we observe that the need to negotiate domesticity in migration is not only a prerogative of unskilled labour migrants. It is experienced likewise, albeit in different ways, by

middle-class mobile individuals, such as the Mexican professionals whom the two authors have interviewed in Madrid. Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak argue that for this section of the population—which in previous literature had been dubbed ‘the spyralists’ (Savage et al. 2005)—it is paradoxically the presence of ‘generic places’ which sustains a degree of spatial personalization. Generic places include locales such as airports, chain restaurants and hotels—in short, standardized infrastructures for travel, consumption and leisure. These spaces can be important for cultivating feelings of home through specific processes of personalization enacted in urban local environments. What counts, according to the authors, is that today specific home feeling, and especially the sense of home as shelter and haven, can be conveyed essentially through retail activities. In turn, however, such a possibility contributes to enhanced inequality in terms of social stratification. According to this view, today the upper middle classes have at their disposal an additional home-making tool, of which the lower classes are essentially deprived. Besides extending an argument once advanced by Bauman (1998) on the new meanings of poverty in a consumer society, Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak’s hypothesis might also be helpful in understanding the lure and resurgence of populism in Europe: irrespective of being public or private, generic places stand in opposition to all sorts of specificities. But these specificities crucially include nationalism and homeland feeling, which, as the cases discussed so far attest, form a crucial societal asset for immigrants.

In her contribution, Bilecen (2015) reports from long-term research on Turkish and Kurdish immigrants in Germany. Her focus lies in particular on how houses are turned into homes through a specific usage of material culture. This is a theme that also features in Kusenbach’s and Cancellieri’s articles. Home can recall the homeland also thanks to the deployment of a range of objects imported or brought back from the country of origin. The importance of material culture naturally evolves into larger biographical horizons: indeed, Bilecen shows the functioning of a *myth of return* among these immigrants. As in the case of other migrations (Safran 1991; Boccagni 2011), the idea of return to the homeland encourages the practice of owning and buying a house in the country of origin. Bilecen stresses how her interviewees constantly struggle to keep their two houses within a single framework through a comparative discourse. Interviewed in their German location, they repeatedly hand to the researcher pictures of their houses in Turkey as if they were next door, minutely describing the physical and furniture assets.

The final article by Smets and Snee (2015) explores the nexus of belonging at neighbourhood level in a multicultural context in the Netherlands. The authors usefully remind us that a single neighbourhood may contain composite social-spatial situations where proximity in diversity is not always peaceful. Even inside a single local neighbourhood, social mixing does not automatically entail interclass contacts, due to the well-known mismatch between physical distance and social distance (Bourdieu 1989). The notions of ‘elective’ belonging (Savage et al. 2005)—whereby newcomers choose the locale they want to identify with—and ‘selective’ belonging (Watt 2011)—whereby residents choose with which elements of the locale they want to identify with—provide us with important prisms through which that mismatch can be described. In their case, concerning a local street in a socially and ethnically diverse neighbourhood in the Netherlands, Smets and Snee illustrate how intergroup relations may evolve towards either social involvement or, alternatively, withdrawal from local social life.

Overall, the studies within this Special Issue cover cases located in various national contexts and adopt different scales and units of analysis. Through such a diversity, however, the contributions share one research concern: to understand how home-making practices are carried out in everyday social life experience and how they are affected by

dwelling circumstances and the built environment. The threshold approach to domesticity we have suggested above enables us to make sense of the specificity of migrant and ethnic minority practices, especially in their interaction with the non-migrant section of the population. Thresholds appear at different scales of analysis: interindividual relations, households, communities, neighbourhoods, urban spaces, national and transnational spaces. Notably, these scales are not necessarily nested into each other—rather, they criss-cross and overlap. Observed through attentive ethnographic lenses, the thresholds of domesticity, commonality and publicness are revealed as fundamental articulations, which determine patterns of interaction at community and intergroup levels. These thresholds constitute veritable social topologies. In other words, they dictate which elements of social patterns tend to persist through transformations and transitions. The newly emerging configurations of home spaces can thus be fruitfully attended by analysing social interaction around social-spatial urban thresholds.

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