

ARTICLE

Creating home: Intersections of memory and identity

Charishma Ratnam 

School of Humanities and Languages,
University of New South Wales

Correspondence

Charishma Ratnam, School of Humanities and
Languages, University of New South Wales,
Kensington, NSW 2052, Australia.
Email: c.ratnam@unsw.edu.au

Abstract

The concepts of memory, identity, and place form key debates in geographical literature because they link people to place. Memory incorporates narratives of the past that are articulated in the present day and can inform the way identities are constructed. The intersections of memory and identity can prompt us to think about how we experience and/or have experienced place(s). In this review, I trace discussions that position memory and identity as meta-concepts that coalesce with the home and home-building practices. I situate this discussion in and around the home because the home is commonly our most frequented place. It is a place where our person-place bonds develop through everyday encounters and practices. I explore how memory, identity, and place have been broached in the home by using more-than-representational approaches. I have turned to more-than-representational theory to flesh out how enactments and encounters with objects and other materialities in the home demonstrate agency and connections to the home, which are indicative of memory and identity in action. Sensory and material encounters provoke remembrances and identifications with home(lands) through objects, people, food, and places that hold particular resonance among migrants.

1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper engages with three key themes: home, memory, and identity. Memory, identity, and place form key debates in geography since they link people to place. Memory and identity intersect with our experiences in place(s), specifically the home. Notions of home are prominent in geographical research since it is a place that evokes social and emotive relationships and meanings (Easthope, 2004; Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007; Massey, 1992). Home is an "affective construct" where homely feelings can encompass a combination of security, familiarity, comfort, and belonging. Memory incorporates recollections of the past that are (re)articulated in present day places. Identities can be built through individual, familial, and collective practices, traditions, or narratives that define who we are

(Somers & Gibson, 1994). Specifically, migrant experiences of constructing and feeling at home provide a strong focal point for this paper, since their memories and identities can be important in the home-building process. In my tripartite analysis of these themes, I have sought to extend existing home-building literature (Boccagni, 2017; Gregson, 2007; Hage, 1997; Ley-Cervantes & Duyvendak, 2017) to argue that the links between memory and identity allow for better understandings around how home-building ensues. In what follows, I discuss the home, as central to this review by refracting ideas of the home through memory and identity. Then, I draw on more-than-representational theory and explicate how this approach—through sensory and material encounters—reveals agency in creating the home. I draw from migrant home-building literature to demonstrate the importance of materials, senses, and emotions in (re)creating home spaces.

"Home" is a complex site that connects movement, places, people, emotions, routines, and identities (Arnold, 2016). Today, perspectives of home are more balanced (see also Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007), where home is an "affective construct" that fosters a liveable physical, social, and economic structure by those who reside there (Hage, 1997). Hage (1997, 2010) argued that there are four key pillars that are integral to building a home and feeling "at home": security, familiarity, community, and a sense of possibility. Similarly, Boccagni (2017) suggested that home can be constructed through security, familiarity, and control. Being and feeling "at home" contribute to dominant meanings of home such as stability, security, and family (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). How family and everyday life is based and built, then, becomes important in understanding the myriad of meanings associated with home and home-building. These meanings and feelings can be experienced by memories of people, things, and moments of familiarity in place. Similarly, the home becomes a "source of identity and meaningfulness" and "a symbol of the self" through its familiarity, even if such encounters are "mundane" (Valentine, 2001, p. 73). Recent literature has expressed that home is an everyday, frequently inhabited and visited place. My analysis of the home returns to the classical geographical focus of examining everyday places (cf. Lewis, 1979) as explicated by scholars including Meinig (1979) and Jackson and Smith (1984) who advocated the value in examining non-unique, everyday spaces. Here, I centre this classical geographical approach through more-than-representational theory to pay attention to how everyday places are experienced and encountered. I situate the home as one of these everyday places that encapsulates memory and identity, and I feed through ideas of how home can be constructed.

The home is subjective and multiscalar—a myriad of experiences occur there. Senses of "home" (and place) can range from micro-level understandings within a household to the macro-level considerations of cities, institutions, nations, and previous home(lands) (Boccagni, 2017; Ley-Cervantes & Duyvendak, 2017). Home can simultaneously be experienced differently as a place of risk, loss, or terror (Gorman-Murray & Dowling, 2007). Dowling and Mee (2007, p. 162) argued that "home is both alienating and embracing, public and private, permeable and impermeable." For some, home can be associated with feelings of fear and abuse; domestic violence and emotional turbulence can be dominant, where the home is considered unsafe and oppressive (Dowling & Power, 2013). Thus, memories of past homes and ideas of future homes are not so straightforward and idealistic, nor are they always positive. For example, homeless people who have not had a proper home romanticise about future homes "as if to compensate for the misery" they are faced with, being without a home (Cieraad, 2010, p. 93). Migrant communities, as well as refugees and asylum seekers, can draw on their memories of past homes, nostalgia of the homeland, and dreams of future homes to rebuild homes in host countries and override negative experiences they may have encountered (Blunt, 2005; Cieraad, 2010). For migrants, home can be constructed in host communities/countries by (re)creating past links through their memories, traditions, and also travel back to home countries (Ley-Cervantes & Duyvendak, 2017).

Expressions of memory and identity can be buttressed in/to the home. There are links between memory and identity that can be experienced and provoked through habitual routines and happenstances (Drozdowski, De Nardi, & Waterton, 2016; Jones, 2011), for example, through reading, cooking, or speaking another language. Other practices enacted in the home—sharing objects, passing down photographs, and daily practices, such as baking—reinforce the close ties between memory and identity in the home (Drozdowski et al., 2016; Gregson, 2007). Home is a place where "memory makes us what we are" (Jones, 2011, p. 875). We may bake our grandmother's favourite recipe for the kids and display special sentimental objects on the mantelpiece of the home; such means of identity expression tie our

pasts to the present day place of the home. It is these articulations of memory and identity that can provide clues into our non-verbal, sensory, and material encounters with other people and attachment to things in the home.

Since its emergence, “non-representational theory” has provided a constructive framework for thinking through concepts of “time-space,” “practice,” and “subject” (Simpson, 2017; Thrift, 1996; Waterton, 2013). This theoretical debate about the possible applications of non-representational theory opened a multitude of terminologies including “assemblage,” “affect,” and “more-than-representational,” which demonstrate the diversity of studying everyday encounters in places (see also Waterton, 2013). On discussing the terminologies associated with non-representational theory and the like, Waterton (2013, p. 66) argued:

in common across this breadth of research is an acknowledgement that our understandings of the world are lived, embodied and tangled up with how we do things, our doings and our enactments in the moment.

Assemblage theory attends “to why and how multiple bits-and-pieces accrete and align over time” (McFarlane, 2011, p. 652), based on material and expressive components that construct a place (Woods, 2015). Conceptualisations of “affect” have also featured in non-representational theory to include the dynamics, emotions, and feelings that create atmospheres (Anderson, 2009; Thrift, 2004). “Affect” is denoted as invisible, but sensed by our bodies. Affect, feelings, and emotions, then, are conceptually interrelated and can be considered together, but also separately in order to understand the connections between the self and the world (Anderson, 2009).

Hayden Lorimer (2005, p. 83) proposed the phrase “more-than-representational” in an attempt to encompass and understand the “more-than-human, more-than-textual [and] multisensual worlds.” This term is the “multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice,” which we see in our embodied practices, sensory experiences, and material encounters that are active and activated in place (Lorimer, 2005, p. 84). The relevance of more-than-representational theory is palpable in the mundanity of home: “home that can be directly experienced—not just seen, but heard, smelled, and touched—is necessarily a small and intimate world” (Tuan, 2004, p. 165). The all-encompassing make-up of more-than-representational theory provides a strong framework to understand how home is (re)created. Thus, this paper is grounded in more-than-representational considerations of how memory—sensorially and materially—is imprinted in the everydayness of home.

More-than-representational theory has informed geographical research through scholars’ engagements with memory and identity in various spatial contexts including sites of national identity, heritage sites, cities, and tourist landscapes (Jones, 2011). As Lorimer (2005, p. 84) has shown, it centres on “how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines ... embodied movements ... and sensuous dispositions.” It is, for example, grounded in the micropolitics of our everyday mundane practices of cooking and walking around the neighbourhood. Our bodies and their actions/performances are central to such expressions; our bodies enact “performative practices of everyday life,” most commonly at home, but also in places where we grew up that shape us and our frequent practices (Jones, 2011, p. 876). As such, we have im/material reminders—known as the “more-than-human”—of memories in place(s) that bring past events, experiences, and recollections into the present (Drozdowski et al., 2016). Our interactions with people, more-than-human, and non-material elements including objects, places, and our senses, for example, can produce corporeal remembrances. The place-based context of the home can provide a space for further consideration into the more-than-representational elements of our memories and identities.

I, as many scholars have, turn to more-than-representational thinking to challenge current discourses of memory and identity as vital to understandings of place (Birth, 2006; Drozdowski et al., 2016; Jones, 2011). Several scholars have used more-than-representational theory to explore the role of the body, senses, and emotions and how they affect perceptions of places (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Phillips, 2005; Thrift, 2004). While discussions on more-than-representational theory have taken shape in public places (see also Carolan, 2008; Waterton & Dittmer, 2014), these enactments also frequently occur in the home, a theoretical and practical application that has received less attention. Jones’ (2011) review of the more-than-representational in relation to memory suggested that memory is bound in domestic places. He asserted that we must pay close attention to the home to account for “objects, spaces, and memory, more than the conventional structure of chronological life events” (Jones, 2011, p. 881). It is our

encounters with tangible and intangible elements in place(s) including sensations, traditions, objects, and other people that create “home.” What is distinctive about the home is that it encompasses individual and collective memories as well as the complexities of these tangible and intangible things, that “remain with(in) us as we live” and move through such a place (Jones, 2011, p. 881). Drozdewski et al. (2016) drew from existing links of memory and identity to focus on more-than-representational approaches in place(s), including body memory and non-human agency. Such a focus on practice and experience in place(s) is useful since it pushes memory research to consider embodiments and encounters (Drozdewski et al., 2016). I seek to take more-than-representational theory into the home, to better understand how sensory and material encounters can serve as daily markers and reminders that contribute to our feelings of homeliness.

2 | PLACE(S) CALLED HOME

Places provide the settings for “the doings” of our everyday lives that involve experiences, people, routines, practices, and emotional connections constructed within the home. “Feeling” and “being” at home involves cohabiting with people, objects, and other non-humans such as pets, gardens, and plants (Gregson, 2007), and more-than-representational theory helps us to focus our attention on these aspects of the home. Such people and objects in the home are used to construct a liveable “structure” of security, familiarity, community, and comfort, for example (Boccagni, 2017; Hage, 1997). Security involves creating a home governed by our “laws” and rules by those who live there. It also involves satisfying basic needs and an absence of threatening otherness (Hage, 1997; Valentine, 2001). Familiarity, then, is the creation of a place for practical use through “practical spatial and linguistic knowledge” (Hage, 1998, p. 40). In our homes, we know where everything is and what everything is for. Gregson (2007) suggested that familiar, “mundane” everyday practices of co-functioning with “things” are central to home-building and are also an extension of our identities. Material objects, including figures, toys, photographs, household goods, for example, also interplay with the “temporal registers of everyday life, and of the social life of objects in the home” (Gregson, 2007, p. 105). Materials in the home, such as our favourite mug or wall hanging, become important, even imprinted, in our daily lives. It is these everyday objects, encounters, and spaces within the home that provide small but significant insights into how we “feel” at home.

Feeling “at home” can be achieved by engaging with the wider community. Boccagni (2017, p. 26) suggested that, for migrants, home provokes “spatialised social practices” where they can “reproduce, reconstruct, and possibly rebuild meaningful home-like” places. Migrants attempt to (re)create links with past homes through memories, values, identities, and traditions that can connect diasporic communities inside the home (Boccagni, 2017; Ley-Cervantes & Duyvendak, 2017). A sense of community is achieved in the home by building “a complex and culturally varied set of emotions and meanings” (Horton & Kraftl, 2013, p. 272) where our experiences of home are different based on our relationships with those in the home, our neighbours, and wider networks that construct a community (Buckle, 2017). Having a sense of community presents the possibility of building a comfortable, stable, and safe home. Migrants also use personal possessions and objects, foods and aromas—known as “home comforts” to build their homes when they move (Gregson, 2007; Miller, 2006). The home-building process encourages social, economic, and personal growth that may not have been possible in previous homes, particularly for migrants and refugees (Boccagni, 2017). Feeling “at home,” for migrants, involves understanding how memory and identity are weaved through home-building processes, and this paper seeks to strengthen this relationship between memory, identity, and home.

3 | THE MEMORY AND IDENTITY NEXUS IN THE HOME

Memories are remembrances and recollections of the past that evoke emotions and experiences in/of/at places. They can be experienced in many forms including public (Drozdewski, 2016; Hayden, 1995; Johnson, 2002), private

(DeLyser, 2015; Fortier, 2000), and collective memories (Halbwachs, 1992; Wertsch, 2002). Memory has the power to provoke remembrances in different places, using the more-than-human (objects), emotions (senses), and experiences as probes. Memories are important facets of creating home since they can engage with place and identity. I contend that the home strengthens a multitude of memories that contribute to our identities. Memory can be experiences articulated sensorially; for example, in recalling time during my childhood spent at my grandmother's home in Sri Lanka, the smell of fresh bread is omnipresent, as is the sound of the delivery boy riding down the street on his bicycle each morning. I can sense the touch of the dresses my grandmother sewed on my skin and hear her sewing machine pattering away while I sat next to her, I can visualise her craft each piece of clothing. Sensorial memory influences the way we narrate our pasts and how we place those memories into wider contexts to shape our identities (Drozdowski et al., 2016). It is these memories that are played out and (re)told at home. In both individual and collective capacities, memory is not simply the story of past "facts," as the building blocks of home, but the ongoing work of reconstructive and recreated imaginations (Assmann, 2011, p. 210). Our emotions, family achievements, and even distressing ruptures in our pasts can be remembered in the home by talking about them, as more-than-human reminders through materiality, objects, and other visual markers. For example, Assmann (2011) asserted that the past must be processed and mediated in place (and home) for these memories to resonate in the present. Collective memories can extend into our homes as regular practices where "stories of past and present relations are narratives that inform how people think about the nature of family and cultural ties and their boundaries" (McLaughlin, 2015, p. 627-628). Such family memories and narratives can be informed by broader collective memories that are remembered in the home.

Collective memories can be central in place and reflected in the home. In *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs (1992) emphasised that collective memory draws strength from a body of people. Every individual belongs to several groups, based on our communal identities, beliefs, interests, and backgrounds, and therefore, we have numerous collective self-images and memories (Assmann, 2011). These shared backgrounds interplay with our identity and experiences at home. For example, Blunt and Varley (2004) suggested we practice collective memories in the way we cook, decorate, and carry out domestic life in our homes every day. Such domestic practices also resonate with collective identities based on our family, social groups, and cultural contexts that shape who we are. Halbwachs (1992, p. 83) also discussed how collective family memories are interpreted in their own day to day manner since the "family's recollections become more precise and fixed in their personal form." These interpretations of collective family memories can underpin the way the home is created based on the logics and traditions that regulate the family home (Halbwachs, 1992). Further, Halbwachs (1992) explained that there is a framework of family memories created in the home where stories, traditions, and the material serve as landmarks. For example, we can extend family stories and memories to encompass remembrances of our worldly life and vice versa (Halbwachs, 1992). These stories and traditions can permeate through collective family experiences that ensure collective cohesion and continuity. The home is a pivotal place where these memories are remembered thereafter; home "is an embodied and embedded memory" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 29). These recreations are based on our collective social contexts—diasporas and family settings—as well as through narratives (Fortier, 2000; McLaughlin, 2015).

In the home, we can draw from recollections of the past through storytelling and narrative forms. While the more-than-representational aspects of home are embedded in the non-verbal, I argue that the home encompasses verbal encounters, where stories and discussions can form part of the "noise" in the home. Memory narratives can influence and are influenced by our sense of place and identity. These narratives provide an additional layer to understanding home, and the story of how home is constructed is made richer by simultaneously paying attention to the sounds, textures, smells, and encounters as well as verbal signatures we have in the home. "We, as human beings, live in the world around us" where our narratives are a product of "where we make, unmake and live in landscapes (home) ... [in] meaningful ways" (De Nardi, 2016, p. 96). Home can provide grounding for family narratives and resulting identities, since it is a place where these narratives can be (re)presented and (re)told materially and verbally (McLaughlin, 2015; Somers & Gibson, 1994). Somers and Gibson (1994, p. 2) suggested that storytelling is an application of personal and collective identities:

people construct identities ... by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that "experience" is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way integrate these happenings within one or more narratives

Narrative forms of memory and identity, through oral and written discussions, can be part of our everyday homely practices (McLaughlin, 2015). Such daily practices could be in the way we read diaries and tell stories at home. Home is where stories are retold as affirming family memory results in/from the past and passing down of memories over time. Although our family memories have a date, we move them along a timeline by (re)telling them and remembering them (sometimes) without modifying them (Halbwachs, 1992; Pahl, 2012). For example, De Nardi's (2016, 2017) recent work on narrative memory has shown how engagements with events and memories, where distinct feelings and elements including places and people, can create the home. She suggested that "an engagement with those events entails an encounter with a number of ... elements—places, other people, traditions, sensations, impressions—that make us feel 'at home' " (De Nardi, 2016, p. 97). We pass down stories, study memoirs, diaries, and letters as "private memories of home," which are key markers of narrative memory and identity (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p. 34). Narratives and storytelling have the power to weave together events and experiences over space and time (Glaeser, 2000; Ricœur, 1991, 1992). These narratives are not stagnant, as are the identities connected to them. Thus, our hybrid identities can be attributed to "home" as a lived experience that is fluid and everchanging (Buckle, 2017).

4 | CREATING HOME THROUGH SENSORY EXPERIENCES AND MATERIAL CULTURES

The home is created through lived experiences, sensory articulations, and the material, underpinned by memory and identity. Specifically, senses of "home" are (re)constituted among migrant diasporas when they (re)create places to maintain memory and identity links to their homelands. Memory and identity are related to the way feelings of security, familiarity, community, comfort, and belonging are ensued when the home is created (Bocchagni, 2017; Hage, 1997). Duffy and Waitt (2013, p. 468) conceptualised home as a "muddled concept [where] the notion of home continues to have ongoing ideological and emotional importance." They suggested that sound is integral to creating home and that we build social and material relationships viscerally by listening and hearing (Duffy & Waitt, 2013). Sensory experiences—through touching, smelling, hearing, seeing, and tasting—at home, demonstrate how the body constructs these places of familiarity and comfort through home-building (Duffy & Waitt, 2013; Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Longhurst, Johnston, & Ho, 2009). Familiar forces such as memory, experience, and materiality intersect with our sensory and visceral experience of eating a traditional home-cooked meal or the texture of the rug on our feet, for example (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008). These forces are poignant for migrants since the sensorial and material can overlap with memory and identity of home(lands). Emma Waterton's (2014, p. 830) assertion that heritage sites are "multi-sensual sites [that are] alive with intense and often lingering sounds, smells and sights" holds resonance for how we use our senses to create senses of place at home. Waterton (2014) has drawn on more-than-representational theory to understand the human interplay with the "more-than-human" as well as sensory experiences or non-human agents as actants or co-producers of experiences in these places. Sensory experiences and interactions with material cultures become pivotal among migrant diasporas since their (re)creations of home—based on home-building practices—are played out through their senses in the way they go about their domestic practices. In the final section of this paper, I critically discuss pivotal work by scholars who draw on migrants' sensory and material constructions of home (Hage, 2010; Longhurst et al., 2009; Pink, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). While these works do not subscribe to more-than-representational theory, my analysis suggests that not only are sensory approaches in the home important, but that filtering this work through a more-than-representational lens adds another layer to our understandings of how the home can be encountered in non-verbal, visceral ways.

4.1 | The senses of home: Smelling, hearing, tasting, and seeing

The multisensual site of the home intersects with memory and identity through familiar senses of sound, smell, touch, taste, and sight. In *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*, Pink (2004) discussed the interactions of the five senses for perception, honing in on comparative ethnographic fieldwork on domestic practices and spaces in homes in England and Spain. For example, she detailed the aromas of different foods cooking in homes and the lingering smell of cleaning products in Spanish homes, compared with sounds and textures of touch when referring to the squeakiness of drawers opening or scratches on a chest of drawers (Pink, 2004). In her research, sensory experiences in the home interweaved experience and discourse through memory (Pink, 2004). Sensory modalities have the power to communicate particular memories. For example, Pink (2004) discussed how people “bleach” their new home to remove signs of the past occupants; they make the home “theirs” by making material arrangements through decoration and structural adjustments. These senses of home construct “laws” that seek to “exclude threatening otherness” and build a sense of security where by being “at home,” a person is a “wilful subject” there (Hage, 1997, p. 102). Notions of home were also evident in relationships with the place and those who live in it—housework, cooking, cleaning (Pink, 2004). Specifically, sound was an important element of home in Pink’s (2004) ethnographic research where music and radio were implicated in home-building. Soundscapes can prompt memories based on familiarity and routine. One British participant, Holly, created her home with her own “domestic soundscapes, with TV and music” as a way of producing a secure place to live (Pink, 2004, p. 110). Creating an expressive space in the Spanish and English homes of Pink’s (2004) participants involved material, sensorial, social, and cultural resources and feelings. Understandings of sensorial articulations in everyday practice “at home as well as in the home challenges traditional ethnographic fieldwork narratives” by focusing on the way our senses are important for our connections and constructions of the home (Pink, 2004, p. 25 [original emphasis]). Recent ethnographic research has built on understandings of how sensory experiences are performed as a way of engendering feelings of safety and familiarity (Coole & Frost, 2010, Ratnam & Drozdowski, 2017). These sensory experiences of memory intersect with migrant senses of home.

Smell and taste, in particular, have strong ties to home and memory. Attachments to home cultures are experienced through our connection to food (cf. Longhurst et al., 2009). Many scholars consider migrant experiences with food from their homeland as a way of building memory and maintaining identities within the home (Carton, 2002; Euridice, 2004; Hage, 1997; James, 2004; Longhurst et al., 2009). Hage (1997, 2010) discussed the food cultures of the Lebanese migrant community in Australia. Hage’s (2010) research on migrant home-building has argued that nostalgia was a mode of feeling that engaged with creating a home in the present. He found that construction(s) of home were a result of migrant memories and remembered pasts (Hage, 1997, 2010). These memories drew from the Lebanese culture that linked shared symbolic values, languages, and food, as a way of extending a sense of community, familiarity, and comfort into the home (Boccagni, 2017; Hage, 1997). Similarly, Carton (2002, p. 83) drew on cross-cultural intersections of memory and food by suggesting that “eating was remembering. It was the symbolic ritual that allowed access into the hybrid world of the Anglo-Indian.” “Home cooking” has the ability to draw on cultural expressions of the homeland but also the way people cook food, present it, and eat it that contribute to their sensory articulations of smell and taste, as well as homely practices. Hage’s (1997, 2010) foundation of homely food cultures among Lebanese migrants is important for thinking through the intersections of memories and identities with the home(land) that are expressed through the senses. Longhurst et al. (2009) have also argued that memory and identity can intersect in the home through the visceral—particularly smell and taste. Longhurst et al.’s (2009, p. 342) research on migrant home cooking in New Zealand found that however mundane, food, through its preparation, consumption, and presentation, were “performative politics of one’s subjectivity.” Thus, creating home, for the women in their research was contingent on their visceral relationship with their kitchen, food, and culinary practices as memories (Longhurst et al., 2009). A sense of community was created in these migrant homes where senses of smell and taste, through food, brought their memories and identifications with the homeland to the fore. They suggested that “home is a useful site for thinking about what we eat, the ways in which we eat, who we eat with, and our visceral responses to eating” (Longhurst et al., 2009, p. 336). A focus on home cooking among migrants provides a way of maintaining

significant connections with home—and homelands—through sensory and visceral geographies (Hage, 1997; Longhurst et al., 2009; Longhurst, Ho, & Johnston, 2008). Taste and smell can bring our senses to life in triggering comforting memories that intersect in home settings.

4.2 | Material cultures: Touching the home

In the home, our bodies engage with senses of touch and sight through interactions with material objects and possessions as markers of memory and identity. “These identity cultures and relationships are forged through the body, space, and place,” specifically among diasporic communities that form part of the “creative process of making home” (Tolia-Kelly, 2013, p. 324–325). Material cultures provide a sense of familiarity in the home. Tolia-Kelly (2004) has discussed the agency of non-human actants, with a focus on objects and possessions as mechanisms of remembrance among British Asians. She has argued that research on visual and material cultures in the home has value when remembering past experience(s) and lived environments (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). It is the connections with memories and material objects that contribute to cultural identities that generate meaning and value in migrant homes. Tolia-Kelly (2004, p. 314) suggested that “solid materials are charged with memories that activate common connections to pre-migratory landscapes and environments.” In her analysis, home was a site where memory was linked with past lived environments through material cultures. British Asian migrants displayed shrines in their homes with objects and icons within them as part of their recalling process (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). The shrine formed part of the symbolic, material architecture of the home where the familiar “scent, touch, sight and sound of prayer, prayer bell ... incense, sandalwood ... or the sights of icons ... ” were centred in sensorial cultural memories, identities, and narratives in the migrant homes (Tolia-Kelly, 2004, p. 321). Material cultures have a “sticky” quality that draws on familiar connections linked to memory, identity, and place (Ahmed, 2010). There is a “stickiness” that we can associate to the connections formed from ideas, values, and memories in objects (Ahmed, 2010). These objects “stick” in/to the home since they are “material memories” that can be “consolidated, solidified, and affirmed” through narratives and remembrances in the home (Tolia-Kelly, 2013, p. 325). Given the significance of memory in the positioning of material cultures in the home, “memory is ‘spatially constituted’ whether in ‘concrete and physical’ form such as monuments ... or in ‘non-material’ form such as narrative, discourse and stories” (Drozdzewski et al., 2016, p. 2). It is the stickiness of such material forms that build and maintain a sense of familiarity and control in the home-building processes for migrants, in the way they interact with and display them. For migrants, these material cultures provide a sense of familiarity and control to their previous home(land)s.

5 | FINAL REMARKS

This paper has reviewed three fundamental themes of memory, identity, and home. This cross-disciplinary body of work—including geography, anthropology, sociology, and heritage studies—all draw from more-than-representational approaches to understand place-based experiences entangled in the past, present, and future. By interrogating the home, scholars consider the way narratives of memory and identity—collectively and individually—are weaved in our experiences and (re)creation of home.

This review extends existing work by focusing on intersections of home, memory, and identity. A more-than-representational approach brings attention to how our senses are central to the way we experience the home, and how these three concepts intertwine. When considering the home, more-than-representational theory is the way our senses, experiences, and texts interplay with memory and identity. The triad of concepts—memory, identity, and home—are fundamental to understanding how our experiences and encounters can (re)create the home. The home is a place of significance since it can be a frequently visited, multisensual site of safety, familiarity, and comfort, for many. Sensorial, collective, and narrative elements of memory and identity are weaved into the way we encounter and (re)create private places. Encountering and (re)creating such places are important since they provide a place for

reminders, remembrances, and identities to be created, fostered, and maintained. The place of the home, here, focussed on the role our bodies play in conveying and contributing to memory and identity. The feelings of being “at home” are linked to the way we read more-than-representational approaches of memory and identity—they can be more-than-verbal. I situate much of this discussion among migrant communities as a case in point; migrants face (re)creating their homes when they move to host communities and countries. Our senses—touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, and hearing—link to familiarity and security of home(lands) and also the sensorial experiences of home cooking and the material that provide comfort. Such experiences build on a homely sense of community and belonging through recollection and remembrance. These, in turn, contribute to our individual and collective identities and vice versa. By drawing on existing home-building literature, more-than-representational encounters and practices provide a link to understand memory and identity. Theorisations of home are important for wider discussions about place, memory, and migration, and geographers are well-positioned to push this research agenda.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. I would like to thank Dr Danielle Drozdowski for her comments and guidance on earlier versions of this paper. My thanks also go to Dr Katy Bennett and the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback that improved the paper.

ORCID

Charishma Ratnam  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6328-4539>

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2010). Happy objects. In M. Gregg & G. Seigworth (Eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (pp. 29–51). North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Anderson, B. (2009). Affective atmospheres. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2(2), 77–81.
- Arnold, G. (2016). Place and space in home-making processes and the construction of identities in transnational migration. *Transnational Social Review*, 6(1–2), 160–177.
- Assmann, J. (2011). Moses the Egyptian: The memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism and “collective memory and cultural identity”. In J. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi & D. Levy (Eds.), *The collective memory reader* (pp. 209–215). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Birth, K. (2006). The immanent past: Culture and psyche at the juncture of memory and history. *Ethos*, 34(2), 169–191.
- Blunt, A. (2005). Cultural geography: Cultural geographies of home. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(4), 505–515.
- Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Blunt, A., & Varley, A. (2004). Geographies of home. *Cultural Geographies*, 11(1), 3–6.
- Bocagni, P. (2017). *Migration and the search for home: Mapping domestic space in migrants' everyday lives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Braidotti, R. (2006). *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Buckle, C. (2017). Residential mobility and moving home. *Geography Compass*, 11(5), 1–11.
- Carolan, M. (2008). More-than-representational Knowledge/s of the countryside: How we think as bodies. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 48(4), 408–422.
- Carton, A. (2002). Remembering Kedgere. *Meanjin*, 61(4), 82–85.
- Cieraad, I. (2010). Homes from home: Memories and projections. *Home Cultures*, 7(1), 85–102.
- Coole, D., & Frost, S. (2010). *New materialisms ontology, agency and politics*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- De Nardi, S. (2016). Who were the enemies? The spatial practices of belonging and exclusion in Second World War Italy. In D. Drozdowski, S. D. De Nardi & E. Waterton (Eds.), *Memory, Place and Identity: Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict* (pp. 95–110). Abingdon: Routledge.
- De Nardi, S. (2017). *The poetics of conflict experience: Materiality and embodiment in Second World War Italy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- DeLyser, D. (2015). Collecting, kitsch and the intimate geographies of social memory: A story of archival autoethnography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 40(2), 209–222.

- Dowling, R., & Mee, K. (2007). Home and homemaking in contemporary Australia. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 24(3), 161–165.
- Dowling, R., & Power, E. (2013). Domesticities. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*, pp., 290–303.
- Drozdowski, D., De Nardi, S., & Waterton, E. (2016). *Memory, Place and Identity: Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Drozdowski, D. (2016). Encountering memory in the everyday city. In D. Drozdowski, S. De Nardi & E. Waterton (Eds.), *Memory, Place and Identity: Commemoration and Remembrance of War and Conflict* (pp. 19–37). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Duffy, M., & Waitt, G. (2013). Home sounds: Experiential practices and performativities of hearing and listening. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 14(4), 466–481.
- Easthope, H. (2004). A place called home. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 21(3), 128–138.
- Euridice, T. (2004). Re-encountering Cuban tastes in Australia. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 15(1), 40–53.
- Fortier, A. (2000). *Migrant belongings: memory, space, identity*. Oxford: Berg.
- Glaeser, A. (2000). *Divided in unity: Identity, Germany and the Berlin Police*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gorman-Murray, A., & Dowling, R. (2007). Home. *M/C Journal*, 10(4), Online <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/01-editorial.php>.
- Gregson, N. (2007). *Living with things: Ridding, accommodation, dwelling*. Wantage: Sean Kingston Publishing.
- Hage, G. (1997). At home in the entrails of the west: multiculturalism, ethnic food and migrant home-building. In H. Grace, G. Hage, L. Johnson, J. Langsworth & M. Symonds (Eds.), *home/world: space, community and marginality in Sydney's west* (pp. 99–153). Marrickville: Pluto Press.
- Hage, G. (1998). *White nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. Annandale: Pluto Press.
- Hage, G. (2010). Migration, food, memory and home-building. In S. Radstone & B. Schwarz (Eds.), *Memory: Histories, theories, debates* (pp. 416–427). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hayden, D. (1995). *The power of place: Urban landscapes as public history*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Hayes-Conroy, A., & Hayes-Conroy, J. (2008). Taking back taste. Feminism, food and visceral politics. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15(5), 461–473.
- Horton, J., & Kraftl, P. (2013). *Cultural Geographies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, P., & Smith, S. (1984). *Exploring social geography*. London: G Allen & Unwin.
- James, R. (2004). The reliable beauty of aroma: Staples of food and cultural production among Italian-Australians. *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 15(1), 23–39.
- Johnson, N. (2002). Mapping monuments: The shaping of public space and cultural identities. *Visual Communication*, 1(3), 293–298.
- Jones, O. (2011). Geography, memory and non-representational geographies. *Geography Compass*, 5(12), 875–885.
- Lewis, P. (1979). Axioms for reading the landscape. In D. Meinig (Ed.), *The interpretation of the ordinary landscape* (pp. 11–33). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ley-Cervantes, M., & Duyvendak, J. W. (2017). At home in generic places: Personalising strategies of the mobile rich. *Journal of Housing and Built Environment*, 32(1), 63–76.
- Longhurst, R., Ho, E., & Johnston, L. (2008). Using 'the body' as an 'instrument of research': Kimchi and pavlova. *Area*, 40(2), 208–217.
- Longhurst, R., Johnston, L., & Ho, E. (2009). A visceral approach: Cooking 'at home' with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34(3), 333–345.
- Lorimer, H. (2005). Cultural geography: The busyness of being 'more-than-representational'. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1), 83–94.
- Macnaghten, P., & Urry, J. (1998). *Contested natures*. London: SAGE.
- Massey, D. (1992). A place called home. *New Formations*, 17(7), 3–15.
- McFarlane, C. (2011). The city as assemblage: Dwelling and urban space. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 29(4), 649–671.
- McLaughlin, J. (2015). Family ties in genes and stories: The importance of value and recognition in the narratives people tell of family. *The Sociological Review*, 63(3), 626–643.
- Meinig, D. (1979). *The interpretation of the ordinary landscape*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, D. (2006). Things that bright up the place. *Home Cultures*, 3(3), 235–249.

- Pahl, K. (2012). Every object tells a story: Intergenerational stories and objects in the homes of Pakistani heritage families in South Yorkshire, UK. *Home Cultures*, 9(3), 303–327.
- Phillips, A. (2005). Cultural geographies in practice: Walking and looking. *Cultural Geographies*, 12(4), 507–513.
- Pink, S. (2004). *Home truths: Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. New York: Berg.
- Ratnam, C., & Drozdowski, D. (2017). Assembling attachments to homes under bushfire risk. *Geographical Research*, 55(4), 1–12.
- Ricœur, P. (1991). *From text to action*. London: Athlone Press.
- Ricœur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simpson, P. (2017). Spacing the subject: Thinking subjectivity after non-representational theory. *Geography Compass*, 11, 1–13.
- Somers, M., & Gibson, G. (1994). Reclaiming the epistemological other: Narrative and the social constitution of identity. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Social theory and the politics of identity* (pp. 37–100). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Thrift, N. (1996). *Spatial formations*. London: SAGE.
- Thrift, N. (2004). Intensities of feeling: towards a spatial politics of affect. *Geografiska Annaler Series B, Human Geography*, 86(1), 57–78.
- Tolia-Kelly, D. (2004). Locating processes of identification: Studying the precipitates of re-memory through artefacts in the British Asian home. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29(3), 314–329.
- Tolia-Kelly, D. (2013). Landscape and memory. In P. Howard, I. Thompson & E. Waterton (Eds.), *The routledge companion to landscape studies* (pp. 322–334). London: Routledge.
- Tuan, Y. (2004). Home. In S. Harrison, S. Pile & N. Thrift (Eds.), *Patterned ground: Entanglements of nature and culture* (pp. 78–96). London: Reaktion Books.
- Valentine, G. (2001). *Social geographies: Space and society*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Waterton, E. (2013). Landscape and non-representational theories. In P. Howard, I. Thompson & E. Waterton (Eds.), *The routledge companion to landscape studies* (pp. 66–75). London: Routledge.
- Waterton, E. (2014). A more-than-representational understanding of heritage? The 'past' and the politics of affect. *Geography Compass*, 8(11), 823–833.
- Waterton, E., & Dittmer, J. (2014). The museum as assemblage: Bringing forth affect at the Australian War Memorial. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 29(2), 122–139.
- Wertsch, J. (2002). *Voices of collective remembering*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Woods, M. (2015). Territorialisation and the assemblage of rural place: Examples from Canada and New Zealand. In J. Dessein, L. Battaglini & L. Horlings (Eds.), *Cultural sustainability and regional development: Theories and practices of territorialisation*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Charishma Ratnam is a PhD candidate in human geography at UNSW Australia. Her research focuses on Sri Lankan refugees and the interlinkages of memory and identity in the home during their settlement in Australia. She is interested in how memory informs identities that are fostered and maintained in private spaces through everyday practices and encounters in and around the home. Her fieldwork is grounded in ethnographic approaches that focus on the Sri Lankan refugee diaspora by analysing their homemaking practices that contribute to building a wider sense of place.

How to cite this article: Ratnam C. Creating home: Intersections of memory and identity. *Geography Compass*. 2018;12:e12363. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12363>

Copyright of Geography Compass is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.