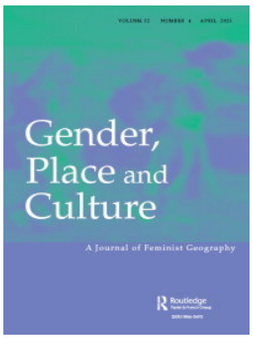

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Domesticity and dwelling in displacement: home-making practices of Syrian women in Istanbul houses

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ABSTRACT

Combining architectural and cultural anthropological approaches, this study explores the domestic spaces of Syrian women in Istanbul in order to understand how they perform 'home-making' in a new social and architectural setting. Scholars who study migration and gender are increasingly interested in studying 'home,' but few studies examine migrant women's spatial agency and how space and time are materialized by looking at past and present homes. Methodologically, we add to standard semi-structured interviews and photographic analysis, the method of mental map drawings of houses in Istanbul and reminisced houses from Syria. These methods allow us to examine interrelated spatio-temporal practices of material culture decorations of the residential interiors and (re)creating of daily routines from Syria within the residential interior. Each of these home-making practices is a form of personalisation, control of space and manner of performing gender roles while increasing contentment and belonging. By decorating with objects from Syria, plants, photos, carefully selected furniture; repurposing guestrooms into spaces of religious practice; and cooking, nurturing family members and hosting friends, women create domestic spaces of comfort. Ultimately, this research showcases how migrant women create homes out of new dwellings, even when they are not able to fully revive what has been lost.

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Introduction

Home-making is a significant activity for migrants through which they seek the togetherness of tradition, security and harmony in a 'dwelling'. The

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power of cultural objects in a dwelling can tell us a great deal about the belonging and attachment of the occupants, as well as the domesticity and (temporal) relationship to times and spaces, whether experienced or imagined. Migrants are in search of a sense of belonging, which is highly tied to enacting learned and observed cultural routines within domestic spaces (Fozdar and Hartley 2014). Yet, for the displaced, the 'luxury' of claiming domesticity in a dwelling is highly dependent on their economic and social opportunities, which are often limited after migration. It is difficult to settle in a 'home' if the residential interior space lacks materials that reflect cultural identity. To belong and to feel content while occupying a dwelling is an act of reconstructing what was left and what is being reminisced. For many, homemaking is an endless ongoing process that cannot be completed because the migrant is not able to reconstruct the belief in the 'wholeness' of housing (Lozanovska 2019, 205).

This article examines how domesticity and dwelling are created in conditions of displacement and how home-making is enacted by migrant Syrian women in İstanbul houses. Beginning in 2011, which marks the initiation of the civil war in Syria, thousands of Syrians began fleeing to Turkey and other surrounding countries (Although Syrians in Turkey are not legally refugees, we use the term 'refugee' in this paper to reflect the condition of forced movement). After their arrival they were not officially considered 'refugees' by the Turkish government'; they were given either 'Temporary Protection Status' or a residence permit (Çetin et al. 2018). No housing was provided by the Turkish government for migrants with any status making them subject to the whims of the market and its landlords. Research shows that migrants face difficulties finding housing due to expensive prices or discrimination (Rottmann 2020), and many are living in residences that are unsafe. Further, they face increasing animosity from the local population in daily life, with a recent survey showing that 86% of locals feel that Syrians should be sent back to Syria (Erdoğan 2018).

The pressure on Syrians to leave Turkey is coupled with stigmatization in the Turkish mainstream media, where it is reported that even government officials think Syrians do not know how to 'live' both in their residences and also in public areas. A recent stark example happened when the governor of Bolu, a city in Northwest Turkey, gave an ultimatum to the Syrians living in his region not to cook with too many spices, not to talk loudly both in-residences and in public and not to leave their houses after 9 pm (Birgun.net 2021). Research has pointed to a type of neighborhood social control consisting of 'informal' disciplinary techniques deployed by citizens,' which leads some Syrians to be reluctant to leave their homes (Saracoglu and Belanger 2019). Women are particularly affected by the rising intolerant climate toward migrants because of their appearance, such as a headscarf that is wrapped differently from locals, which swiftly identifies them as Syrian

(Gönül 2020; Rottmann and Nimer 2021). Although Syrian men are usually more subject to physical violence from locals, researchers have also identified cases where local women attacked Syrian mothers. This threatening political landscape increases the importance of home as a space of comfort and safety for women. Home-making as a displaced human being is a form of political agency, hence, when Syrian women are making homes they are acting in a way that is highly significant for their wellbeing.

Despite the many challenges they face, our research shows that migrants are *actively* engaged with the act of home-making, and this is fundamentally an agentive 'spatial practice' (Beeckemens, Singh, and Gola 2022, 19; Boccagni 2017). Scholarship on migration and home tends to focus on the social relationships and emotions of home (Brun and Fabos 2015) or on the impossibility of being at home (Murcia 2019). However, the specific spatial and personal practices that make spaces 'domestic' receive scant attention since traditional interview methodologies may not document them. We use mental map drawings and photographs as well as interviews to capture how migrants perceive time and space. As we are interested in both culture and also space, we adopt an interdisciplinary perspective combining concepts and methods from the fields of architecture, anthropology and geography. We show how material culture is entangled with spatial and temporal practices in migrants' domestic spheres. We highlight how Syrian women agentively perform personalisation, spatial/occupational control, and care activities to create 'homes' in their dwellings. Personalisation is not only a means of expressing class and identity, but of tying migrants to particular places and times as they use objects from their pasts whenever possible. Through prayer, cooking and carework, migrants domesticate residential spaces. Their homemaking actions emplace them after war unmade their homes (Meade 2011) on the one hand and while discrimination in their new society makes occupying the public space uncomfortable on the other hand. In this environment, the most private space, their home, is vitally important – it is the only place they can personalize and therefore express an identity beyond the condition of being a refugee.

In the next section, we discuss the inter-related theoretical frameworks of home, domesticity and gender in migration contexts. Next, we describe our methodology, which included in-depth interviews, mental-map drawings and photographs. Our methods provide a detailed perspective and documentation on the domesticity contexts of the homes of participants. The final part of the article showcases home-making as spatial practices of personalisation and routines and decodes how 'domesticity in displacement' is realized in the dwellings. By exploring how these migrants deal with the interiors of their dwellings, we can shed light on how agentive occupation of spaces generates feelings of being 'at-home' and safe but remains an unfinished endeavor.

Theoretical frameworks: the spatial practices of homemaking

Theorizing home: dwelling after displacement

A study of home finds an apt starting point in Martin Heidegger's work on the relationship between building and dwelling. Questioning the literal origins of 'building dwelling thinking', Heidegger investigated what building meant for us and how we dwelled (1971). For him, the dwelling was solely *the way* in which we *are,* and, *the manner* in which we humans are on earth; they build therefore they dwell, and vice versa. It was the old word *bauen* that deciphers the human beings' existence as he dwells, and it also meant to preserve and care (96). Therefore, dwelling is an act of building for preserving and caring, in other words, to simply 'be'. Walter Benjamin takes the context of dwelling further and says that dwelling is an active form of interaction where the inhabitant and his surroundings adjust to each other through traces and habits (Benjamin 2002, 221). 'For the private individual the private environment represents the universe. In it, he gathers remote places and the past. … To live means to leave traces' (Benjamin 2002, 35). Deriving from the word 'habit', Benjamin suggests that *the dwelling and inhabiting is the formation of habits*. Benjamin's concept of dwelling is actually the experience of home, whereby 'making a home' is a continuous process that is never finished. In short, home-making is to build a dwelling to the fullest extent; it is the act of building for inhabiting, which is a continuous activity for the inhabitants. As Benjamin and Heidegger theorized, for human beings to perform their identity and reenact their existence as the inhabitant of a dwelling, they form habits through dwelling and inhabiting – or, home-making.

The meaning of 'home' is slippery. It has been defined in a wide variety of ways by scholars in the humanities, social sciences and architecture and urban planning fields (e.g. Akcan 2018; Beekmans 2022; Boccagni 2017; Cairns 2004; Gauvain and Altman 1982; Hage et al. 1997; Lozanovska 2019; Mallett 2004; Mee and Vaughan 2012; Somerville 1997). In this article, we bring literature from anthropology and architecture together with scholarship in geography. Most scholars distinguish 'dwelling' and 'house' from 'home' with the former two referring to physical places, whereas the latter refers to social relationships, emotions and ontologies of security, familiarity and control (Boccagni 2017, 9). Homes are not simply entered or inhabited, but rather are *made*, through a process called 'home-making' (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Yet, geographers and others have also pointed out that homes can also be unmade through various displacements (i.e. eviction, war, destruction) (Baxter and Brickell 2014; Meade 2011). But, unmaking is not a final moment: this research explores how engagements with lost homes and the spaces and objects left behind are in dialogue with homes being made in the present. While homes of fear and destruction were

unmade back in Syria, Syrian women willingly 'make' new residential interior spaces to create belonging and express their desire to survive and live.

The study of homemaking is particularly poignant for migrants as it is part of their search for the togetherness of tradition, security and harmony that guarantees connectedness (Heynen 1999, 18). Migration scholars have long been interested in this connectedness – in how migrants embed homes in values, traditions, memories and feelings (Brun and Fabos 2015; Cieraad 2010; Dona 2015), how migrants experience liminal spaces like camps or temporary shelters as home or homelessness (Brun 2016); and the political and historical contexts of homemaking (Brickell 2012; Staeheli and Nagel 2006). Often scholars see migrant homes not as specific locations, but rather as 'an idea, a state of mind, a memory, an ongoing aspiration (Hage, et al. 1997; Taylor 2013) or simply what Brah (1996, 192) denotes a 'mythic place of desire' (Murcia 2019, 1528). Recently and departing from these abstract approaches, space and time have emerged as important topics within the study of migrant homemaking (Beekmans et al. 2022; Boccagni 2017; Wang 2020). Research shows that migrants often have relationships to more than one space, and spatial attachments develop gradually over time and according to the political and economic contexts of migration.

Spatial agency: theorizing personalisation and routines

While home is a prominent object of study, what remains unexplored – whether in the social sciences or in architecture – are the spatial practices or 'spatial agency' that makes a home 'home' for migrants. Our research contributes to the study of migration and home by focusing on how space and time interpenetrate materially and in action as migrants make homes. In doing so, we join scholars who have studied domestication through materiality (Gauvain and Altman 1982) and specifically how artifacts, appliances and decorations tie people to past and present homes (Meah and Jackson 2016; Walsh 2006; Van der Horst 2010). Objects make the home into a kind of private museum where 'objects of personal, artistic or cultural interest are stored and displayed' (Meah and Jackson 2016). The placement of objects reflects personalisation of the space or the decoration of one's occupied space by their own will and choice. Material culture of the domestic interior provides evidence of how its occupants wish to be recognized (Miller 2006, 196), and it is enacted in the residential interior space through personalisation, a core process of domesticity. Last but not least, it should be remembered that material belongings have a duality in the homes of the displaced. Firstly, they complicate the temporalities of displacement – raising questions about time and space attachments, secondly, they show us how things are involved in the negotiation of cultural significance affecting the subjectivities of occupants (tenants) (Dimitrakou and Hilbrandt 2022).

Aside from the physicality of the dwelling itself and the objects it contains, cultural practices are the suppliers of phenomenological bounds to the place that one resides in. They are the routine activities that make the occupants 'feel at home'. To perform the cultural routines in the dwelling provides the domestic space a symbolic role through the 'integration of daily life with core spiritual teachings and practices' (Andersen and Gündüz 2020). In other words, performing material and performative extensions within the domestic space positions the occupants beyond limited understandings of privacy and publicness, and this makes the dwelling a 'home'. When speaking about home-making for the displaced, the material cultures, routines and the lived (traumatic) experiences can rarely be separated (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020; Pasquetti and Sonyal 2020). Thus, this paper looks at how routines – actions repeated in a regular way, such as prayer and cooking - are spatialized. Importantly, routines can show us the actual spatial – temporal creations of home and thus are important for highlighting women's agency (Datta 2006 in Meah and Jackson 2016.

Domestic space and gender

The relations between architecture, gender and domesticity becomes visible and comes forth in a home (Heynen & Baydar, 2005). As with all dimensions of social life, but especially when considering private spaces, gender roles have an impact on 'home-making' (Gurney 1997; Wardhaugh 1999; Young 2005; Mallett 2004). Researchers have traced the association of women as caretakers of the home to the industrial revolution and association of men as familial breadwinners (Heynen & Baydar, 2005, 7). In Syria, tradition also supports gender-based distinctions in the occupation of the domestic sphere (Salamandira 2004). For example, traditional houses were designed with separate areas for men and women and architectural features that separated family members from visitors' views (Kharboutli and Erdogan 2022; Watenpaugh 2010). Feminist scholars have shown that women are often responsible for cultivating the family home as the 'main carers' (Leonard and Speakman 1986) and that they identify closely and intimately with it (Rapoport 1981). Homes are spaces of safety, privacy, individuation and preservation where women express their identity and safeguard meaningful things (Young 2005).

Homes are sites where women perform their roles as caretakers, which today includes intensive mothering: 'the day-to-day labor of nurturing the child, listening to the child, attempting to decipher the child's needs and desires, struggling to meet the child's wishes, and placing the child's well-being ahead of their [mothers'] own convenience' (Hays, 1996, 115). Domesticity therefore, includes the spatial settings and behavioral patterns, such as arranging furniture, cloth, food, the need for cleanliness and hygiene, and everything involved with providing care for family and children (Heynen, 7). While some

women find the role fulfilling, others point to how it circumscribes possibilities by ascribing women's roles within the domestic space. Grosz has argued that homes are not built for women, leaving women homeless:

> The containment of women within a dwelling that they did not build, nor was even built for them, can only amount a homelessness within the very home itself: it becomes the space of duty, of endless and infinitely repeatable chores that have no social value or recognition, the space of the affirmation and replenishment of others at the expense and erasure of the self, the space of domestic violence and abuse, the space that harms as much as it isolates women (Grosz; 1995: 122).

Yet, domestic spaces are important to many women. They are a source of comfort and familiarity and also a space that they can control to a certain degree. Given that they are in varying ways confined to the home, women's spatial practices are significant for showing how they act to give their lives meaning. Due to having lost their house, migrant women have lost a prior spatial expression of domesticity and must reconstruct new patterns of spatial and gender-related practices (Benchelabi 1998; Daley 1991; Gola 2021). Additionally, migration may change gender roles as women may become primary family providers and take more active roles in public spheres (Culcasi 2019). Our research explores how migrant women make these spatial choices after displacement and in this way assert domestic control and agency.

Methodology

Our research draws on semi-structured interviews, mental maps and photographs with 8 married, 1 unmarried and 1 divorced woman living in Istanbul. Each of the interviewees were between 19 and 44 years old and arrived in Turkey between 2014 and 2019 (Table 1). As the table shows, they have a range of educational and professional experiences, although most were middle class, meaning the conclusions that we draw about homemaking do not apply broadly to all Syrians in Turkey, but rather to those with a basic level of financial and other resources to (re)create domestic spaces. Spatial agency is directly tied to economic position.

The research took place in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore all interviews were conducted *via* Zoom in English or Arabic with the assistance of a native Syrian research assistant. The questions covered topics, such as how daily life practices are being performed in these new houses, where and when interviewees feel at home in the dwelling, which interior architectural components and/or accessories made them feel at home, and their post-occupancy critiques regarding past and current houses. The case study houses were not collective living/co-living shared residential spaces, but were rather apartment flat dwellings, where the nuclear family of the participants reside as tenants (except one participant who occupied a dormitory room with her roommates). Participants were asked about their

Table 1. Table showing the case study residences in Syria and Istanbul.

#	Name	Date of birth	Profession	Initial year of residence in Turkey	Residence permit type	Location of the residence	Kitchen	Living room	Dining room	Bedroom
1	MONA	2001	FREELANCE DESIGNER	2019	STUDENT	DAMASCUS, SYRIA	1	1	0	2
						ISTANBUL	1	1	1	2
2	LAILA	1976	NONE	2018	SHORT TERM	PALMYRA, SYRIA	1	2	1	3
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	4
3	MANAL	1999	STUDENT	2017	STUDENT	HOMS, SYRIA	1	1	0	3
						ISTANBUL	0	0	0	1
4	HODA	1980	ARABIC INSTRUCTOR IN A STATE UNIVERSITY	2015	WORK	ALEPPO, SYRIA	1	1	0	3
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	3
5	ASEEL	1984	ACADEMIC	2019	SHORT TERM	IDLIB, SYRIA	1	1	0	3
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	3
6	ABEER	1978	NONE	2013	SHORT TERM	ALEPPO, SYRIA	1	1	1	4
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	3
7	EMAN	1996	MEDICAL DOCTOR	2017	SHORT TERM	ALEPPO, SYRIA	1	1	1	2
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	3
8	RAWAN	1986	NONE	2017	SHORT TERM	DAMASCUS, SYRIA	1	1	0	2
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	2
9	REEM	1980	MASTER IN CURRICULUM AND CHILD PEDAGOGY, LOOKING FOR A JOB	2013	SHORT TERM	ALEPPO, SYRIA	1	1	0	4
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	3
10	NOOR	1979	MAID	2014	SHORT TERM	ALEPPO, SYRIA	1	1	0	1
						ISTANBUL	1	1	0	2

dwellings in detail, to understand the practice of home-making, and how and where it was realized in the residential interior space. Many questions were related to material culture and how women personalized their dwellings to create domesticity. As a background to this fieldwork, we also draw on 20 in-depth interviews with women conducted for a broader EU research project and a TUBITAK project. Although not specifically focused on spatial agency, these research projects included fieldwork in homes and observations that indicated the importance of homemaking for Syrian women's belonging in Turkey (Figure 1).

Mental maps are basically sketch-plan drawings of the houses that Syrian women occupied back in Syria, and the houses they are now occupying in İstanbul. We asked the participants to create these mental maps either directly before or after the interview, and, following this drawing process, the participants were asked to describe the two maps (First map is the mental plan-sketch of their Syrian house, the latter one is for their current house in İstanbul) verbally to the researchers (Figures 2–4). The method of the re-creation and reviving of past spatial practices is a tool that was developed by Sezginalp (2017). These drawings were not asked to be done as a technically or architecturally equipped individual would do them: Interviewees were free to sketch the rough-plan according to their own perceptions in order to show the interior spatial allocation. The mental map method draws on research on 'retrospective memory' (Furlong 1951), 'event memory' (Ayer 1956),

Figure 1. Randa's accessories from syria, displayed in her İstanbul house.

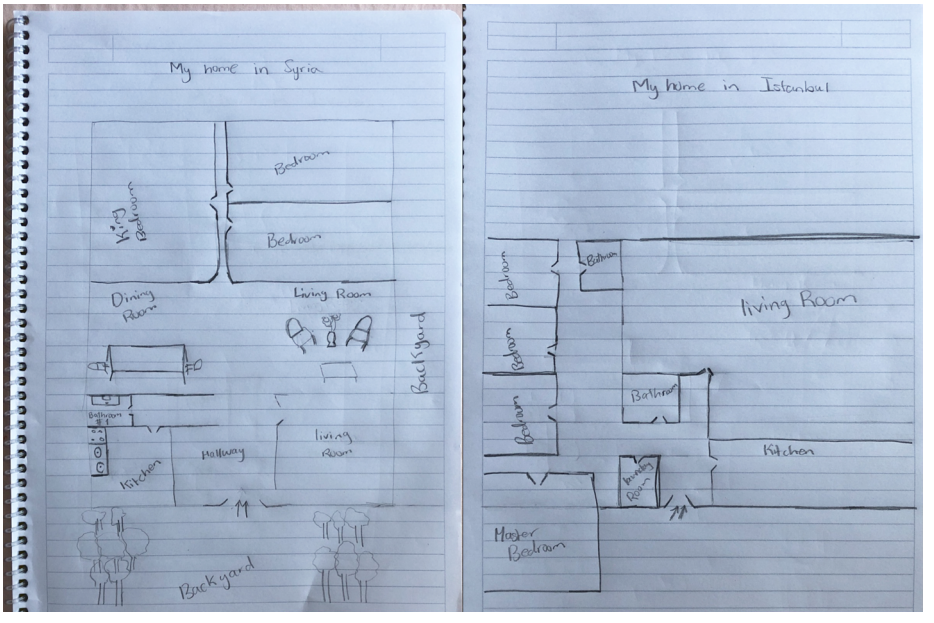

Figure 2. Laila's mental maps of syria and İstanbul houses.

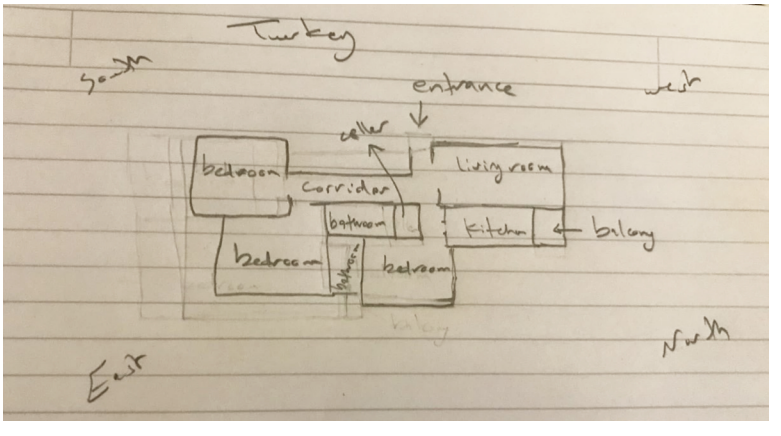

Figure 3. Aseel's mental map of her house in İstanbul.

'occurrent memory' (Smith 1966) and 'personal memory' (Locke 1971). The goal of mental map analysis is not only to understand spatial differences in proportion, but how these are abstracted by the individuals in order to understand their personal meanings (For example, a participant may have drawn a corridor of her Syrian house much narrower than its actual measurement compared to the other interior spaces of the house proportion wise. This would not be a flaw or a mistake, in fact, this would be a reflection of the participant's memory of that space. The mental maps will show the residence as the occupant remembers it). This technique allowed us to make memory work and imagination an object (home) of our analysis. The mental

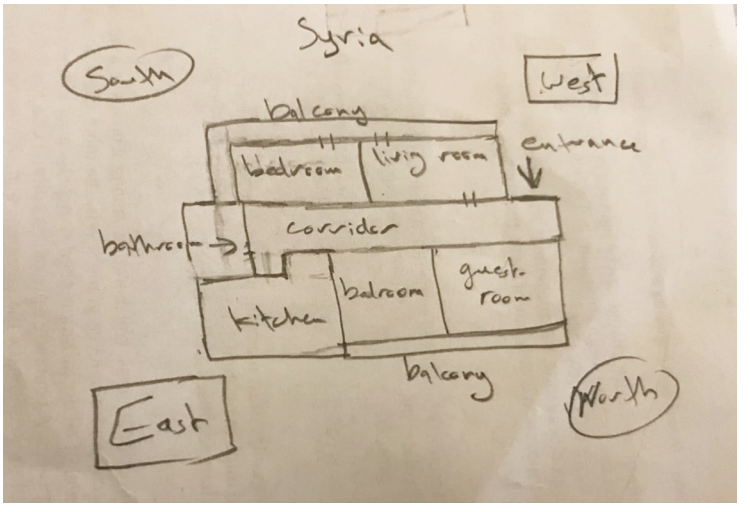

Figure 4. Aseel's mental map of her house in syria.

maps helped us to understand the spatialization of the interior spaces of lost or current homes but they do not necessarily guide our observations of the personalisation in the residential interior. To study personalisation or home-making more specifically, we rely on specific questions that the interviewers asked based on particularities of the drawings, as well as other interview questions. When interviewees showed photos, or interior components such as decorative objects or furniture, these were also noted by the interviewers and subsequently subject to visual analysis.

Domesticity in displacement: spatial practices of home-making

Performances of specific daily and cultural spatial practices – personalisation of the residential interior and spatial routines – are fundamental for providing a sense of self and a secure and attached 'home'. Through personalisation and spatial routines, individuals produce and then reproduce home in their daily lives. While personalisation is usually a one-time act, spatial routines such as cooking and praying are acts that are re-produced daily. For migrants who have lost many personal belongings (whose homes were unmade) and who have experienced routines disrupted by war, these spatial practices are vital for making a new home. The material items that 'personalize' home and the spatial routines that give the material space meaning enables cultivation of a stable 'Syrian self.'

Personalisation

> 'In every Syrian household, family members gathered to play backgammon on happy occasions. For me, having such nostalgic objects at my house makes me feel

> that I *belong* somewhere, d*espite the fact that I have never seen anyone playing it back in Syria*… I never felt home anywhere until now, I have always felt like a stranger. Accessories of Syrian culture make me feel safe and make me think of how life might have been in the past: *Oud* [musical instrument] playing in the background, courtyard houses, the sound of water flowing from the fountain, the smell of coffee and jasmines…'

Randa, a Syrian woman in İstanbul, poetically describes the significance of a miniature backgammon accessory that she exhibits in her İstanbul house, just below her TV unit (Figure 1). The extent to which a tiny material object reverberates so meaningfully from her past in the domestic space is apparent in this quote. Even though Randa shared the fact that she has never seen anyone playing backgammon, she appears to idealize a Syrian cultural past where everyone played. Nostalgic objects allow Randa to claim a more-than-migrant identity, as a member of a rich and beautiful culture. As Benjamin noted, living means to leave traces in the space that surrounds the human being. Through 'home' and its domesticity Randa can reflect upon remembered and learned cultural artifacts. The new 'place', her new home, carries a greater emotional charge than location (Tuan, 1979, 409); she re-creates *the spirit, the personality and the sense of place* through home-making.

The act of personalisation within the residential interior spaces occupied by Syrian women, is an act of leaving traces, whereby they can reminisce about what has been lost and also reflect upon it as a part of their identity. During our interviews we could clearly observe how a feeling of being at home was achieved through personalisation. For example, when asked which item made her 'feel at home', Shaima replied that she brought toys that she had played with in her childhood and antiques that her grandparents had had in Syria. She stated that being able to bring these items from Syria was a 'privilege.' They made her feel comfortable, relaxed and at-home. The objects are highly personal, specific to her own past and ancestral relationships. In this way, her decoration makes an ephemeral connection between Syria and İstanbul. These materials resonate with feelings of familiarity and attachment.

When asked which item or items they would have liked to have brought to İstanbul from Syria to help them to feel at home, many migrants referred to their childhood belongings. Remembering clearly to express the physicality of the item, Hoda said she had a small wooden box that had a lock and a key, with a mosaic design on top: 'That was very dear to me. I did not take it with me, because we did not ever think we would not go back to Syria soon'. Hoda also had a set of wooden pieces that she painted when she was younger, yet she forgot to take them along with her to İstanbul. Regretting not taking something along with her, just like Hoda, Reem also expressed her regret about not being able to bring her bookshelf and books with her. The bookshelf was filled with the stories and novels that she had read during her childhood. As these examples show, home is materialized in objects that

represent particular time periods that are highly personal to the individual. There also seems to be a desire to communicate an individuality and specialness through the discussed objects. For example, after mentioning some wooden pieces that she painted, Rawan noted, 'I studied fine arts.' She wanted to show us that she is not just a migrant, but also has an identity as an artist.

Objects from Syria or which reminded them of Syria were universally important to those we interviewed. For instance, Eman referred to a table-cloth that was used on her desk during the day. She said, 'I am attached to my Syrian identity; this item reminds me of my identity.' Similar to the table-cloth of Eman, Sara brought little wooden accessories that reflected Syrian culture, and placed them on the television unit so that each time she is watching it, these accessories are 'taking her to Syria' in her own words. Decorating the dwelling with vases and plants was a common way of personalising for migrants. Laila told us that she likes placing plants in the house and on the balcony, whereas Abeer said that she specifically chooses vases for each room and her house had lots of vases. Both of them referred to this activity as a tool for home-making and feeling at home. The importance of plants is clear if we examine the mental map drawings of Laila in which she depicted a potted plant with flowers in her home in Syria, but omitted them in her drawing of her Istanbul home (Figure 2). The Istanbul house is plain; only its borders are shown. However, the house in Syria contains many small details such as a dining table, an oven, two sinks, two armchairs and a coffee table. Her map shows us how home is remembered through particular interior spatial elements. These active personalisation interventions to the residential interior are pure demonstrations of the Syrian occupants' sense of place, as Tuan suggested – through applying their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations (1979, 410).

Many migrants treat photographs as precious interior accessories that personalize the dwelling. For example, family photos taken in Syria were key decorative objects for Mona. These photographs were not placed on a distant shelf but were vividly accompanying her during her spatial practice in interior spaces, such as while cooking. She specifically chose the often-occupied spaces in the dwelling's kitchen for placement and related how she would often gaze at them.

Personalisation of the residential interior is a reflection of economic status. While Abeer was happily sharing her decorating performance by saying 'being able to access and purchase the things she liked for her house' made her feel at home – Noor, a maid, never mentioned anything about decoration or accessories regarding her house. Most of the women that we interviewed were middle class, however Noor had to gather second-hand, used furniture for her house. Her home was in a basement and received very little daylight from narrow clerestory windows. While Abeer and many others were married and sharing the house as a family, Noor was a divorcée. She had to start

from scratch to make a home after her divorce. She did not have the luxury of 'decorating' and placing objects that reflected her identity. All of our participants were building an independent life after having lost everything. But, the ones with economical opportunities have greater spatial agency to re-make their 'homes' through material objects. Migrants who must rely on hand-me-downs, charity and second hand furniture are less able to achieve this feeling of being at home.

Importantly, interviewees stressed to us that it was not simply a matter of having the objects themselves, which bring a feeling of being at home, but rather being able to make their own choices about decoration. For example, Abeer emphasized, 'I can purchase or get what I want for my house' while speaking about the wallpapers and bathroom furnishings. She added that the 'kitchen equipment is nice and new' and gives her a feeling of being at home. Even if they have the financial means to re-furnish, the difficulty of doing so should not be underestimated. Migrants have lost everything and they are building an independent life, re-making their homes. They express agency through personalizing their spaces in ways that communicate aesthetic tastes and past and present identities. Even though migration was involuntary to a large extent the creation of home is a voluntary and active process.

Spatial routines within the dwelling

Home is a context where a set of cultural practices and rituals are performed with repetitions – and these spatial practices within the dwelling provide permanence and continuity within the occupant's domestic sphere. In this section, we focus on two types of routines: Muslim prayer and the household tasks of cooking, nurturing and hosting.

Guestrooms as the space of religious practice

N*amaz* is one of the five pillars of Islam requiring Muslims to perform bodily routines on a prayer rug five times a day. Thus, it is a religious activity that requires a certain space to perform. In the course of home-making, our interviewees explained where and how they performed *namaz* both in their Syrian houses and also in their İstanbul houses. With regards to their İstanbul houses, our interviewees expressed enthusiasm and feelings of attachment and connection to their dwellings with the help of the *namaz* because they had the opportunity to have an extra room that could be dedicated to it. The extra room was actually the 'guest room,' which is basically a bedroom that a guest would normally sleep in. In Syria, guest rooms were needed as guests frequently visited our interviewees. However, in Istanbul, women rarely have a need for guest rooms meaning that there was an opportunity to re-purpose the room for themselves.

For example, Reem explained that she prayed in her guest room and felt utterly at home there. When she did not host any guests, which was the case most of the time, Reem was the sole occupant of that room, as if she is the owner of the room – being in contact with God in a safe place. Similarly to Reem, Aseel and Laila perform their prayer in the guestroom as well. In Aseel's words, 'I drink my coffee, run some errands in the house and read the Quran as a daily routine in the guestroom, it gives me a feeling of spirituality.' She explained that she literally 'meditates' through the religious routines, and it helps her to connect with her own self – 'the Syrian self'. All three women appreciated having a separate interior space for solely praying and performing their religious routines. Through such routines they revitalize identities beyond refugeeness and assert a belonging as practicing Muslims in a Muslim-majority country.

Interestingly, even though Aseel was using the word 'guestroom' during our interview with her, we found out that she did not label the guestroom of her İstanbul house as 'guestroom' in her mental map. Instead, she used the word 'bedroom' (Figure 3). By contrast, when drawing her Syrian house, she used the label 'guestroom' for one of the rooms (Figure 4). This difference shows how belonging in the Syrian house is connected to hosting guests. In Aseel's Istanbul house, that room has become a space for religious practice, not a guestroom.

Similarly repurposing space, during her interview Reem mentioned that she created a 'working corner' in the main living room solely for herself, where she could work on her writings and do some job hunting aside from nurturing her kids the whole day (Figure 5). This act of setting up a creative-space within the largest interior space of the dwelling, where usually the TV-watching, sitting and chatting occur, is another way of agentively shaping the dwelling according to a spatial practice. By repurposing the spaces in this way, women create a space for themselves. It is through the reenactment of their existence through the repetitive/spatial practice that women feel they are the 'inhabitants' of the house.

Cooking, nurturing, hosting

Food preparation and food preservation are important domestic management activities and are core activities of the daily routine of Syrian women, which take up a lot of their time. Cuisine practice is a fundamental part of being a 'Syrian' woman, a wife and a mother, and our interviewees felt content when talking about their productivity. For example, Shaima expressed how she loved spending time preparing and cooking Syrian dishes, while Maysa, specifically said that Syrian food makes her feel at home. In short, the kitchen was the space where Syrian women reflected their Syrianness as an identity performance.

Our interviewees were conscious about their heritage as family provisioners, which they learned from watching their grandmothers and mothers cooking back in Syria. When talking about cooking, Abeer, for instance,

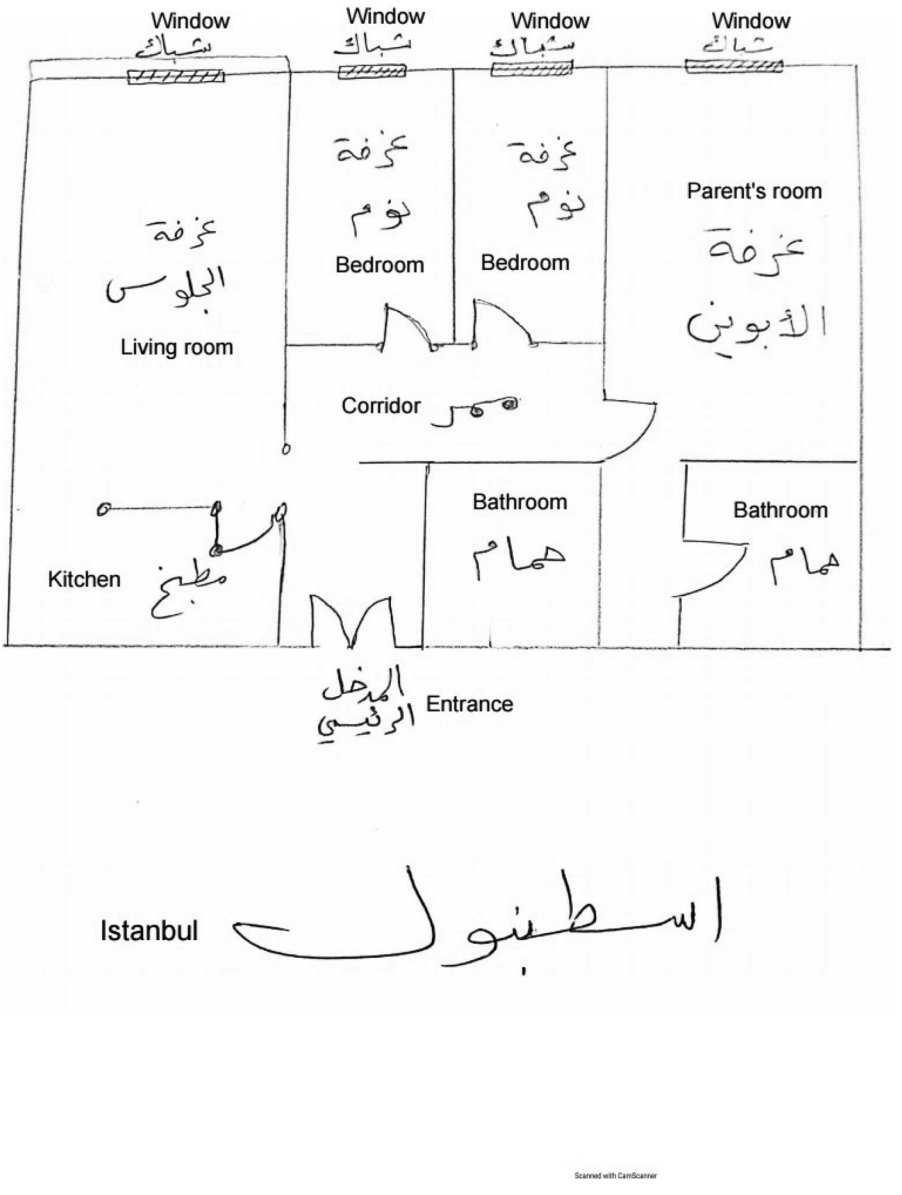

Figure 5. Reem's mental map of her house in İstanbul, showing her working corner.

confessed that she felt 'utmost Syrian' when she was cooking in her kitchen back in Aleppo. When occupied mostly in the kitchen during the day, interviewees remembered their childhoods when their mothers and grandmothers spent most of their time in the kitchen. In this way, mechanisms such as cooking, housework and related daily routines facilitate the orderly fabrication and daily maintenance of the domestic scene (Miller 2006, 197). Importantly, kitchen routines also tie them to cultural and familial pasts, and enable them to express current identities as family caretakers. Spatial practices within the kitchen are means of active home-making in İstanbul.

As noted, our research took place in the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. This was a time when the Turkish government implemented a mandatory lockdown. Occupants could only leave their dwellings in the case of an emergency or if they had a mandatory task. Children's schooling took place through online education. While most white collar workers easily shifted to home-offices, blue collar workers had to continue their labour in workplaces. The professions of our interviewees varied (Table 1), but all said that home-making was difficult during this time if they were married with children: Their husbands were mostly blue-collar workers and had to be away from home during the day. In their absence, mothers had to manage care-giving, nurturing and working. Many were the sole caregivers to children. Statistics show that the Covid-19 pandemic was a time of 'crisis' for women globally, as they had to operate the reproductive and caretaking work in the domestic sphere 'even under vulnerable spatial conditions' (UN Women 2020). Men and women encounter different social expectations and realities at 'home', in their roles of husbands and wives. The social expectations for married women and mothers centered on their domestic contributions at home (Hunt 1984, 47). For our interviewees, one way of understanding their stress can be observed in reflecting on statements like this. Hadeel said, 'when my husband is at work, my children are playing by themselves and my house is clean, I feel at home and happy. During the pandemic it was difficult to keep the children occupied continuously and the house clean.'

It was also inevitable to notice how our interviewees punctuated 'sharing their food' through socialising, as something that made them happier in the domestic sphere (but which was also affected by the pandemic). It is an essential part of Syrian culture to host guests in the house, prepare dishes, cater to them and to spend a long afternoon together with other Syrian women. Just as the objects of decoration create a private museum (Meah and Jackson 2016), the act of hosting involves 'exhibiting' the house as well. Three interviewees, Hadeel, Hoda and Shaima, specifically said that socialising with neighbors and friends, cleaning the house and preparing dishes before their arrival and sharing food were among the activities that made them feel-at-home in their İstanbul houses. Hoda spoke about her feelings of happiness during the time when she was 'with women' in her home. 'I invite my students over to talk; I also cook for them; they like Arabic dishes. I feel happy when they come over.' In other words, sharing the domestic sphere with other women made her occupy a 'home' space in İstanbul. Hoda combats the stigmatized social space Syrians experience outside their houses by hosting Turkish women in her home, which enables her to showcase shared cultural values like generosity and hospitality.

Through this reciprocal spatial practice with guests, Syrian women are not solely the occupants of their house, but also are actors performing a piece

to the others/the guests/the spectators: A cultural performance performed as 'the owner of the space'. In Lacan's words, 'From the moment this gaze exists, I am already something other, in that I feel becoming an object for the gaze of others' (1988, 215). In short, having guests in the house and hosting them as a cultural practice sustains not only the Syrian identity, but also the hostess identity or identity as the sole woman of the house. Syrian women become the subject of the house by the viewing mechanism of their guests.

Conclusion

Home-making is a social, cultural and place-specific process that characterizes human life, and it becomes more evident when it is done under the conditions of displacement (Beeckmans et al. 2022, 12). This research investigated the dwelling and domesticity of displaced Syrian women's houses in İstanbul, and examined how Syrian women performed home-making in order to feel content, safe and attached to their new social and architectural setting. We showed that migrants are actively engaged with unmade homes and the spaces and objects lost through actively making new homes in the present. Mental map drawings helped us to see how they remembered and (re-)made their homes in difficult conditions.

Although migrant home-making is well-studied, this research contributes to understanding homemaking as a temporal and spatial process. We found that personalisation and spatial routines within the dwelling were the two key spatial practices of home-making that link migrants to belonging across space and time. Home is not simply a feeling or an imagination that is often described to researchers in interviews. It is also something that people enact with objects and activities in daily life – from game pieces, to tablecloths, from photos to vases, in prayer and in hosting guests. In short, architecture is not simply a stage that accommodates the viewing subject, it frames its occupant (Colomina 1992, 83).

Women in our study were the main agents of homemaking as private spaces are seen as their domain and responsibility in Syrian (and also Turkish) culture. They were responsible for creating the important spaces of comfort for themselves and others. While researchers have noted women's key roles in symbolizing 'home,' homemaking as an arena of agency – personal choice and action – is less often stressed. By focusing closely on the objects and routines women choose, we showed how they fulfilled gender roles while confronting the hostile social environment outside of their houses and still celebrating Syrian identities within.

One issue the paper did not explore is women's post-occupancy critiques of their Istanbul houses, a subject we have dealt with in a separate article (Sezginalp Özçetin and Rottmann 2022). There, we discussed how women complain of insufficient balconies and storage areas in Istanbul compared to

their houses in Syria. Insufficient spatial conditions in İstanbul dwellings made 'home-making' practices harder for Syrian women. In this paper, we rather focused on what they are able to achieve in the spaces they have and with available resources. We highlighted how they agentively assert identities that are not solely tied to their social positions as migrants, even though they are shaped by them.

Whether or not we are migrants, the unsettling context of the pandemic has made us all reconsider what 'home' means and reshaped our domestic routines as well as home-making practices. How can we attach ourselves to stability when public spaces, state institutions and even social gatherings require caution? But, even prior to the pandemic, scholars noticed feelings of being uprooted, deconstruction of home (Verschaffel,2002 268) or homelessness (Said 1984 [2001], 159–160) due to globalization, colonial legacies, political polarization, the dominance of digital media and other features of modern life. Adorno famously said that 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (1951, 38). He wanted to question the meaning of home for the homeless and criticize the materialistic extensions of modern culture. Home is something in the past, and no belonging within a home is solely ours to declare (1951, 39). Yet, the women in our study do declare a belonging amidst the homelessness of modern life and the even more stark homelessness of forced migration. Through objects and routines, they make themselves at home.

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