
37. Home and homemaking practices among skilled Indian migrants

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INTRODUCTION

Skilled migration is seen as an integral part of the globalisation process and of the transnational exchange of goods, capital, services and resources. The availability of skilled workforce in countries such as India and China is due to the demographic dividend (James, 2011; Joe et al., 2018). With skilled migration it is not just the mobility of skills but also the flow of cultural norms, beliefs and practices that move with the migrants. Individuals and families leave homes to set up new homes in destination countries. Skilled migrants come from different generations, different groups, cultures and ethnicities. The literature that examines skilled migration from an economic perspective focuses narrowly on the potential benefit of skilled migrants to societies and for innovation for companies and institutions in the Global North (see Nathan, 2014 for a review). Many countries in the Global North are facing societal challenges, such as population decline, lack of skilled manpower and mismatch of skills (Zaiceva & Zimmermann, 2016). This opens up a niche for skilled migrants to move not only for better pay or wages but often also for new opportunities to further improve their cultural capital. This is often on a pathway for onward migration and in some cases return migration (Kōu & Bailey, 2014, 2017). The ability to move and take their skillsets to different countries gives them the possibility to move across countries and often results in short-term housing decisions. Homemaking both for the short term or for the long term is often fraught with the idea of transient living and multiple senses of belonging (Bocagni, 2017; Bocagni & Yapo, 2022). In the European context there is also a differentiation made between skilled migrants and expats (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2020). Skilled migrants are often third-country nationals or nationals coming from the Global South. Expats are often people moving between the countries in the Global North and have a more advantaged position compared to skilled migrants. Koutonin (2015) questions why white people are expats and the rest are immigrants, thereby adding the racial lens to highlight the everyday inequalities faced by migrants. The definition of a skilled migrant varies per country as it lays down key legislation on who can be termed a skilled migrant, what conditions are to be met in terms of income, education and family structure and who within the family is allowed to co-migrate. Thus, we need to examine the intersectional advantages and disadvantages of accessing housing and homemaking among these groups.

Skilled migrants are often seen as transient entities who are there for temporary periods just to satisfy the gap in the labour market and are expected to migrate further or return back to their countries of origin. Their time in the host country is also characterised as people living in expat bubbles and not seen to be an integral part of the host society (Kofman, 2000; Robertson, 2011; Walsh, 2014). In fact, immigrant integration and the development of a sense of home/belonging are not always compatible. Antonsich (2010) observes that when immigrants face discrimination and harassment from host populations their sense of belonging is disrupted.

The arrival of skilled migrants is sometimes seen through contempt (Meijering & Van Hoven, 2003; Robertson, 2011) as migrants in general are seen to take jobs away from the host population. In a study we conducted among Indian nurses in the Netherlands, the arrival of the nurses was marked by a backlash that the Dutch hospitals were stealing nurses from India. However, for some jobs the skilled migrants are not perceived to be encroaching the local labour market. Robinson and Carey (2000) note how the presence of the ‘Indian doctor’ is generally accepted by the British people. Conversely, their German counterparts went on strike to oppose the arrival of Indian information technology (IT) professionals. Some studies also question if immigration is the answer to shortages in the labour market and population ageing in the first place (Saczuk, 2013). As highly skilled migrants have a skillset that can be easily transferable in the global market, there are possibilities for either onward or return migration (Kōu & Bailey, 2014). Recent literature also highlights that skilled migrants are starting to build bonds with the host country more often in the form of home ownership, family formation and citizenship (Bailey, 2017; Kōu & Bailey, 2017; Maslova & King, 2020). Interestingly, the discussion on settlement and citizenship is particularly contentious in the European context. In the North American context, instead, it is an accepted norm that immigrants move to settle (Roohi, 2017). This is reflected in the discussions we had with skilled migrants when they were amused by questions by the Dutch on whether they were planning to return or how long they were planning to stay. It also reflects an internal tendency in the Dutch society of not expecting that immigrants would plan to stay and contribute to society. This unwelcoming attitude has an impact on the willingness of skilled migrants to set up long-term housing plans in the Netherlands.

In this chapter I explore how skilled Indian migrants negotiate multiple senses of belonging through homemaking practices. I present research examples from work among skilled migrants who moved from India to the Netherlands. An increasing group of highly skilled that migrate to the Netherlands are Indians. The number of Indian migrants living in the Netherlands has increased significantly from 9,476 in 1996 to 32,682 in 2016 (Kirk & Bal, 2019). After Syrians, Indian immigrants formed the largest group of new non-European Union residents registering in the Netherlands in 2017 (CBS, 2019). The cases that are embedded in each section are derived from participants who were purposively selected to include a broad range of occupations and durations of stay. The two main groups included were migrants from the states of Kerala and Karnataka in India. Kerala has a rich history of migration and is one of the front runners in skilled and semi-skilled emigration. Karnataka and specifically Bangalore is the hub for IT and most migration takes place from this region. The participants were recruited from Groningen, Amsterdam, Amstelveen, Enschede, Eindhoven, The Hague, Rotterdam and Maastricht. In the Netherlands the *Kennismigrant* visa (highly skilled migrant visa) was introduced at the end of 2004. According to this scheme a visa can be granted to ‘labour migrants with nationally or internationally scarce expertise; generally highly educated and earning an above average wage; employed in sectors of great economic or social importance’ (ACVZ, 2004).

SKILLED MIGRANTS AND ARRIVAL INFRASTRUCTURES

With increasing numbers of skilled migrants arriving in the Netherlands, we see that many legal regulations and immigration procedures need to be streamlined to accommodate the

needs of the skilled migrants and their employers (Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Czaika & Parsons, 2017). Immigrants often have to deal by themselves with bureaucracy around immigration, including their access to banking services and to real-estate or rental agreements, which are often in a language that they do not understand or they are not familiar with (Meeus et al., 2019). These issues pose larger challenges and increase costs of migration. To reduce such costs and to facilitate a smoother arrival and onboarding process many companies and organisations hire various kind of agencies and consultants to help settle the newly arrived skilled migrants and their families in the host country (van Bochove et al., 2011; van Riemsdijk & Basford, 2021). These services can range from arranging for schools, applying for banking services, navigating immigration paperwork and regulations and providing training and soft skills for the migrants and their families. In the Netherlands many cities and municipalities recognise the need for a combined approach for migrants to access services. These services (banking, immigration, etc.) are provided on arrival and in some cases even before skilled migrants arrive in the Netherlands. These organisations are clubbed under international welcome centres which are currently running in major cities of the country. The services offered by the welcome centres are often paid by the employers, private companies, municipalities and provinces. Skilled migrants working for larger companies such as Shell or Phillips, instead, may be offered a private agency to guide them through the whole moving process and help them find a home. The agency appoints a contact person who then makes contact with the prospective migrants and has an intake interview where the wishes of the migrants and the families are noted. This contact person will approach several housing agencies for rental offers, then send the pictures and rental conditions. In some cases the information has to be translated from Dutch into English. These exclusive services are only available to a select group of highly skilled migrants. The rest relies on the international welcome centres, personal networks, social media, diasporic groups and expensive housing agents.

SKILLED MIGRANTS AND HOUSING

When we relate housing and migration together the larger academic discussions focus on low-skilled migrants and ethnic minorities (Balampanidis, 2020; Bolt & Van Kempen, 2010; Skovgaard Nielsen & Skifter Andersen, Chapter 26, this volume). This literature often talks about discriminatory practices against migrants and ethnic minorities with relation to access to rental housing, social housing or real estate. Home, housing and homelessness emerge as key elements of intersectional inequalities migrants face in host countries (see also Jacobs, Chapter 4, this volume). Nygaard (2011) notes that ethno-cultural differences of the migrants also play a significant role in homeownership. This is marked by demographic, socio-economic and length of residence in the case of the United Kingdom (UK). In France, d'Albis et al. (2019) found that international migrants increase the demand of housing and change the characteristics of the housing market in host regions. The increasing property prices significantly reduce the demand of housing in that neighbourhood by the international migrants. The literature has also addressed ethnic enclaves and their impact on housing prices and real estate. International migration and residential segregation change the composition of the local population to a large extent. The immigration of highly heterogeneous and culturally diverse migrant groups raises the challenges of integration in the local community. Bosswick et al. (2007) observe that affordable housing of the international migrants indicates their structural

integration in the receiving region. Depending on class, education, employment and gender migrants have differential access to housing opportunities. Carlsson and Eriksson (2015) revealed the ethnic discrimination for shared housing for the culturally diverse migrants in London. Their study explored that ethnic discrimination is widespread for housing markets in European and United States (US) cities. In addition, the degree of discrimination depends on the applicant's occupation and the ethnic residential concentration. Skilled migrants and expats are often on the beneficial end of the spectrum and have greater support from employers in finding housing and in processes for creating a home atmosphere. Housing and residential choices are spatially governed by proximity to the workplace, ease of travel to work, current and past familiarity with the social geography and awareness through social circles. The decision-making on housing is constrained mainly by an exogenous factor, that is, 'pricy markets' (Maslova & King, 2020). Housing markets that cater to expats and skilled migrants exclusively increase gentrification of neighbourhoods and push out low-skilled migrants and host populations. The residential investments of the super-rich are part of an interwoven transnational system of housing investment, production and consumption (Paris, 2017). This involves extensive purchase of super-prime and prime housing, decoupling the most expensive areas from 'national' housing systems to global hyper-gentrification (Paris, 2016, 2017). Haas and Osland (2014) state that international migration of high-skilled labour substantially impacts the demography of the local community. In addition, affordable housing is difficult for migrant groups as they have to spend a large proportion of their overall budget to maintain the house. Housing consumption, and particularly homeownership, is considered as one of the salient features of immigrant integration (Desilva & Elmelech, 2012; Haan, 2007). Moreover, Maslova & King (2020) explored how migrants bring 'housing cultures' from the country of origin. For example, a study on highly skilled migrants from Italy and Russia living in London shows that Italians build multi-stage housing careers with many moves during their stay, as an upward housing trajectory, whilst Russians demand high-quality housing from the start, are less inclined to multi-occupancy and move less often (Maslova & King, 2020). Navarrete Escobedo (2020) reports how heritage-led transnational gentrification by expats and tourists in Mexico increases local housing inequalities. In Shanghai, Arkaraprasertkul (2018) notes how heritage-led gentrification offers new opportunities for local residents to scale up the home they have on offer. In our own study, all the skilled migrants had higher wages and could afford to apply for mortgages. Skilled migrants often looked for housing with close proximity to other Indian families. Single migrants largely rented homes as they were not sure of staying longer in the Netherlands or had temporary employment contracts which mortgage agencies were reluctant to accept (Bailey, 2017, 2019).

FEELING AT HOME AND BELONGING

An important factor for migrants in their decision-making to stay or to move is their feeling at home or not in a place. This feeling at home is achieved through various cultural, social, emotional and physical practices of homemaking (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021; Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021). Bilecen (2017) defines homemaking practices as those day-to-day domestic living experiences that transform a house into a home. Such everyday practices that combine different sensorial approaches are key in contributing to the sense of home (for an extensive bibliography see Boccagni et al., 2018). According to Blunt and Dowling (2006),

ideas of home are relational across time and space. They are shaped by bringing together both imaginative and material geographies of home and belonging, shaped by memories of past homes as well as by images of future homes. As any migrant group, skilled migrants have multiple senses of belonging and memories of home that they carry with them from one destination to the next (for viewpoints from diverse disciplines on home and homemaking see Boccagni et al., 2020). For skilled migrants and expats their sense of belonging can be multi-sited and fluid. As Benson and O'Reilly argue (2018: 201):

within migration research, questions of belonging have been deployed as a way of thinking through the experience and effect of displacement and marginalisation brought about by migration. At the heart of such evaluations of the relationship between home and migration lies the assumption that home can be geographically located and fixed; belonging enacted in and through (one) place. And yet, in an increasingly deterritorialised world, we might ask instead whether belonging is necessarily located, and if so, where?

Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests the notion of social locations is crucial to the concept of belonging. These social locations change over time, get contested and intersectionally influence each other. As skilled migrants are able to move across borders and seek employment in different countries, their attachments to specific places or locations are fluid. The decision to settle and set up home in a particular country is largely dependent on their positive experiences with the country and its society. In our study among skilled Indian migrants we observed that those migrants who had lived in other countries, such as the US, Singapore and the UK, found Dutch attitudes to work and private life very family friendly and public policies to be very positive. This played a major role for them to buy a home and start a family. For the younger and single migrants these issues were not perceived important as they were rather looking for professional development. Hence, owning a home or building bonds with the host community was less important for them.

HOMEMAKING AND BELONGING

According to Benson and O'Reilly (2018), migrants seek a sense of belonging through three ways: '(a) through material practices of homemaking in domestic space, (b) social practices, particularly the community-making enabled by expatriate associations, and (c) emotional and autobiographical emplacement, highlighting the significance of life events and their claims to cosmopolitan belonging' (pp. 223–224). The use of material culture in recreating home or home-like atmospheres is also present among the skilled migrants. In our study, skilled migrants imported furniture, traditional decorations or brought cherished possessions from their homes in India. Some of this material culture has functional value such as cooking or is used for everyday religious practice. Other possessions had more symbolic and emotional values attached to them, for example jewellery, books or photographs. The everyday use of these material cultures from home countries can be linked to the concept of 'co-presence' (Campos-Castillo & Hitlin, 2013), where objects are embedded with memories of places or people who owned/gifted the items. These objects then create and strengthen bonds with families and friends living in other countries (Pérez Murcia & Boccagni, 2022). Blunt and Bonnerjee (2019) observe that the Indian diaspora experiences a changing dynamic of home where diasporic 'residence' and 'belonging' are intricately linked to identity, ethnicity and

culture. According to Sandu (2013), ‘transnational connections are materialized through a range of gendered homemaking practices, which raises particular issues of identity and belonging as well as positionality of women in the community and society’ (507). Activities such as transporting and arranging the furniture, cleaning, caring, watching movies and television programmes, socialising, reading books and shopping are all domestic practices that continually emphasise the significance of the lived space of home for transnational migrants.

The exchange of care among transnational households is also key in homemaking in the receiving country and in retaining a sense of belonging to the family back home. Skilled migrants often bring parents over for short visits to provide childcare (Glick & Van Hook, 2002). This type of pendular migration is part of the care networks established by transnational families where older parents keep moving between different homes. Baldassar and Merla (2014: 25) developed the concept of ‘care circulation’, as the reciprocal, multi-directional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over the life course within transnational family networks and is subject to political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both sending and receiving countries. Lourenço and Cachado (2012), who studied Hindu-Gujarati transnationality, take into account their social, spatial and housing mobility. They argue that with territorial mobility the community also migrates with culture and thus forms a new family configuration while still maintaining relations with distant relatives and other transnational families. Care in a transnational context can be seen as a homemaking practice through the exchange of attention and support across distance and national borders, with the purpose of perpetuating intimate and meaningful relations and maintaining well-being (Baldassar et al., 2007; Schaab & Wagner, 2020). These exchanges of care in transnational families are capitalised through ‘phone calls, gifts, remittances, visits’ (Neysmith & Zhou, 2013). Strasser et al. (2009) establish that migrants and their families develop strategies to fulfil the rules and regulations required for the majority of society. By ‘doing family’, the migrant groups repeatedly produce who is part of the family and who holds responsibility. Schaab and Wagner (2020) point out that practices to increase co-presence are evident through the ‘replacement of caregivers by substitutes providing basic and affective needs in physical space’ (193). Absent migrants can actively engage in emotional, affective and sometimes material care from a distance by using communication technologies or sending gifts, and often arrange on-site caregivers to attend to needs that require a proximate presence (Carling, 2014; Dreby & Adkins, 2010) and provide the dependants with the financial means to do so (Carling, 2014; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012).

HOMEMAKING THROUGH FOOD, COOKING AND COMMENSALITY

Key to the migrant experience are the practices surrounding the consumption, sharing and exchange of food (Bailey, 2017; Brown et al., 2019; Miranda-Nieto & Boccagni, 2020). Immigrant foodscapes (following Appadurai, 1996) include various migrant groups who create common spaces to feel a sense of community. For example, skilled migrants often visited Indian/Asian grocery shops where they met other Indians, they could smell the spices and touch and feel products that reminded them of home. In that brief moment of shopping for ‘home’ food they are able to transport themselves back home. Building on Appadurai’s work, Ferrero (2002: 196) defines foodscapes as ‘an analysis that deals with transnational food practices and their dynamics that potentially subvert consumer societies and allow immigrants to

reconstitute their identity by importing, preparing, selling, sharing and consuming food from the “home” land’. Food in different forms, cooked, preserved and raw (rice and pulses), was a common feature in the things that were brought from home. On their first journey from home participants recollected how they had brought basic food from home thinking they would not be able to find this in the Netherlands. Participants who have stayed in the Netherlands for more than a decade recollected how in the earlier years they had to go to neighbouring countries such as the UK or France to bring spices and other ‘home food’. The arrival of many Indians from 2000 onwards led to the emergence of many ethnic shops where participants could find food from home. The burgeoning market has led to the emergence of online platforms from which Indian foods, cereals, spices and pulses are ordered.

Sandu (2013) notes that food and the social cultural practices of cooking, socialising and eating are important in maintaining a collective memory and identity. Such spaces become sites of both containment and potential liberation for women (508). Women as linked movers with the skilled migrants often found it difficult to enter/re-enter the Dutch labour market. This was due to non-recognition of their skills and work experience. Some of the women in this group started ‘home-based’ work of cooking and selling food to other Indian families. This brought them in contact with other groups and helped widen their social circle. Women who could not participate in such networks felt more isolated and more likely to move back to India or to an English-speaking country. Ryan and Mulholland (2014) explore how highly skilled migrant families access networks in their new environment in the UK. They state that the mothers play a key role in the composition of social ties and the expansion of networks. Older female relatives who were visiting the skilled migrants in the Netherlands used cooking and sharing of food as one of the ways in which they contributed to the care needs of the family. The following example shows the dilemmas of commensality. One of our participants had a Dutch spouse and at the time of the interview his mother was visiting the Netherlands. He had to take extra care to explain the cultural differences in the household and the extended family. The rules of commensality were different and the expectations were also different between the two cultures.

Like my mum felt pressure to constantly cook whenever someone came. She felt the pressure to cook, I kept telling my mum food is not the important part of [the Dutch] culture. For some reason she can’t digest. When we went to visit my wife’s [parents], my in-laws and then they just serve some coffee and some cookies. And I even explained to my mother okay, it is a possibility that they will serve you one cookie. A box comes out of the wooden thing, wooden cupboard and they cover and they will offer you one and the moment you have taken one they will shut it and put it back. They will not lay it out there on the table, here, go on, eat. I explained to them food is not important part of the culture as such. It took a while for them to understand that.

During the interview the participant constantly compared Indian and Dutch cultures to make sense of the differences and reflect on his ambiguous role between these cultures. Skilled migrants depending on their socialising practices have to constantly code-switch between different sets of cultural norms. What we observed in the interviews was that socialising with fellow Indians was largely at home and with the host population was mostly outside in cafés, restaurants or bars. Thus the spatiality of commensality is determined by the nature of attachments and by the expected cultural norms.

HOMES, REMITTANCES AND MULTIPLE HOMES

According to the World Bank, India received close to 84 billion US dollars as remittances in 2019 which is close to 2.8 per cent of its gross domestic product (Ratha et al., 2020). Financial remittances are primarily used to improve the living situation of the household. Once households meet their everyday needs, they start to incrementally improve their homes, and then venture out into investing in small businesses. Transnational housing investment is a widespread practice among many migrant groups residing in various destination countries (Kuuire et al., 2016; see also Rajan & Cherian, Chapter 52, this volume). Cuong and Mont (2012) revealed that international remittances are not only spent on housing and land, debt repayment and saving, but also on different household welfare indicators including child education, assets and durable goods. Investment in houses, land and real estate is seen as a way to secure a place to stay on return or to build an alternative source of income for the migrants and their families (for an overview see Boccagni & Bivand Erdal, 2021). Studies show that reasons for transnational housing investment are more social and cultural and less economic in nature (Erdal, 2012; Grant, 2005; Mazzucato, 2008; Obeng-odoom, 2010; Smith & Mazzucato, 2009). Agrawal and Lovell (2010) argued that the socio-economic profile and high income of the Indo-Canadian diaspora determine their housing and other welfare variables in both India and Canada. The study revealed that the migrants who achieved incremental upward mobility with time own a house sooner than those who do not experience much upward mobility. Obeng-odoom (2010) observed that, thanks to remittances, the transnational migration to Europe, the US and Scandinavia is mitigating the housing crisis caused by rapid population growth and low incomes in Ghana. By saving remittances, Ghanaian migrants build houses much quicker back home. The study by Kagochi and Kiambigi (2012) indicated that remittances from abroad increased the demand for housing construction in Kenya. By building houses through remittances immigrants maintain economic and social ties with their communities. Furthermore, owning a house also embodies the dignity, security and privacy of the migrants. Migrant remittance housing is not always beneficial for the local economy, though. As Codesal (2014) argued, one major outcome of international migration is to build migrants' own houses in their places of origin. Remittances from the US have changed the housing landscape of many villages in Ecuador. Many of these remittance houses remained vacant as other members have also migrated, thus these houses are sometimes called 'wasted houses'. In addition to the ability to remit and for the family 'left behind' to utilise these resources there needs to be strong support from the local government. Zapata (2018) revealed that migrant remittances from the UK to Colombia reconfigure the political economy of housing in the region, as the Colombian government aims to institutionalise migrant households' transnational practices through a renovated housing policy. In the Indian situation, not just the government but also banks and other financial institutions offer special 'non-resident Indian' loans. This machinery of catering to the non-resident community extends to the creation of exclusive and gated communities in Indian metropolitan cities such as Bengaluru and Hyderabad. The latter even has neighbourhoods with skilled migrants (read IT engineers) who have returned. Their homes and housing layouts are also designed in relation to their American tastes (Rayaprol et al., 2021).

Particularly in the Global South it is a cultural norm and duty that adult male children have the responsibility of providing the housing needs for their parents and other dependants in the extended family. Skilled migrants are perceived to have financial resources for investment in

the country of origin. Studies show that immigrants' homeownership in their origin countries is a sign of prestige, a status symbol and an indication of accomplishment (Erdal, 2012; Kuuire et al., 2016; Obeng-odoom, 2010; Smith & Mazzucato, 2009). For immigrants, these transnational houses act as proxy symbols of their constant presence in the community of origin (Dalakoglou, 2010; Erdal, 2012). Trends of globalisation linked with the aspirations for modern housing in major cities motivate migrants to invest in homes in their origin countries (Asiedu & Arku, 2009; Grant, 2007). Immigrants who engage in such investments generally have intentions of returning to live there, thus transnational housing investment acts as both a practical and symbolic measure to show the possibility of return (Kuuire et al., 2016; Sinatti, 2011). However, the experience of transnational housing investment and financial debts can be challenging for the household that needs to maintain and pay mortgages for two homes. In our study, one of the skilled migrants (Rajan) was building a new home for his parents in India and had recently bought a home in the Netherlands which needed extensive renovation:

We are building the house in India and at the same time we bought a house here [in the Netherlands]. ... Family is there [in India], I want to them to have a better and good-looking house. We are not going live here [in the Netherlands] for more than twenty years, then we have to move there. We have to be there [in India]. That's our plan. I don't know what happens so. But at the same time we have to build here, that's the thing.

The constant shifting between here and there and the obligation to create a home for multiple families and meet their expectations was difficult for Rajan. This example also highlights that for some skilled migrants managing two homes and families was a challenge but the cultural norms required them to perform their roles as providers, even though it involved high costs and debt.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provided an introduction to the category of skilled migrants. It explored how skilled Indian migrants negotiate multiple senses of belonging, and the practices of homemaking both in the country of origin and the destination country. Both the academic literature and policy tend to homogenise skilled migrants as one undifferentiated group. In fact, as with other migrant groups, this population is highly differentiated and faces different sets of challenges and opportunities. We need to take a more intersectional approach to understand the multiple senses of belonging and homemaking practices among different sets of migrants. We need more specific insights on how skilled migrants, who are women, people with disabilities, sexual minorities and those fleeing patriarchal structures, engage in homemaking practices. We also need to deromanticise homemaking as linked to home countries as people may be leaving abusive and precarious homes to set up new safe spaces. The fact that skilled migrants are privileged in terms of mobility and income does not necessarily mean that this privilege is shared among other household members. Skilled migrants, similar to other migrant groups, are constantly (re)shaping their sense of belonging and imaginations of home.

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