

From home to homemaking

Seforosa Carroll

[\(sefc@bigpond.com\)](mailto:sefc@bigpond.com)

This is a summary of my paper presented at the “**What makes a good city conference**” held at the United Theological College, May 10th 2010. The full text will be published in a forthcoming book on *Postcode Theology* edited by Stephen Burns and Clive Pearson.

Abstract

Home is an ambivalent term. It can mean a range of things from a house, a street address to feelings of security and belonging. In this paper I will consider the notion of home and homelessness in relation to migration and displacement. I will consider homemaking as a theological hermeneutical tool for (re)creating "storied" places of meaning at both the local and public spaces.

Home is an ambivalent term. It can mean a range of things from a house, a street address, land, country, and religion, to feelings of security and belonging. In fact home is inclusive of all these things. My interest in home came about through my research on hospitality – or as I coined it *hospiatleity*, taking into account the oceanic practice of welcome symbolised by sweet smelling leis. In considering the parties of hospitality, I argued that *hospitaleity* was a series of movements of which the ultimate goal was transformation of guest, host and space. As guest and host engage in a dance of role reversals, spaces become endowed with meaning through the exchange of stories, which lead to the transformation of space into place. My fixation with home came about through Jacques Derrida who raised the question of whether hospitality is indeed possible if one was homeless, particularly as ‘hospitality is fundamentally connected to place - to a space bounded by commitments, values and meanings.’ (Pohl, 1999:136) Derrida’s question continued to play on my mind prompting me to consider the notion of home, homelessness in terms of displacement and homemaking in the diaspora.

In this paper I consider the notion of home in relation to migration and displacement. This necessitates the exploration and unravelling of the strands, which bind the migrant to the home of origin and home of new settlement (by migration or displacement). It also necessitates the exploration of the complex relationship between the body, identity, home, place, nation and space. The critical link is between body and space where the specific focus is upon the way migrant bodies are situated inside the national imaginary. Exploring the critical link between body and space offers numerous possibilities. It enables one to do several key tasks such as rethinking notions of home for the sake of constructing an embodied diasporic theology of home and homemaking. I also consider a theological framework for homemaking as a means for (re)creating "storied" places of meaning at both the local and public spaces. I would like to suggest that homemaking is a contributing factor to making a good city. Why? Home is not constrained to the personal it is also political. In considering the idea of home, one needs also to deal with the reality of homelessness both economic and ecological. Socioeconomic homelessness is a global political issue – a result of economic policies that privilege profits rather than an ethic of care and justice. The same can be said about our growing ecological crisis.

Secondly, although home is an ambiguous concept, that is the meanings and lived experiences of home are diverse which range from: ‘a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear’, the home, Alison Blunt states, ‘is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life.’ (Blunt, 2005) Home is usually the site where worldviews, values and identity are formed and mirrored in relationships with “others” outside the home. A case in point is Pauline Hanson, the member for Oxley who made a deep impression on the Australian political scene in 1995 with her strong views on multiculturalism, Asian migration, reconciliation and Aboriginal issues. In her maiden speech to Parliament in 1996 she stated ... if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country.’ (Tuesday, 10th September 1996). Hanson draws the intimate connection between who is welcome in her personal home to that of her country. In this instance Hanson exemplifies the embodiment of the structure of her personal home which is lived out in the political realm through her relationship with those particular “others”, she claims, will not assimilate. The idea of home (both as a metaphor and real) and homemaking is integral to the task of Christian witness, discipleship and global citizenship.

Dislocation and displacement raises challenges and questions of home and belonging both at home and away. Spaces and places are not physically transportable. In the act of migration it is the memory of place and home that makes the journey across spaces embodied within the body. Bodies of knowledge embody within them the history, memories, stories and experiences of the home they have inhabited. Our experience as embodied beings shaped by place suggests that movement across spaces carry the memory of the place it has previously inhabited, one such significant place is the home. To limit home to location and physical structure is to assume that home is fixed and immovable. Re-evaluating the notion of home as ambivalent/ambiguous rather than fixed or impermeable may open up alternative ways of being and becoming in a new context.

According to Robert Ginsburg Human beings are “home-makers”. He writes:

We make our homes. Not necessarily by constructing them, although some people do that. We build the intimate shell of our lives by the organization and furnishing of space in which we live. How we function as persons is linked to how we make ourselves at home. We need time to make our dwelling into a home... Our residence is where we live, but our home is how we live...

Homemaking is a process of creating a habitus for *meaningful* inhabitation (Bouma-Prediger & Walsh, 2008) whereby the *oikos*, the economy or household is founded on the values of hospitality, dialogue, reconciliation, compassion and justice where both human and non-human life is nourished. Inhabitation is a matter of embodied being. It is a two way street, whereby we are shaped by place and place is shaped by the relationship we have with it. It is as Sarah Ahmed states “body and place leak into each other” (Ahmed, 2000). Being at home is a process of inhabitation. As home is fundamentally a place of connection, of relationships that are life giving and foundational that includes the past. Homemaking as Marion Iris Young defines it ‘consists in the activities

of endowing things with living meaning, arranging them in spaces in order to facilitate the life activities of those to whom they belong, and preserving them, along with their meaning' which is both a personal and collective act of identity (Young, 1997). Homemaking, Young emphasises is a redemptive act of story telling which in turn requires us to restructure the household by the symbols we choose to identify ourselves by.

Homemaking is the task we are entrusted with to make the idea of home possible. It is creating and recreating spaces/places into meaningful shared storied places. The activities of preservation of the meaningful things that constitute home are important both as personal and communal or public acts (Young, 1997). The challenge is providing a framework and an open environment that can help facilitate dialogue and strengthen relationships. The metaphor of home and homemaking provides, I believe, a possibility of deepening relationships that may in turn open up new ways of speaking, listening and acting.

Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*. London: Routledge.

Blunt, A. (2005). Cultural geography: cultural geographies of home. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(4), 505-515.

Bouma-Prediger, S., & Walsh, B. J. (2008). *Beyond Homelessness: Christian faith in a culture of displacement*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans.

Pohl, Christine (1999), *Making room: recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.

Young, I. M. (1997). *Intersecting voices: dilemmas of gender, political philosophy and policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.