

Rethinking Home in the Caribbean Diaspora and the Americas: Introduction

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The question of what, who, and/or where constitutes home is more urgent than ever. Global migration movements, new ideas and possibilities of living together, continually improving (telecommunication) technologies, growing inequality in population groups, overpriced housing and residential segregation, as well as racism and many other forms of exclusion are only a few points that serve to illustrate that definitions of home and belonging are not to be viewed as straightforward or static. Geographies, ideas, and imaginaries of being, experiencing, and longing for home shape and are shaped by current social and cultural discourses in the Americas and the world at large. International and transnational mobilities, in particular, (re-)navigate “processes of establishing home, as senses of belonging and identity move over space and are created in new places” (Blunt and Dowling 2).

Since the late twentieth century, “the political salience of migration has strongly increased” (Castles et al. 1). Global mass migration is by no means a new phenomenon. However, the visibility of the impact of such movements on societies, cultures, and economies has heightened and significantly influenced as well as propelled new cultural productions in and about experiences of migration and diaspora. [1] Narratives about voluntary and involuntary movement and displacement emphasize spatio-temporal processes of de- and reterritorialization—roots and routes (Clifford)—and provide valuable spaces for the unsettling of ideas about “home as a stable origin and ... the fixity and singularity of a place called home” (Blunt and Dowling 198). Home, in other words, is formed “by memories of past homes as well as dreams of future homes” and “by ideas and experiences of location and dislocation, place and displacement, as people migrate for a variety of reasons and feel both

at home and not at home in a wide range of circumstances” (ibid.). Therefore, in order to address ideas of ‘home’ in contexts that span geographical, temporal, and social spaces, it becomes necessary to critically assess and (re-)conceptualize ‘home’ as unstable, dynamic, and processual.

Literature, film, and other art forms represent important media that deal with ideas of ‘home’ creatively and critically. These cultural texts provide important sources for reflections on the complexity, volatility, and fluidity of home as a concept and experienced reality. For these reasons, this issue is dedicated to the multi-layered connections between diaspora and home within the shifting dynamics and conflicts of inter-American entanglements, particularly between the Caribbean and North America, which need to be read in a wider global context.

In order to grasp the complex representations of home in Caribbean diasporic cultural productions, this edition thus ventures beyond traditional definitions of ‘home,’ viewing the latter insufficient in regard to global international migration processes in which affiliation and home are always up for negotiation. To put it differently, home can no longer be conceived solely in terms of physical shelter, nation, family, or community, at least not in traditional or singular senses. [2] Instead, the editors and contributors depart from the assumption that the study of home must consider the importance of both material and symbolic spaces. [3] Thinking about home as inherently geographical sheds light on “relations between place, space, scale, identity and power” (Blunt and Dowling 2) and allows us not only to “study the material and imaginative geographies of home, and the ways in which home is politically, socially and culturally constructed, but [also] lived and experienced in personal ways” (Blunt and Dowling 32). [4] As

Vijay Agnew states, “the individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between ... memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home” (4).

The contributions to this edition critically engage with narrative constructions of and reflections about home in the cultures and literatures of the Caribbean diaspora in the Americas, thereby uncovering various spatial, imaginary, mobile, and conflicted dimensions of being, experiencing, remembering, and belonging. In a dialogic fashion, the authors employ mobility and spatial frameworks to engage questions of home on multiple scales and from different perspectives. The inclusion of different narrative forms –ranging from the (children’s) novel to dub poetry and other art forms– further adds to the complexity of representations and explorations of home. Through its analysis of (Caribbean) diasporic (be-)longing, (collective) memory and trauma, as well as different forms of experiencing space and place materially and imaginatively, this edition emphasizes ways that cultural productions serve as important vehicles for social, historical, and political commentary. In these ways, the collected essays provide new itineraries for (re-)thinking and (re-)imagining home across different local and global scales that traverse the Caribbean, the Americas, and the world at large –including the body, household, nation, and (transnational) diaspora.

As Anne Brüske’s contribution shows, geopolitical global contexts influence the production of diaspora spaces through the lived experiences of subjects. More specifically, she explores Cuban diasporization and the geographies of Cuban homes in- and outside of Cuba in the novel *Days of Awe* (2001) by U.S. Cuban writer Achy Obejas. From a Cuban diaspora perspective, the novel discusses the tensions experienced between what Avtar Brah refers to as the “desire for a [remembered and imagined] homeland” and a “homing desire,” between the global currents of de- and reterritorialization, and the protagonist’s attempts to appropriate different spaces home. Brüske’s objective is to unravel how ‘home’ is performed as a spatiotemporal phenomenon in Obejas’

novel, on which scales ‘home’ is produced (global, national, local), and how the tension between remembered homes and the current locale of living is elaborated. The article proposes to define ‘home’ as a social space, a negotiation between homing practices, concepts of home, and lived experiences on different geographic and temporal scales with a particular focus on the practices of homing and remembering in the urban spaces of Havana and Chicago and the micro space of the family home/house as both a social and material space.

Cécile Accilien explores imaginaries about the absence, loss, and reconstruction of home in Haitian cinema. In her article, she considers different concepts of ‘home’ in connection to themes of im/migration, deportation and exile as presented in three selected Haitian popular films: *Diaspora \$100*, *Kidnapping*, and *Deported*. Through the analyses of these films, Accilien examines what meanings ‘home’ may take on in Haitian diasporic communities and how the economic impact of transnational migration shapes Haitian imaginaries and realities of home. The essay further explores how the films depict the ways in which Haitian immigrants maintain, negotiate, and build identities both individually and collectively. In particular, Accilien demonstrates the complexity of identity and belonging within inter-American entanglements particularly in regard to young people (men) who have been deported back to Haiti and often find themselves alienated while at ‘home’ in a space that is not welcoming and indeed foreign to them. She addresses the ways in which the selected films present ‘home’ as a fluid and complex space of (non-) belonging for Haitians, both in Haiti and in the Haitian diaspora.

Wilfried Raussert’s contribution looks at the poetic and performative use of call-and-response patterns and their role in creating a sense of home and belonging in the works of the African Canadian dub poets Lillian Allen and Afua Cooper. As the author argues, home can no longer be thought of solely in terms of house, nation, family, or community, at least not in their traditional sense. Historical experiences of black subjects and cultures have produced radically different perspectives on what constitutes individual and collective belonging and the

meaning(s) of 'home.' Therefore, as the article shows, in order to address ideas of home and affiliation in contexts of black cultural production, it is important to critically assess and (re-) conceptualize home as unstable, dynamic, and processual. The (dub) poetry by Lillian Allen and Afua Cooper provides dialogic examples of how to recreate and 'perform' home in the diaspora, addressing global and black audiences in Canada, the Caribbean, and beyond.

The female body –the womb, in particular– functions as a central metaphor for rethinking home and belonging in Paola Ravasio's analysis of Caribbean-Central American Queen Nzinga Maxwell's art work. Ravasio's contribution argues that historical imagination functions as a highly abstract metaphor for 'home' and sets out to analyze the representation of the womb and menstrual blood in 21st-century black diasporic writing as re-signifying the place and nature of historical imagination. The womban-trope, as found in spoken word poet and activist Queen Nzinga Maxwell's work constitutes the object of Ravasio's study as it is approached as an unconventional metaphor for thinking about home, belonging, and exile in the context of the African diaspora, then and now. Asserting that history functions as symbolic capital in the consolidation of belongingness, the author pursues the ensuing question: *how is the womban-trope like 'home'?* The text, then, is grounded upon the premise that menstrual blood taps into a rich metaphor for 'home' and thus discourses of body and home are explicitly linked.

Sigrid Thomsen explores home through the lenses of rhythmanalysis and mobility studies. Drawing upon theories by Henri Lefebvre and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Thomsen analyzes the juxtaposition, change, and tension that ensues between motion and stasis in Edwidge Danticat's short story "New York Day Women." In the short story, a young woman spots her mother, who she had assumed never left Brooklyn, in Manhattan, and starts to clandestinely follow her. The plot of the daughter trailing behind her mother is juxtaposed with vignettes in which the daughter remembers things her mother has said about Haiti. This contribution analyzes how various types of mobilities clash and

intersect; the physical im/mobilities of walking and the imaginative mobility of remembering, in particular. Through this clash, the characters not only navigate their relationship to home, but position themselves in a 'home' which spans Haiti and the United States. This rhythmanalytical reading of the story achieves several things: it brings together Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis with Caribbean approaches to rhythm, and it makes visible ways in which physical and imaginative mobilities –the mobilities of walking and remembering– can come together in everyday life to continuously forge a 'home.'

Giselle Anatol's contribution explores how Kacen Callender's 2018 novel for adolescent readers, *Hurricane Child*, illustrates how literature for young people can be employed to leverage formidable critiques against European colonial ideologies and the neocolonial policies in the contemporary United States. As Anatol shows, while literature for children and young adults (YA) is not typically given center stage in theorizing postcolonial subjectivities, taking up this body of work gives adult readers crucial insights how young people are taught to absorb information about themselves and the world. In her analysis, she explores how Callender's work may be read as a re-visioning of Jamaica Kincaid's semiautobiographical *Annie John* (1985) and ways that the two novels push past easy definitions as bildungsromane and 'home' as haven for the nuclear family to comment on the tourist industry as a continuation of colonial systems of domination. 'Homes,' both island homes and smaller structures identified as homes for individuals, transmogrify into the unfamiliar and unsettling.

Endnotes

[1] For a recent discussion of migration literature in the Americas, see, for example, Brandel and Kirschner 2020.

[2] For further examples, also see Al-Ali and Koser 2002, Mallett 2004, Ralph and Staeheli 2011, and Rapport and Dawson 1998.

[3] See also, for example, Blunt and Dowling 2006, and Urry 2001.

[4] For further elaboration on geographies of diaspora and home, see, for example, Brah 1996, and Blunt 2007.

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Authors' biographies

Miriam Brandel is a PhD candidate and lecturer at Bielefeld University. Together with Prof. Dr. Wilfried Raussert, she is part of the DFG-funded research project "(Re-)Thinking 'Home': 21st-Century Caribbean Diaspora Writing and Geopolitical Imaginaries in North America". This project houses her doctoral thesis which explores (re-)presentations of 'home' in 21st-century Caribbean Diaspora writing in Canada and the US. Coming from the broad field of (Inter-)American studies, her fields of interest and publication include Caribbean diaspora literature, processes and ideas of

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Wilfried Raussert is chair of North American Studies at Bielefeld University, Germany. He is director of the International Association of Inter-American Studies, member of the steering committee of CALAS (Bielefeld-Guadalajara), and co-founder of the Black Americas Network at the Center for InterAmerican Studies. Among his recent publications are the monograph 'What's Going on': How Music Shapes the Social (UNO 2021) and the edited volumes *The Routledge Companion to Inter-American Studies* (2017) as well as *The Routledge Handbook to the Culture and Media of the Americas* (2020). As photographer, he has published four books, among them *Black Matters* (Roseway 2020), and *Art Begins in Streets, Art Lives in Streets* (Kipu 2016).