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Sisters-in-Waiting: A Case Study of Displaced Syrian Women Fostering New Senses and Memories of Home in Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

Building on variously located Syrian women's accounts of their day-to-day lives in Lebanon, this article illuminates meaning-making processes in **protracted displacement**, defined by the UNHCR (2004, p. 1) as a "long-lasting and intractable state of limbo." We draw on the metaphor of a "constellation of homes" (Brun & Fábos, 2015) to explore various homemaking practices and the interconnected temporal and multi-sensorial dimensions thereof. In so doing, we counter narratives of displaced women as a homogenous collective and problematic assumptions of stasis and passivity associated with protracted displacement. Particular attention is paid to women's narratives regarding "purposeful work" and, crucially, female friendship, which we argue can be understood as additional nodes in the constellation of homes. We contend that further and different forms of research are required to do justice to the multi-sensorial dimensions of homemaking and concept of "sisters-in-waiting" in the lives of women in protracted displacement.

KEYWORDS

protracted displacement; agency-in-waiting; multi-sensorial; homemaking; female friendship; Syrian women

RÉSUMÉ

En s'appuyant sur les récits de femmes syriennes localisées à divers endroits concernant leur vie quotidienne au Liban, cet article met en lumière les processus de création de sens dans le cadre du déplacement prolongé, défini par le HCR (2004, p. 1) comme un « état d'incertitude durable et irréductible ». Nous nous inspirons de la métaphore d'une « constellation de domiciles » pour explorer les diverses pratiques d'établissement de domicile et leurs dimensions temporelles et multi-sensorielles interconnectées. Ce faisant, nous nous opposons aux récits présentant les femmes déplacées comme un collectif homogène et aux présuppositions problématiques de statisme et de passivité associées au déplacement prolongé. Une attention particulière est portée aux récits des femmes concernant le « travail utile » et, de façon importante, l'amitié féminine, qui peuvent selon nous être compris comme des nœuds supplémentaires dans la constellation de domiciles. Nous soutenons que d'autres formes de recherche sont nécessaires pour rendre justice aux dimensions multisensorielles de l'établissement de domicile et au nouveau concept de « sœurs-en-attente » dans la vie des femmes en situation de déplacement prolongé.

INTRODUCTION

We still have all the same values and all the same traditions. We try to preserve them as much as possible. Specifically, the relationship I have with my husband, the love, the respect … Many people when they come from Syria to here, they change, … they become cruel … and the relationship with their wives and their families change. So, I try, as much as possible, to keep that, because I am the woman of the house and I am what keeps the house standing. I am what keeps it standing. (Bashirah,[1] 30)

Building on highly evocative accounts of Syrian women in Lebanon, this article illu-

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minates the ways in which women made meaning of their daily lives in protracted displacement through various forms of home-making practices and, in Bashirah's words above, sought to keep their "house standing," metaphorically and otherwise.

According to the UNHCR (2004, p. 1), **protracted displacement** refers to "long-lasting and intractable state[s] of limbo [during which people's] lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled." Existing literature has done much to unsettle this definition, particularly the notion that the lives of protractedly displaced people are characterized by passivity and stasis (Etzold & Fechter, 2022; Fawaz et al., 2018; Mendola & Pera, 2021; van Raemdonck, 2023). As Brun and Fábos (2015) have argued, waiting is not a passive undertaking. That is, it is critical to acknowledge the agentic endeavours of displaced people in processes of waiting while simultaneously acknowledging the uncertainties involved. Concerning the latter, authors such as Loescher and Milner (2008) have argued that the United Nations' definition of **protracted displacement** needs to be revised to better attend to chronic and recurring problems of protractedly displaced people. The passivity implied by the term **limbo** in the definition thus not only obscures agency of displaced people but also risks creating a sense that, given people are "simply" waiting (to return home), they require less attention in the here and now.

The relevance of these kinds of calls to thicken definitions of protracted displacement becomes even more apparent when due consideration is given to the fact that most displaced people in the world today are in situations of long-term displacement, and that time "in displacement" can extend into decades (UNHCR, 2021). In other words,

while the notion of **displaced** people, particularly those residing in camps, suggests they are only temporarily so, in practice, the "temporariness" of displaced people's lives can attain a degree of permanence (see also Hart et al., 2018).

As Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023) have argued, a focus on home and home-making offers a means to move beyond the kinds of blind spots highlighted above. To support this kind of nuanced analysis, we make use of Brun and Fábos's (2015) "triadic constellation of homes." This framework sensitizes us to home(making) as both idea and practice and offers a distinction between three modalities thereof—that is, day-to-day practices of homemaking: memories, traditions and feelings of home, and the broader geopolitical and historical contexts in which homes are made (im)possible. Furthermore, the metaphor of a constellation of homes allows for a conceptualization of different nodes of home, Home, and HOME as forming varying meaningful patterns. This metaphor is helpful in that it can help illuminate the ways in which people turn points of reference into meaningful patterns, and in that the same points can be imagined differently depending on time and place of observation.

We contribute to this framework in various ways. First, we explore in greater depth the interacting temporalities of notions of home and homemaking in displacement, the multi-sensorial nature of idea(l)s of home, and the entangled nature of these dimensions. We build on Ahmed's (1999) conception of home as a question of memory, arguing that this conceptualization offers insight into the difficulties of re-creating a sense of home in protracted states of "limbo." Second, we propose expanding the framework by adding the element of "purposeful work" as a homemaking practice and more explicitly teasing out the centrality of female friend-

ships or "sisters" in conceptions of home and meaning-making for women in displacement. We argue that these two modalities of homemaking, and particularly that of female friendship, might be understood as fostering new memories and meaning-making, thus contributing to creating senses of home. Third, we draw attention to instances in which (class) location shaped homemaking opportunities and experiences.

In what follows, we discuss in more detail the notion of home and homemaking, including Brun and Fábos's (2015) "triadic constellation of homes" framework, and the methodological design of the study that informed the present paper. The central themes highlighted above are then explored. In the final reflection, we focus on the ways in which we propose to expand Brun and Fábos's triadic framework. We draw particular attention to the concept of sisters-in-waiting and sensorial dimensions of home and homemaking, illuminating further areas of research required to generate deeper intersectional and multimodal understanding of experiences of protracted displacement.

Home and Homemaking in Longer-Term Displacement

Our work is grounded in a conception of home as provisional and processual, rather than its more common definition as a (singular) site of fixity, and attendant implications of immobility and "purified space of belonging" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 339; Wyatt & Wyatt, 2015). In line with the idea of home as (always) becoming, we conceive home as a (spatial) imaginary, comprising both a site and an imaginary suffused with feeling (Blunt & Dowling, 2022).

Forced migration and protracted displacement complicate any narrative about home, however defined. Reflecting on the spatial and temporal dislocations involved in migra-

tion, Ahmed (1999) noted, in her inimitable style:

> The narrative of leaving home produces too many homes and hence no Home, too many places in which memories attach themselves through the carving out of inhabitable space, and hence no place in which memory can allow the past to reach the present. … The movement between homes hence allows Home to become a fetish, to become separated from the particular worldly space of living here, through the possibility of some memories and the impossibility of others. (pp. 330–331)

As will become clear, Ahmed's observations as to the attachments between memories and spaces, and possibilities for the past to reach the present, are particularly pertinent to our discussion. Ahmed goes on to explore the crucial role of community in the re-creation of migrant identities and homemaking. Noting that migrants tend to be assigned as strangers to a place, she observes how place-making by migrants can occur in and through acts of "reaching out to the 'out of place-ness'" of other migrants (Ahmed, 1999, p. 345). Salient here are Ahmed's reflections on reconfiguration of community and sense of place through "gestures of friendship" with others who are already recognized as being out of place (p. 344; see also Fábos, 2015).[2] Friendship in displacement merits further examination, particularly given this subject has received far less attention in existing research than has, for example, kinship (Obeid, 2010).[3] As the present article clarifies, friendship, particularly with other Syrian women, was crucial to participants' reconfigurations of place and a sense of home.

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[2] We use the interrelated notions of sense of home and place in this article, aware that these notions cannot be equivocated. For a fuller discussion of the notion of place, see, e.g., Massey (1994, 2004), Miedema (2016), Miedema and Millei (2015) and Mountz & Hyndman (2006).

[3] Many thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for alerting us to the relative gap in research on friendship in relation to that on kinship.

Brun and Fábos's (2015) triadic constellations of home and homemaking in situations of long-term displacement respond to nuanced conceptions of "home," such as those discussed above. The framework makes a distinction between the following:

- **home**, representing day-to-day homemaking practices, which help turn "the place of displacement" into a significant place (Brun & Fábos, 2015, p. 12). These practices involve material and imaginative conceptions of home, including daily routines, investments in temporary dwellings, as well as the social connections made in, for example, a camp or neighbourhood (see also Čapo, 2015; Fábos, 2015).

- **Home**, representing the memories, traditions, and subjective feelings of home. The idea of home in displacement is shaped by experiences of lost homes and hopes for a future home, and as this article also highlights, may be expressed at varying scales, for example, longing for the "homeland" permeating the ideal(ized) Home. "Home" thus denotes an ideal, influencing people's day-to-day practices.

- **HOME**, as the geopolitics of nation and homeland that contribute to situations of protracted displacement. This modality refers to the broader socio-historical context in which home is defined and experienced by displaced people themselves, "the perpetrators of nationalist exclusion and violence" and policy-makers seeking "durable solutions" to protracted displacement (Brun & Fábos, 2015, p. 13).

As this constellation of homes clarifies, homemaking does not merely refer to the literal creation of a physical home. Rather, homemaking is focused on the ways materially, emotionally, and relationally inflected practices, which are underpinned by varied and multi-scalar understandings of home, are used to create a sense of feeling at home.

These practices can also take place outside a physical home (Fábos, 2015).

Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023) have drawn attention to the ways in which categories such as class, race, and gender stratify migrant homemaking practices and experiences. van Raemdonck (2023) has compellingly highlighted interactions between, for example, gender and class and how these shape efforts to re-create a sense of home and meanings of "waiting" for displaced young men. We seek to be mindful of these critical intersecting issues, and thereby strive to illuminate how location influences the ways in which people turn the points of reference in the constellation into meaningful patterns. In so doing, we counter assumptions of displaced people as a homogenous group, as well as the gendered, racialized, and classed assumptions underpinning the emphasis on stasis and passivity in the UN's definition of long-term displacement (see also Hyndman and Giles, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Between 2017 and 2018, the first author spent five months in Lebanon as part of her research master's degree; the second author supervised her from a distance. Ethical approval for the study was provided by the Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Amsterdam. Initial contacts with women were established through a Lebanese women's studies institution and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While in Lebanon, the first author divided her time between informal urban settlements in and around Beirut and Mount Lebanon and informal tented settlements in the rural setting of Beqaa Valley. People residing in informal urban settlements tended to live in one-room dwellings, while those in the informal tented settlements lived in plastic tents held up by wooden posts.

Irrespective of location, all women involved in the study often spoke of their fears of being forcibly evicted or removed, and all lacked electricity, water, and heating.

The first author began the research in the different locations by observing activities organized by NGOs. These activities included cooking classes (Dekweneh, Beirut), education projects (Beqaa Valley), music classes and volunteering possibilities (Naher Ibrahim, Mount Lebanon), and finally, knitting and cooking gatherings (Beirut). Observation focused on women and their interactions during and in the doing of activities, the first author taking part in certain activities, such as cooking. The latter involved much tasting of dishes that the women prepared and allowed the first author to develop a better (sensorial) sense of, for example, meanings attached to joint processes of cooking and certain dishes. Spending time (one week minimum) with women helped build rapport and likely contributed to greater comfort levels among those who opted in to subsequently taking part in interviews or focus group discussions (FGDs).

In total, the first author conducted in-depth and shorter semi-structured interviews with, respectively, 18 and 17 displaced Syrian women. Additionally, she carried out three FGDs with 30 displaced Syrian women. The youngest participant was 18 years old, the eldest were between 65 and 70 years of age, and all but four were married (three were single, one was widowed). Of those married, all but one were in Lebanon with their husbands. All but two married women (and two single women) had children. The average number of children was four (the number of children ranged between one and seven children). Two women had lost or were missing a child. On average, women had been in Lebanon between four and five years at the time of the study. Women residing in the informal settlement in Beqaa Valley typically had no or less formal education, were married at a younger age, and were from a lower socio-economic background than women living in the informal urban settlements in Mount Lebanon or Beirut.

The study drew on a qualitative emergent research design. The first author paid careful attention to recurring themes and those that were emphasized in women's narratives, such as references to "purpose" or friendship, during subsequent interviews, informal conversations, and observations. All interviews and FGDs were conducted in Arabic. Given the first author's Arabic was too rudimentary to conduct these conversations alone, support was sought from Lebanese and Syrian female interpreters, all of whom had an affinity with the topic or had worked with displaced people before. It is important to note that unless participants raised issues relating to the war and their flight, these topics were avoided. The first author furthermore sought to be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal cues, including those provided by interpreters. Despite these efforts, women did at times become emotional. Interviews would only resume once it had been verified that women wished to continue.

Interviews and FGDs were recorded with participants' permission and were transcribed verbatim by either one of the interpreters (if the conversation had been in Arabic) or the first author. If the interview was transcribed by an interpreter, the first author and interpreter would discuss the interview transcript to clarify, for example, unfamiliar use of terminology.

In the development of the present article and to ensure robustness of the original codes generated, the two authors jointly analyzed interview and FGD transcripts. To allow central narratives to emerge, the analysis commenced with a process of inductive

coding. Open codes, such as those pertaining to taste and scent, were clustered in broader families and, following an examination of the relationships between them, grouped in overarching themes, such as "senses of home." Deductive coding was then used to examine, among other things, if, where, and how women's accounts spoke to the different nodes of home as identified by Brun and Fábos (2015). This process was highly collaborative and iterative; the authors frequently met to discuss the coding process and to examine where interpretation of data, coding, and clustering between them overlapped or diverged. The analysis of transcripts was complemented by analysis of observation data, which had been collated in the first author's fieldwork journal. The observations provided context, allowing for more nuanced analysis.

Both authors are female, the first being of Moroccan descent and with a Muslim background, the second of mixed parentage and a nomadic upbringing, mostly in Muslim contexts. In very different ways, both authors are what Abu-Lughod (1991) refers to as "halfies" and have intimate experience of navigating an in-between status and share an interest in questions of "home" (see also Brah and Clini, 2017). That said, neither author has ever experienced war, forced displacement, or homelessness, and in this respect alone, their lives and experiences cannot be compared to those of women involved in the study. Being cognizant of the important differences with research participants, the authors were in regular contact during the research, frequently discussing questions pertaining to positionality and how this might shape research questions and interpretations.

Collaboration with female interpreters was invaluable in this regard, supporting, among other things, the first author's efforts to be reflexive about power dynamics and differing world views. The collaboration also came with challenges, however. For example, the Lebanese interpreter was occasionally met with suspicion by participants, requiring the first author to take additional measures to ensure participants were heard and well documented. Experiences such as these raise additional questions regarding questions of home, specifically with regard to who one feels (sufficiently) at home with to discuss questions of belonging, feeling or being made to feel "out of place," and the who, what, when, and where of home.

The above brings us to the limitations that characterize the present paper. Not only may our study have been limited by participants' varying levels of comfort with different interpreters involved, but the sample size of the study was also small. While the data gathered were very rich, this paper draws strongly on only a small number of women's accounts. We focus on these accounts given that they most clearly illuminated the themes that emerged from the overall data set. However, further research would be required to further examine, substantiate, and refine the findings presented here; the concluding section of this paper identifies areas that warrant further research. We now turn to the key themes that emerged from the women's accounts of their lives in long-term displacement.

Re-Creating Normalcy and Questions of Memory

Many daily activities of the women involved in the study seemed geared to "keeping the house standing." Women spoke of their day-to-day schedules: routines of getting children ready for school, cleaning, and cooking. Re-creating a sense of normalcy in and through the care for their children formed a particularly important theme in women's

accounts, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

> I try to play with [my children] with some of the toys we have … because I try to give them the best I can because I'm still a bit down because of everything that is happening. So I try as much as possible to not make them feel like there is a big gap in their lives, because they aren't as happy as they used to be when they were back in Syria. So I try to play with them and have fun with them. (Bashirah, 30)

> Despite all the changes in our life, I try to make my children feel like we are living a good life. I try to make them forget that we are displaced and get past all the things we've been through. I always fill their time. My husband and I create this spirit of music, dancing, and laughter for them at home. (Maya, 35–40)

These two excerpts shed light on the kinds of everyday activities that women engaged in to give meaning to their present lives and, more broadly, their efforts to nurture (new) "homey" traditions as a means to redress as best possible the dislocations and losses as a result of displacement. The quotes also begin to illuminate sensorial aspects of homemaking. The daily rituals mentioned above offer a poignant illustration of Brun and Fábos's (2015) argument that the ideal "Home" that many displaced people refer to, and long for, shapes the daily domestic activities and rituals that they enact in temporary dwellings. Crucially, the excerpts illuminate Brun and Fábos's observation that the notion of home in displacement needs to be understood in relation to other points of reference to understand the meaningful patterns for people in "permanent temporariness" (p.12).

Particularly pertinent to the present discussion is how these excerpts illustrate, to paraphrase Ahmed (1999, p. 343), how in displacement, the past is associated with a place that can neither be inhabited in, nor "inhabited by, the present" (see also Meijering and Bailey, 2023). These quotes thus illuminate how the sense of being at home or leaving home is always "a question of memory" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 343). Whether through play or music and dance, Bashirah, Maya, and Maya's husband sought to help their children (momentarily) "forget" or "get past" their past and re-create a sense of meaning in the present. The next section further explores efforts undertaken to redress the sense of loss and re-create meaning, attending to additional senses involved in these processes.

Re-Creating Senses of Home

Participants' narratives revealed that women's ideas about their past lives in combination with a strained relationship with the host community often made it impossible to create their idea of home in Lebanon. The following quotes powerfully evoke the sense of loss and the loss of senses as a result of displacement:

> I remember home in small details. I miss home when I buy water here because we had a well there [in Syria]. I miss home when I buy vegetables, because we had everything on the land. When I clean the tent, I remember how comfortable I was in my house back in Syria. During Ramadan, I remember how better it was there … . I miss home in whatever I do. (Samira, 35)

> Everything in Syria was better, and during the holidays is the time I remember home the most. We do the same rituals and things, the weddings, the gatherings, Eid, but it is not the same as at home. The holidays are not as joyful as they used to be back home. (Hasna, 20)

When asked what was missing, Hasna responded by saying, "Our land, our houses, our family, we do not have the same feeling as being at home, everything is different." Reaching out across time, space, and entirely different lived lives, it is difficult to know whether we are over- or misinterpreting Hasna's words. The shift from first person singular "I" to the plural "we" suggests that despite the efforts of the collective **we**—to

do "the same rituals and things"—these did not bring about the same feeling as they used to at home—not for Hasna, in any case. The clustering of "the same rituals" with "and things" and the listing of rituals seem to diminish the value that even the rituals had in the place that Hasna inhabited; they were done but their meaning appeared hollowed out.

What it was that made "everything different" and holidays "less joyful" is not fully clear, possibly because words fail to capture the extent of the feeling and difference.[4] That said, the reference to "our land, our houses, our family" is suggestive of Brun and Fábos's (2015) third node, "HOME"— that is, the geopolitics of nation and "homeland" that shape situations of protracted displacement. As Brun and Fábos argue, the "politics of home are necessarily implicated in the causes of displacement" (p. 13), and it seems safe to assume that a critical reason that "everything is different" had to do with Hasna and kin having been forced to leave land, houses, and, in all likelihood, family.

Here too, sensory experiences, such as the taste of food, seemed to play a pivotal role in the ways in which women re-created a sense of home, experienced the loss of Home, and sought to redress this sense of loss. Dudley (2011, p. 749) noted in her study on Karenni refugees on the Thai–Burma border that the production and the smell and taste of food "triggers memories and imaginations of the past" as well as bringing about a **sense** of being at home. Women involved in the present study often spoke of participating in activities with other women that did not necessarily involve talking, such as jointly cooking Syrian dishes during Ramadan and Eid. These activities served to create a sense

of home, thereby helping women to carry on. The excerpt below is illuminative in this regard:

> Some people remember Syria through their dishes, others through their gatherings. … I personally remember Syria through my cooking and through the recipes I got from my mother and my grandmother. … Ramadan here reminds me a lot of Syria. I used to prepare a dish and share it with my neighbours. In Lebanon, we do the same. In the evening we all get together in the park. (Maya, 35–40)

Maya's account illustrates how food and cooking can be a powerful means to bring the past to the present, illuminating the entangled nature of the temporal and the sensorial dimensions of different nodes of home. Participants spoke of the joy of smoking waterpipe with other women or of eating stuffed grape leaves or Makdous (stuffed eggplant). The making of these dishes, women indicated, also took them back to more pleasant times. These narratives resonate with Dudley's (2011) observation that the ability to remember and continue certain practices and eating particular kinds of food, in however restricted a manner, is "fundamental to maintaining continuity with the pre-exile past" (p. 749).

As noted, food made in displacement reportedly did not taste the same as it did pre-exile and "at home." Women spoke of food tasting different due to the lack of holiday "spirit" in Lebanon. This lack of spirit was often related to the loss of family members and the lack of belonging women experienced in Lebanon more generally. Participants also spoke of food not tasting the same because they could not afford or grow the same quality of ingredients that they could in Syria. As Čapo (2015) has also noted, even if a dwelling does become imbued with the meaning of Home, this does not mean that the surrounding context is imbued with or generates the same meaning—for example, daily homemaking activities such as

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[4]We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for alerting us to the possibility that the lack of clarity here may be due to words failing to adequately capture meaning, particularly deeply felt emotions such as loss and longing.

gardening in a patch of post-exile land not yielding vegetables that taste of Home. Thus, although participants re-enacted important traditions and rituals in displacement, the inability to fully re-create the tastes and spirit of these traditions meant that they experienced them as less complete. The lack of taste and spirit needs to be understood in relation to the element of HOME. That is, loss of family and the sense of not belonging in another nation-state can both be understood as allusions to the way in which geopolitics of the homeland are implicated in the causes of displacement and loss of home, hearth, and kin.

Sense of smell and taste are closely connected. Sense of smell is, furthermore, said to be our oldest sense and, of all the senses, most strongly connected to both memory and feeling (Lindqvist, 2011). If we conceive of "Home" as a socio-spatial imaginary imbued with feeling (Blunt & Dowling, 2022) **and** as a question of memory (Ahmed, 1999), the centrality of smell and taste in women's narratives about (re-creating a sense of) home is not surprising. The importance of smell and taste in (re-creating) feeling and remembering can also help us better understand why women did not fully **feel** at home in the spaces they now inhabited. Ahmed's (1999) analysis allows us to better understand senses of "Home." She observed that

> [the] immersion of a self in a locality is … not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one can simply depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. (p. 341)

The subject and the space inhabit one another. In the case of the women involved in the study, while they may have physically inhabited a particular space, that space did not inhabit them, and a fundamental divide thus remained.

Work and the Creation of a Sense of Purpose in Place

Having further explored temporalities involved in and the multi-sensorial nature of home, Home, and HOME, we now turn to what we argue can be understood as another crucial element in this constellation: purposeful work. Many women spoke of the activities they were engaged in in terms of "purpose" or giving "meaning" to their lives, referring to, for example, knitting or cooking classes, organized in different locations in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon area, or their paid or unpaid work for an NGO. The following quotations illustrate the value of purposeful work; speaking about their participation in NGO workshops, Maya (35–40) and Bashirah (30), respectively, shared the following:

> I'm from a place that was destroyed by war. Since I came here, … I try to fill my time. I get my moral support by coming to the centre [which provides workshops and voluntary positions to refugee women]. I started to attend courses here and meetings in Beirut, and slowly I felt supported. I might be crying now in front of you but I'm still strong.

> It [helps me release tension] sometimes, because it helps me forget, it helps me take distance from my world and work on something creative, and it makes me happy when I do something nice.

The excerpts illustrate how work and/or creative activities allowed women to, albeit temporarily, develop some distance from their daily struggles and find support in the company of others. The cooking and knitting classes involved groups of women coming together and, in addition to being creative, were future oriented—the women were making products for purposes of vending. It is possible that this combination of factors promoted the sense of purpose, belonging, and well-being that women appeared to derive from their engagement in these activities. Maya worked at a centre for Syrian

women and children, including victims of violence. The following further illustrates the meaning of her work:

> When I sometimes watch the news …, I think that we might never go back to Syria. Then I think again and I still have hope. Insha'allah we go back. At the same time, I think that I might not want to go to Syria because I'm helping so many people here, because Syrians living in [town in Mount Lebanon] had never had help before, and when I started doing what I do, I was the first on-the-ground volunteer. There have been many positive changes in the lives of children and women since I started my work. … When you see an 8- or 9-year-old child forced to go to work, and … you try to convince that child [to go] to school …, and … when the child starts going to school, this gives me a warm feeling of satisfaction and meaning in my life. Some children did not get the opportunity to register in schools. It troubled me when I saw them wasting their time on the streets, so … I tried to convince them to come with me. After a while, they started waiting for me … to go with me to the centre. This draws me even more to my work.

The excerpt demonstrates the value that Maya attached to work; her questioning whether she would want to return to Syria suggests her work was pivotal to the sense of place she found in Lebanon. Like Maya, many other women involved in this study expressed contentment when it was not them who were in need, but instead they were the ones needed.

Women who did not have a pastime or job that was meaningful to them tended to speak of feeling bored or sometimes even lost. Nabihah (40), who used to work as an engineer's assistant in Aleppo, intimates as much:

> I don't work here. So I have a lot of time. … it is quite boring here, because every day is the same thing. Nothing changes, there is no movement. The time passes very slowly here. … I need to do something with my life, I have to do some kind of thing, not just sit and take care of the kids, and clean and cook. … Of course, I'm happy to have my family here … but I miss my work, because I

> felt important at my work. … It was something I was achieving. That's something I feel like I need to have.

Nabihah was from a relatively higher-class background and had completed a higher level of education than most of the women involved in the study. She lived in a three-bedroom house in Mount Lebanon with her husband and children and faced fewer daily struggles than women in informal settlements did. Nabihah too related her work to her sense of well-being. However, Nabihah's work was in the past and as such differs strongly from, for example, Maya's account. The association between the absence of work in Lebanon and the lack of movement Nabihah experienced in her present and only role, that is, of caregiver, was central. As such, purposeful work appears crucial to the idea of agency-in-waiting, further illuminating the limitations of the mobility–immobility dichotomy (on this topic, see also Dijstelbloem, 2023). As Brun and Fábos (2015) observed, daily activities, associated with "home" may help turn a place of displacement into one of significance, and the work that many women referred to seemed to contribute to such a process.

Nabihah's account draws attention to the class distinctions that were at play in relation to experiences of work—that is, the extent to which women felt work was "purposeful" seemed to depend on a combination of past experiences of work and the kinds of activities they took part in. Regarding the latter, participants in the rural Beqaa Valley were often involved in (underpaid) manual agricultural work. These women often spoke of the harsh conditions that characterized their work, speaking of work as a means of survival rather than giving purpose. Taken together, women's accounts suggest that volunteering opportunities and/or involvement in creative activities were contingent

on a combination of place of inhabitance and class, offering further support to calls for analyses of home and homemaking that are sensitive to people's locations prior to and in displacement (see, e.g., Lokot, 2020).

Sisters-in-Waiting

In what follows, we explore a final frequently recurring narrative, namely, female friendship. As Brun and Fábos (2015, p. 6) noted, home is a place "with which, and within which," people experience strong social and emotive attachments. The following quote offers insight into attachments between displaced Syrian women:

> We [Syrian women in urban settlements] talk about everything, about religion, about life. … We have a good time together, and we try to feel just like we did back in Syria. (Umayma, 55)

Umayma's words sketch the ways in which women taking part in this study (re)configured their relationships in displacement. Crucially, Umayma's words begin to illuminate the centrality of these relationships to women's home-making practices in waiting.

Social relations formed a crucial element in women's daily lives and activities in displacement. These relationships mainly consisted of interactions with family members (e.g., using social media), neighbours, and friends but could also involve interactions with members of the host community. Particularly noteworthy here were the social networks women created with other Syrian women in their vicinity—to use participants' words, their "sisters"—and the support these networks provided. The following excerpts powerfully illustrate the meaning of these friendships in processes of homemaking:

> I don't consider women as my friends but as my sisters. God created us all equal and when there is love, the way to heaven is easier. Love can save people from the fires of hell. … My sister and brothers are far away. These women are all I have, so they are closer to me than my actual family. (Umayma, 55)

> I find it very very beautiful the relationships that are formed between women … . So sometimes I … talk to one of the girls and say, "Come help me [with my knitting]," and we sit together and help each other. And this makes me feel a little bit like home, because it feels like they are my sisters, or it feels like what it used to be like when I had friends back home in Syria and I would go and visit them and have fun with them. So this is very crucial because sometimes it takes me back to what I used to have and it brings back that feeling of happiness again … . I love it when women help each other out through anything, whether it is a recipe or whether it's just checking on each other's children, and I feel like this is very very very important. I think it is very beautiful. (Bashirah, 30)

It is salient that the new support systems that women established involved relatively small everyday "homey" acts, such as the exchange of recipes and knitting together mentioned above. As the women's accounts illustrate, the importance of friendships seemed to reside primarily in re-creating both familiar homemaking patterns and establishing new meanings of belonging (on this topic, see also Fábos, 2015; Lokot, 2020; for contradictory findings in the context of Jordan, see Stevens, 2016). Forging new relationships and the support women found in these relationships thus formed a crucial dimension of women's meaning- and homemaking practices, and while new social networks did not mean that women felt fully at home in Lebanon, they appeared critical to women's well-being and sense of belonging in their displacement.

Umayma's reference to the women in her present life being closer than her actual family is reminiscent of the notion of **fictive kin**, defined as relationships based on close friendship ties or religious rituals, and which entail many rights and obligations commonly associated with blood or marital ties (Ebaugh & Curry, 2000). As Lokot (2020) argues, when

attending to friendships with nonfamilial others, the intersectional dynamics thereof need to be considered. The author offers an overview of literature as to how categories of difference have historically been mobilized in Syria and how outsiders were viewed. Her own research with displaced Syrian women and men in Jordan partly confirms the kinds of dividing lines discussed in existing literature; her interlocutors' narratives about friendships indicated these were only established once the other was "known"—that is, when there was a sense of that person's family background. However, Lokot also notes that nonfamilial friendships in Syria were reportedly more common between women than between men—women being able to more freely visit other households than men could—and how categories of difference that might have applied in Syria were not upheld in contexts of displacement. Both observations certainly seemed to be relevant in relation to many women involved in this study.

While some categories of difference may have been less salient in displacement, it is crucial to note that the women involved were from different parts of Syria, different socio-economic classes, some with formal education and others with none or little, from both rural and urban areas, with different past and lived traumas, and, crucially, different unique personalities. Therefore, they were far from the homogenous group of "refugee women" often invoked in humanitarian narratives (see also Lokot, 2020). Some of the nuances and fault lines become apparent in the excerpt that follows from interviews with Madihah (39) and Nabihah (40), the latter as noted earlier being from a relatively higher class than other participants:

> When I come to the [knitting] workshop, I feel a little bit of relief because of the girls around me.

I forget about my problems when I come here because we always joke and have fun. (Madihah)

Madihah went on to clarify that all the women "have problems, [but these are] not the same problems for all of us." While the women might not necessarily be able to fully identify with one another, this did not appear to hamper the friendships and "relief" that, in any case, Madihah experienced when spending time with other women in this particular circle.

Nabihah tells a different story:

> I don't have any friendships here, also not with Syrians. … The Syrians in Jbeil [Byblos, close to her area] aren't in the same social category that I would be comfortable with. They are also not comfortable with me, and I'm not with them. We live in different environments. They are living in different conditions and we can't really connect with each other. … I feel like they even see me as coming from a different planet, they also don't see me as the same.

As became apparent in Nabihah's account, class differences could form a critical point of distinction and separation between women, despite shared national origins and sharing in experiences of displacement. While socio-economic class is more frequently considered in studies of protracted displacement (e.g., Ayoub, 2017; Bardelli, 2022; Grawert & Mielke, 2018), there seems to be little research on social standing and how this background and positioning interacts with gender, and jointly shape (social) experiences of displacement (but see Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023; Lokot, 2020; van Raemdonck, 2023). How gender intersects with higher ("non-working") class status and shapes experiences of friendship with nonfamilial others in displacement appears least studied.

Nabihah spoke of discomfort and disconnection, Madihah of experiencing relief in a particular circle of women who knit. Both narratives speak to embodied experiences

and as involving multiple senses. Our data are not sufficient to fully examine the relief and discomfort experienced by these or other women involved in the study. That said, the sensorial is evident throughout women's narratives of displacement as well as homemaking, including their experiences of friendship, warranting more careful attention in future research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to efforts to thicken understanding of experiences of long-term displacement. We have illuminated the agentic day-to-day endeavours of Syrian women in "administrative limbo" in Lebanon and, in so doing, contribute to literature that complicates reductive narratives of stasis and immobility, implied in conceptions of protractedly displaced people, and associated assumptions of passivity. Engaging with women's narratives about loss and longing, re-creating home, hearth, and "fictive" kin through various means, gestures, and senses, we have highlighted how women created meaning in and of their daily lives. We used Brun and Fábos's (2015) triadic constellation of homes as our primary analytical tool and proposed to thicken and expand this framework in various ways.

To begin with, our data illuminate how experiences of home and feeling at home in Lebanon were profoundly shaped by memories of women's lost home and homeland, evoking Brun and Fábos's (2015) second element of "Home." While Brun and Fábos do engage with temporal distinctions and how these shape protractedly displaced people's present and future orientations, less is said about distinctions and connections between past and present (but see Brun, 2015). Taking our cue from Ahmed (1999), we argue that home is a place where the past, including memories thereof, reach the present. In the

case of the majority of women involved in the present study, memories of home and homeland remained at a fundamental remove from women's present and future, offering insight as to why all participants, bar one, spoke of not feeling at home in Lebanon.

We further contribute to Brun and Fábos's (2015) triadic framework by explicitly engaging with sensorial dimensions of home, Home, and HOME. Attending to how women spoke about smell and taste, but also their references to, for example, dancing, singing, and knitting, we illuminated the embodied multi-sensorial nature of loss and (re-)creating home. Women's narratives furthermore revealed the deeply entangled nature of sensorial and temporal dimensions of home and meaning-making. Smell and taste are particularly important in relation to memory, and Home thus also needs to be conceived of as smelling and tasting in particular ways.

We argue that the senses involved in home-making merit further research. Multiple senses emerged in the study presented here, but it is likely we missed many others, such as the sounds associated with (a) home.[5] To support research that explicitly attends to sensorial dimensions of home, Home, and HOME, we propose drawing on work by, for example, Howes (2019) on multisensory anthropology and Bremmer et al. (2021) on multimodality. Such scholarship can provide necessary tools to sense and make sense with others, thereby allowing for deeper understanding of what it means to (re-)create and be at home.

The one participant who appeared to feel most at home was Maya. She volunteered at an NGO and spoke passionately about her work and about feeling needed. Drawing

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[5]We would like to thank Melissa Bremmer (Amsterdam University of the Arts) for alerting us to additional senses involved in sense-making, and particularly those relating to sound and touch.

on Maya's experiences as well as those of other women, we draw attention to the importance of purposeful work in processes of homemaking and attaching meaning to place. Given the centrality of this narrative in our data, we propose expanding Brun and Fábos's (2015) triadic framework with this element of homemaking. As our data revealed, purposeful work gave further meaning to women's waiting, as well as offering some a means to conceive of a future in Lebanon. That said, we drew attention to the ways in which class dynamics and location shaped opportunities for, and experiences of, work. The intersectional dynamics of purposeful work in displacement merit further research.

Finally, we attended to sisters-in-waiting—that is, the friendships women formed with nonfamilial others in displacement. Attention to the social in homemaking is not new (Ahmed, 1999; Fábos, 2015; Lokot, 2020; Stevens, 2016; Tobin et al., 2022). Brun and Fábos's (2015) too include it in their framework, defining the element of home as involving, among other things, social connections made in displacement. However, the highly evocative accounts women gave as to female friendships in displacement, and the meaning thereof, suggests that social ties inflect and shape the constellation of homes as a whole, yet do so in complex ways. To accord the social nature of homemaking in protracted displacement the nuanced attention it merits, we propose considering friendship and sociality more broadly as both node in the constellation as well as a constant feature that permeates and shapes all other nodes. We propose future research that explicitly attends to the ways in which memories of gestures and instances of friendship become attached to a place in displacement and contribute to this place becoming significant. Friendship is experienced, expressed, and forged in multiple

ways. To do justice to the enactments and meanings of sisters-in-waiting for women in protracted displacement, we argue that a multi-sensorial approach is also crucial to future research on this topic.

As Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo (2023, p. 164) argued, as a concept, "homemaking is far more than a metaphor, or a catchword for a disperse set of social practices." They posit that homemaking offers a means to generate deeper understanding of experiences of, and possible responses to, protracted displacement, but such analysis must attend to unequal distributions of homemaking practices, experiences and opportunities, and their determinants (see also Brun & Fábos, 2015; Lokot, 2020; van Raemdonck, 2023). Our data offers insight into the ways in which marginalization **and** privilege shape experiences of home and homemaking processes, particularly those pertaining to purposeful work and female friendships. The exploratory nature of our study and its small sample size mean that our findings are preliminary. Yet they underscore Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2023) argument that the value of homemaking as an analytical lens depends in important ways on the sensitivity that is brought to bear on intersecting categories and determinants of home and homemaking. Future research should be designed to generate greater insight into the ways in which gendered, classed, and racialized dynamics; privilege; and marginalization shape experiences and sense-makings in and of protracted displacement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

have been possible. We would like to dedicate this article to the women who found time in their hectic lives to open up and share their stories of grief, trauma, and war, but also of joy, strength, and resilience. To the women who could not wait for change any longer and took matters into their own hands. And to the women who are still trying to find their way. We hope we have done justice to your accounts of what it means to be(come) at home.

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