Vulnerable homes on the move
An introduction

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Abstract: In a world of rampant inequality, when millions seek out better futures elsewhere, this introduction situates critical experiences of dwelling within recent debates on home and migration. Seeing vulnerability as an active condition, this theme section records the attempts of individuals and groups on the move in fashioning a home despite adverse socio-cultural, economical, and political situations. Our argumentation considers: the imbrication of structural forces and existential power, the complexity of temporal registers across the life course, and the human capacity for home-making. As asylum-seekers, evicted refugees and deprived migrant families struggle to feel at home in precarious circumstances, our ethnographies reveal the violence inflicted by social systems but also the agency of subjects who strive to make the places they inhabit everyday worth living.

Keywords: agency, (politics of) care, deprivation, home, institutions, migration, subjectivities, vulnerability

"Stay Home, Save Lives!", a political slogan employed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, has compelled many of us to rethink received notions regarding human mobility and vulnerability. Rather than simply asking what we mean by home, we now must also contend with questions like "How much home do we *have*?" and "How much home do we *need*?" Although this theme section does not directly address ethnographic cases related to the pandemic (as it was proposed right before this broke out), it nevertheless reveals our human vulnerability—at once existential and structural—while attempting to recognize the centrality of a safe base in all of our lives. In recent years, precarity has become a widespread concern across the humanities, seeing the rise of an alternative approach to placemaking (Hinkson 2017), more attentive to powers, relations, and practices. This theme section situates concepts of home and migration within such broader anthropological studies, exploring people's capacity for home-making in spite of otherwise unhomely conditions.

In this anthology, we host contributors who creatively engage with home, as a peculiar kind of space, and vulnerability, as a shifting condition whereby people and places may be un/able to deal with more or less unexpected crashes

in their everyday lives. As the readers shall see, all three articles here address experiences of migration, across a range of contexts and legal statuses. Although the authors contend that the frailty of finding a place to call home can affect anyone anywhere and at any time, with different angles and outcomes (Rapport and Williksen 2020), the various geographical locations and migration cases that appear in this collection refer to a particular condition of *being human* (Grønseth 2013) and to specific political and social circumstances, where vulnerability, movement, and hope overlap (Jansen and Löfving 2009). Doing ethnography with people on the move called us first to understand what migration meant for our interlocutors in their daily life and how this in turn shaped the home spaces they were searching for. At a time when home has become a place of shelter or quarantine for billions, this theme section acknowledges that the recurrent problem of regulating movement, demarcating thresholds, and legitimizing people's right to reside sits at the core of an anthropology that asserts its public relevance.

This theme section, in drawing connections among *migration*, *home*, and *vulnerability*, reveals how inextricably they define and reflect one another. More precisely, our arguments consider three key issues. Firstly, insofar as individuals experience constant struggles in securing their stay in the world, migration should be conceived not only as displacement in space but also as temporal disruption/continuity. Migration is a diachronic phenomenon: a process occurring at variable speeds, through which people reshape their perception of time (Brun and Fábos 2015; Griffiths et al. 2013). Secondly, whereas existential and structural vulnerability are at the core of migration, home for migrants should be conceived as an aspiration rather than an achievement (Chen 2018). As a concept, a practice, and an emotion, home is the provisional result of continuous processes of making, unmaking, and remaking which span in time and space (Easthope 2004; Lenhard and Samanani 2020). Thirdly, if one accepts migration as taking the form of an individual and collec-

tive search for home (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2021), vulnerability thus manifests as an active condition that further accentuates human agency under straitened circumstances (Das 2006; Han 2018). As a place which is not there yet, making a home on the move brings inequalities into sharp relief but can also endow people with creative transformative power. Searching for a safe place in times of hardship is the prime theme which recurs in this introduction, where we unpack notions of migration, home, and vulnerability respectively, as well as in the three articles, as we will explain in the last section. As this introduction seeks to explain, and each article substantiates with detailed case studies, the authors did not arbitrarily adopt at times a critical and at others an existential approach to ethnography as if they were two random entryways through which to make meaning of fieldwork. By means of how we understood the migration travails of our interlocutors as a search for home in spite of precarious livelihoods, this theme section advances an anthropological posture that sits in a generative middle ground. While recognizing the import of the global political economy on localized attempts at migrants' home-making, our case studies prove how contingent vulnerabilities affect the lived experience of people who may have the power to give new meaning and directions to their reorganization of space, patterns of mobility and claims for social rights. Quoting Finn Stepputat (2009: 181), "the 'sense of possibility' is not something people just have; rather the quest for achieving this sense is something they live by."

Migration: Journeying toward home

While the migrant condition may be understood as intrinsic to humanity since the first footsteps of our species, current conceptualizations of migration have come far and wide, spanning disciplines and approaches. Within anthropology, migration is considered a social process as much as a lived experience, which entails multi-

ple networks, moral economies, and normative discourses.

Being on the move reverberates on how people experience the passing of time. Biographical accounts of migration are replenished with both foundational remembrances (either lost moments of joy or of anguish) and images of better days yet to come (e.g., Hage 2009; Kleist and Thorsen 2017). Moreover, since mobilities are oftentimes restricted by various political agencies, episodes of delays, stoppage and restart of journeys and life plans (Fontanari 2019) rebound in the tumultuous interior of many migrants, reshaping the temporalities of everyday life, from career struggles to intimate relationships (Robertson 2021). Although we acknowledge the relevance of paying attention to the numbers, directions, and various macro social forces related to migration from a disembodied vantage point, we recognize the need to complement this view by seeing how an individual actually experiences movement interiorly in space and time. This theme section therefore places the temporalities of migration as it is experienced as a focus of concern to explore individual practices of making home among various existential and structural vulnerabilities. While referring to individual experiences of migration, we are aware that intersubjectivity is key to understanding how people make sense of themselves, their relations, and the world they inhabit. Re-embodying migration studies also means taking into consideration how ways of moving change along one's life course (Brettell 2014) and to what extent different migrant generations can afford easier or harder chances for transit or settlement (Wessendorf 2016).

In addition, scholars have claimed that migrations are a floating subset of mobility practices and ideologies for which moving places is a livelihood strategy for millions around the world in the face of constraining boundaries (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013; Hannam et al. 2006). Consequently, the condition of migrancy has been de-exceptionalized (Dahinden 2016; Ramsay 2019) and resituated within a spectrum of human possibilities. While we acknowledge

the importance of overcoming a rigid migrant/non-migrant paradigm, we recognize that border regimes (via legal labels, visa systems, and the often-hostile attitudes of host societies) have a deep impact on migrants' possibilities to move to and remain in their countries of settlement. The articles included in this theme section cover a wide range of different migratory contexts (asylum and economic migration, more or less settled) and question the nominal sedentarism implicit in the modern Western idea of home (Cieraad 1999), whether as an island of privacy and comfort or an institution that provides putative support to the needy. This may take the form of nationalist isolationism, ethnocentric atavism, or even patriarchal dispensations of support to client populations. The articles that follow give evidence to the logic of housing the poor and the displaced (and failures to do so) at the intersection of care and surveillance (Appadurai 2013). How different people upon conditions of mobility can (or cannot) afford to stay in a place, take advantage of a "dedicated" reception system or elude coercive removal are at the foundation of the ethnographic cases analyzed herein. Whether subjected to bureaucratic indifference or obsessive control (Shore and Wright 2011), migrants learn to juggle and come to terms with the same policies that deem them as being vulnerable, often defying victimization with any possible means.

Moreover, this theme section reconceptualizes migration not only as a disaggregation from what was once considered "home," in an ascriptive perspective, but also as a search for a home to be located somewhere else. This is not meant to disregard the strong ties that migrants often have with the place and people they left behind, which manifest in feelings of belonging, desire to "return," or remittances. Rather it entails recognizing the migrants' tireless efforts in making and remaking a home for themselves and their family in their new life circumstances, without cutting off their previous sense of home. These efforts can also take place in physical and political surroundings that contest people's right to create a home, as in the case of asylum-seekers

and "unwanted" migrants (Grønseth and Thorshaug in this issue). As Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving (2009: 3) point out, the possibility to attach or detach home from particular places is in strict relation with relations of power and, conversely, social inequalities are also crucial in shaping how people are afforded the "transformative power" to emplace. This issue aims at advancing this analytical path by further developing the notions of home and vulnerability with fresh and thick ethnographic insights.

Home: Are we there yet?

Like Shelley Mallett (2004) argued in reviewing the burgeoning literature on "home," this concept is variously described as conflated with or related to house, family, haven, self, gender, and journeying. While home is often reduced to a dwelling place that provides a safe base for the intrinsic frailty of being human, its lived experience reveals the continuous interplay of risks and anchorages, in material, symbolic and relational terms. "Home" as an analytical term has a debated genealogy in the anthropological literature: from a house and its social reproduction (Bourdieu 1970; Douglas 1991; Lévi-Strauss 1982) to the search for personal and collective identity (Jackson 1995; Rapport and Dawson 1998). Far from coinciding with the place where one dwells, home can take different configurations: it may point at a variety of scales (from a room to a neighborhood or a country; Blunt and Varley 2014), and to entangled temporalities. Home might be sought, found, and lost during the course of an individual's life (Jansen 1998; Moore 2007)—especially in a time of crisis, whether personal (Long and Oxfeld 2004) or historical (like diaspora studies have shown; Brah 1996). Home is a repository of the past as much as an imaginative platform for the future (Ahmed 1999; Humphrey 2005). Anthropological approaches have also elaborated a distinction between the house and the home, wherein houses involve normative, widely reproduced, and often material forms, while homes center around the subjective feelings of belonging and dwelling (Lehnard and Samanani 2020; Miller 2001).

We agree with cultural geographers that the experience of migration means to look at home from without, from a distance, or from the margins (Ahmed et al. 2003; Ralph and Staheli 2011). As a result of the absence of what should be naturally "here," that is, a fixed and supposedly protective domestic space, migrant life trajectories open up unique ways to approach the lived experience of home as a more or less imaginative or concrete space for belonging on the move (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Erdal 2014). This focus shift from place to enactment in conceptualizing home maintains that home-making stretches across time as well as space, and even in the blatant absence of a physical home, the act of home-making often remains a matter of daily practice (Miranda-Nieto et al. 2020).

While the aspiration to home often involves an ideal(ized) state of well-being for the self (in time and space, possibly shared with others), many people worldwide are dwelling in poor conditions or experience severe emotional disruption, sometimes referring back to their hearth of childhood, arguably seeking for a place of "comfort, security, and familiarity" (Boccagni 2016; Botticello 2007). Often grounded in nostalgia, home is intimately connected to yearnings for a better future. Objects salvaged from flights or circulated from one's former place to another can evoke both losses and hopes that point to the multiple temporalities embedded in migration (Baas and Yeoh 2019).

Instead of restating how people on the move arrange their domestic spaces with ad hoc items and plans, the authors of this theme section take an interactional approach to the materiality of homes, through which subjectivities are expressed (or repressed) and relations consolidated (or terminated). While domestic objects mediate between interpersonal memories and desires (Miller 2011), houseware and interior design partake in people's everyday efforts to arrange spaces of haven, even more so when adverse structural conditions impede them.

(Forced) migrants' attempts to re-grounding against emotional and physical displacement come forth in Grønseth and Thorsaug's, as well as in Massa's article: in a limbo accommodation the Norwegian government provides for asylum-seekers, or in the public space where refugees claim for their rights after another eviction in Rome.

As a socio-spatial engagement, founding one's home means to draw physical and symbolic *thresholds* that set inside and outside spaces and determine insiders and outsiders, instituting a form of "domopolitics" that is a prerogative of private homes as much as of larger territorial entities (Walters 2004). On the one hand, this "b/ordering" process (e.g., establishing a border to determine legitimate stays and trespassings) has been aptly argued in geography studies (Van Houtum et al. 2016). On another, feminist scholarship has long contested that *domus, dominus*, and *dominium* (the house as a property, its rightful owner, and the exercise of house-holding) are a lexicon for understanding patriarchy and/or gender inequalities, which can be sustained only through a set of shared *rules* and *routines*. Whatever its realization, in private or public space, home is always a place for some to control, for others to resist, on the thin red line between violence vs. care.

Stemming from these interactional dimensions, this collection emphasizes that home is primarily realized as a set of relations, possibly implicating some kind of intimacy (Ward 2003). The articles that follow shed light on a wide range of cohabitation experiences, ranging from strangers or co-ethnic peers to households and more or less close kinsfolk or affects. Within the variation of a domestic group, people's yearning for and yet disheartening of home become manifest, as if it were a place whose boundedness offered a security barely sustainable in rapidly changing times. The ambivalence of home attachments appears in Bonfanti's article, in the public housing where a needy Indian family in Italy has been allocated.

Similar to Veena Das (2006, 2015), who combines psycho-cultural and socio-political

approaches in vulnerability, this theme section contends that making oneself at home in the world is not only an intrinsically fraught human project; precarious living conditions can also incite people to seek out alternatives to their ordinary struggles. Our ethnographies suggest that if the search for home may be understood as a human disposition, we cannot ignore that the loss or lack of home, or else its inadequacy, are real experiences that many of our interlocutors have faced in the everyday, now being overwhelmed then restarting. Contrary to the "invisibilization of suffering" (Herzog 2020), we witnessed histories of vulnerability inscribed in peoples' homes, often impinging on discriminatory housing systems, which put vulnerable subjects (whether or not also due to their migrant condition) at risk of exclusion or segregation (Low and Iveson 2016; Pozzi et al. 2019).

The individual case studies included in this theme section allow a sharper gaze into the structural inequalities and vulnerabilities that the broader political economy of exclusion, violence, and perseverance produce. While we map global dynamics, such as the exploitation of workers, the decline in welfare systems, and the hostility toward forced and economic migrants, each article addresses these dynamics from a specific angle with special regards to the outcomes of housing policies for migrant peoples. This rather composite review of home studies in the face of precariousness speaks back to what Karen Fog Olwig (1998) defined as "contested homes": migrant experiences of home-making do not only denaturalize a commonsense understanding of home, but they also contribute to a rethinking of the prospects and limits of anthropology.

Unpacking vulnerabilities

Vulnerability is a slippery concept which points at an ontological feature of our humanity and, at once, it can be increased in certain circumstances and is always lived and understood in historically shifting conditions. These multiple

dimensions—both existential, structural, political, and contextual—characterize our approach to vulnerability. Literally referring to a "wound" from the Latin word *vulnus*, being vulnerable expresses the quality of being affected or attacked due to one's exposure to the environment or to other beings. By recovering this etymological meaning, scholars in fields that include feminist philosophy and legal theory (e.g., Butler 2004, 2009; Mckenzie et al. 2014) acknowledge a common primary human vulnerability that emerges from the relational interdependence of our existence. As social and embodied beings, we are not only vulnerable to the external world and to the actions of others but also dependent on their care and help, especially at certain times in our lives. In this relational perspective, vulnerability has to do with the capacity and necessity to be related to other people as well as to things, such as shelters and houses. These latter can indeed protect people or expose them to further forms of precarity.

However, vulnerability is not evenly distributed but is often the outcome of multidimensional systems of structural social inequality (e.g., Oliver-Smith 2004). Environmental hazards, breakdowns in health, as well as inadequate housing and obstacles in making a home can produce conditions of vulnerability that act in combination with social precarity and political marginality, inadequate resources to cope with difficulties, and deficiencies of care and assistance. As a consequence, some groups and individuals are disproportionately more vulnerable than others, revealing the political and intersectional feature of vulnerability, as well as the role of institutions in preventing, caring or increasing vulnerability (Fineman 2008). While these considerations remind us of the importance of investigating the historical production of vulnerability, some critical reflections have demonstrated that vulnerability is not a neutral term but one that is often used in descriptive and normative ways. In its transformation into a jargon of policy, vulnerability classifies people and defines the targets of humanitarian interventions, as the anthropological literature on disaster studies have extensively demonstrated (e.g., Bankoff 2001; Benadusi 2013; Faas 2016).

This is evident also in immigration, asylum, and care systems, where being labeled as "vulnerable" and manifesting a certain type of "vulnerability" allow some people to receive help and protection, within the moral frame of deservingness (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). While this form of humanitarianism offers a support in cases of unexpected disability, loss of home or request of international protection (Bonfanti, Massa, and Grønseth and Thorshaug in this issue) also acts as a "politics of life" (Fassin 2007) and has deep consequences on people's ability to act (Chase et al. 2019). Moreover, the use of "vulnerability" as a classificatory term is often based on a priori representations where the vulnerable subject appears as a passive needy victim (Malkki 1996), triggering processes of otherization and stigmatization, especially when people's self-identifications are disregarded (Honkasalo 2018). Likewise, the language of vulnerability can also be appropriated and mobilized by groups and individuals to claim protection (Massa in this issue).

While we acknowledge these critical remarks, we do not consider vulnerability as a specific feature of certain social groups (e.g., migrants, asylum-seekers, sick people, or evictees). Rather, we trace back the condition of vulnerability as it is lived and experienced by real people and how it is produced within the intersubjective relations they are immersed in everyday life. Besides these existential and structural aspects, as social anthropologists we cannot disregard that the ways in which conditions of vulnerability are produced and faced, interpreted and experienced across spaces and times are highly contextual. Following Clara Han (2018), we believe that one of the major anthropological contributions to the study of vulnerability is an ethnographic sensitivity to the way in which vulnerability shapes and is shaped by singular situations. Through this perspective, rather than offering a general definition of human vulnerability, our theme section aims at illuminating how specific individuals and groups interpret

and face their particular conditions of vulnerability in relation to their sense of home and their status as being on the move.

As Marja-Liis Honkasalo (2018) points out, vulnerability has to do not only with the "dark" side of anthropology (Ortner 2016), which explores the harsh dimensions of social life and the related subjective experiences. Vulnerability also means "a contingent possibility of openness toward the world. Vulnerability also includes the ability to become animated and affected, to be able to bring things together and to mobilize" (Honkasalo 2018: 1). As such, in exploring what vulnerability does to people and homes, the articles of this theme section conceptualize vulnerability as an active condition that compels people to learn how to live with disturbance and possibly overcome it: a subjective space of experience where people rediscover their constraints and possibilities (Das 2006). While home is the pivot around which vulnerabilities are explored, the continuous processes of home-making enacted by our interlocutors appear as a resource to cope with difficult conditions, on the background of localized practices, emotions, social ties, and moral frameworks. According to Estelle Ferrarese (2018), taking charge of one's vulnerability means to constitute oneself as a political subject, thus recognizing the interplay of power and agency. Within this slippery terrain between the existential and the critical, we situate our ethnographic endeavor.

Ethnographic engagements

In this theme section, each article serves as a reflective essay into the challenging concepts of home for people on the move and an effort to record the struggles of individuals attempting to fashion a home in difficult conditions. They connect lived realities with ideas of home (Frost and Selwyn 2018) by considering vulnerability in different migration contexts. Rather than merely addressing conceptions of what the notions of "home" and "vulnerability" *are*, each ethnographic case shows us what the notions of

"home" and "vulnerability" *do* in its specific socio-cultural, economical, and political situations:

Anne Sigfrid Grønseth and Ragne Øwre Thorshaug's article focuses on a specific form of institutional accommodation that is aimed at disciplining and controlling migrants' movement across space and their presence in a certain context, namely a reception center. It shows how asylum-seekers in Norway endeavor to create a sense of home within a physical and political environment that contests their right to resettle safely. By employing auto-photography to access the research participants' perceptions and private spaces, it examines their opportunities (and capacity) to make a home for themselves and questions how obstacles to this place put at risk their well-being and mental health. Their work identifies a pressing need to address the poor housing standards asylum-seekers experience under Norway's immigration and asylum policy as well as elsewhere.

Aurora Massa's article presents an intense moment of eviction involving Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants and holders of international protection in Rome, situating it within wider processes of marginalization and exclusion produced by current housing policies, border regimes and racialized capitalism. This study explores the ephemeral thresholds of intimacy and domesticity settled by some evictees in the traffic island where they temporarily found refuge. From this transient time-space, it also demonstrates in a visceral way how vulnerability is socially produced and existentially experienced as well as how the language of vulnerability was used and manipulated by different social actors. While for the evictees expressing their marginality was a medium to claim their right to a home, for public institutions it was a label which excluded the majority of people on the traffic island from this right.

Sara Bonfanti's article builds upon years of ethnographic collaboration with an Indian diaspora family settled in Italy, reporting the story of a Punjabi laborer's lifelong efforts to make a home for himself and his reunited wife and children. When faced with a debilitating stroke,

the man must reevaluate his status as a migrant worker and head of the family, and secure new sources of social support from a state apparatus that questions his continued value within an exploitative global labor market. In the urban scenario where this family lives, the same welfare institutions that provide housing benefits end up reaffirming the marginalization of the recipient and his caring loved ones, condemning them to spatial invisibility in the city's degraded outskirts. This poignant account of an individual's lived reality is emblematic of embedded forms of structural violence and social inequities affecting society at large and racialized migrant communities in particular.

Methodologically, while all the authors of this theme section set off for fieldwork according to the tenets of doing ethnography (mainly relying on conventional techniques such as participant observation, collection of narratives and photos), each of them pursued this practice on their own terms, also attuning their embodied presence to the context in which they were working. While their field sites are as diverse as the provisional accommodation for asylum-seekers, the informal residence of evicted refugees or social housing for long-term migrants, all of them deal with the continuous practices through which a sense of home can be negotiated and emplaced, despite differences in the material and existential circumstances.

This methodological premise affected the contingent ethics of research to which all authors complied in each case study. Following Mary Douglas' (1991) insights, home is a remarkable space of tyrannies, which functions on a blend of authority, mutuality, and hierarchy. As anthropologists, our admission and stay in the field depended upon the conditions set by our informants, and on the position occupied by our gatekeepers in the different dwelling spaces considered. Since our hosts often occupied a *subaltern* place in the home space considered, as per gender, generation, and/or legal status, not the least for their diverse migrant conditions, our visits challenged deep-seated

powers and thresholds. Moreover, by standing with those who try to make a home on shaking grounds and seating in a "militant middle ground," all the authors subscribe to "a model for critical engagement with the world, rather than a distanced and magisterial explanation of the world," like Michael Herzfeld (2001: x) described this recent anthropological posture.

As ethnographers, we also adopted vulnerability as a specific methodological posture. As a mode of knowing that depends on the relationship between different subjectivities, anthropology "has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability" (Behar 1996: 5). Indeed, as the condition of being open toward the world, vulnerability permits us to be touched, to be contaminated, to participate. As "vulnerable observers" (Behar 1996), the authors of this theme section are enmeshed in the lifeworld of their research participants and this can make them even more vulnerable, especially when they are entangled with precarious, adverse, or difficult life conditions. This is blatant in the case of Massa, who faced on her body the fear and the hazard of a violent police operation against a group of evictees. Confronting precariousness and vulnerability means to carefully handle, describe, and make use of the stories we hear, witness, and experience, always bearing in mind the structural power differential with our research participants, as well as our peculiar position in our field sites.

Experiencing vulnerable homes on the move: Three highlights

Though each of the ethnographic studies points to different existential and structural vulnerabilities involved in the struggle to make a home, the authors nevertheless demonstrate that what matters most is not to define any "vulnerable home" but to understand how home and vulnerability are *experienced* and how such experience *interacts* with one's subjectivity through those representations in different precarious sit-

uations. In doing so, this theme section brings into focus the following three highlights:

Imbrication of structural forces and existential power

With the acknowledgment that socio-cultural, political, or historical forces have important effects on the vulnerability individuals and groups feel with regard to their homes, the articles in this theme section weave micro-level analysis of migrants' experiences together with macro-level considerations of structural forces. Being aware of the common critiques to phenomenological approaches in anthropology that point to their lack of attention to political and socio-economic determinants of human experience, and recognizing the potential limitations of phenomenology as it seeks to extend its scope and applicability (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 95–97), the authors in this theme section aim at enriching this perspective with a close examination of structural conditions. They indeed share an approach that leans on an ethnographically grounded existential anthropology (Jackson 2009, 2013) as well as a critical phenomenology (Good 1993). In so doing, their work attempts to "[heighten] our understanding of the realities of lived experience and still [speak] to the larger social and historical processes of which the actors are only dimly aware" (Good 1993: 62). As in the case of Bonfanti's ethnography, there is an acute awareness emerging from the informants' accounts that their biographies unfold within petty yet structurally determined constraints, to which their subjectivity (in the form of family resistance) nevertheless finds expression. Similarly, in the vivid ethnographic moment of eviction that Massa presents, migrants' everyday micro-practices foreground the unequal political and economic systems that instantiate their precarity. To pursue a more subtle, critical, and yet existential understanding of vulnerable homes on the move, in their article, Grønseth and Thorshaug employ critical phenomenological approaches to recover migrants' often-muted inner voices. Their work offers us a glimpse into how the structural forces are interpreted, experienced, and potentially reconstituted by individuals. Thus, these studies seek to rebalance the "hegemony of the macrocosm" through an appreciation of "an ethics of small things" (Jackson 2013: 24). They insist that a sovereign expression of life, a sense of self, and well-being (Grønseth 2013) entails articulations not only of socio-political accounts *about* migration, home, and vulnerability from a disembodied perspective but also phenomenological accounts *of* migrants' experiences across space and time. The imbrication of socio-political structural forces and individual existential power in these studies therefore provides an analytical ground for shedding light on the particular experiences of social actors in the background of the broader social, economic, and political influences upon their lives and living conditions.

Complex temporal registers

The human experience of time may be understood as a process of constant becoming. How do migrants face the temporalities of vulnerability and home, whether in moments, throughout their life course, or across generations? How does hope for the future (and the lack thereof) pervade migrants' everyday life in vulnerable situations? How do socio-political and economic unequal forces contribute to defining the regimes of temporality people live in (Gardiner Barber and Lem 2018)? In the autophotography in Grønseth and Thorshaug's article, each photo is itself a frozen moment that an asylum-seeker experienced in the reception center, echoing with their inner struggles of self/home-making that are impossible to extricate from hope or lack thereof for a future. Asylum-seekers, the authors argue, experience multiple temporal tensions and uncertainties that are both disorienting and disempowering, particularly when the future cannot be envisaged. In the other two articles—Massa's ethnography describing moments of extreme housing

vulnerability in Rome and Bonfanti's work examining a migrant's moment of health crisis in Lombardy—*dramatic peaks* are, in fact, emblematic of the *chronic crisis* of Italy's housing sector as a whole. Through longitudinal ethnographic investigation of a variety of lived experiences within an intergenerational household, connections between physical and social mobility as well as changes (or a lack thereof) in relation to broader political and economic regimes unfold, as Bonfanti's article shows us.

Manifestations of the human capacity for home-making

Last but not least, this theme section argues that, even in the midst of severe constraints, migrants persist in their efforts to make and remake their homes. Rather than adapting a vulnerability framework that portrays certain groups as subjects defined by their precarity, all three articles emphasize the creativity and perseverance of individuals in their efforts to make a home for themselves. If harmful events breach normative expectations, Bonfanti shows how the sudden disability of a migrant laborer and family head calls for interventions beyond social assistance receipt. Moving from a damage-centered account to reckoning people's endurance, the author highlights that right when the paterfamilias cannot exercise his laboring functions anymore, the labor of love that his wife and children perform endow them all with some agency in the face of poverty and racialized citizenship.

Residing in substandard housing and occupying a marginal social position, Grønseth and Thorshaug show that asylum-seekers in the Norwegian reception centers impose silence on themselves and experience social withdrawal in the reception centers. Withdrawal and silence, in this sense, become a means of resistance in an effort to reclaim some limited control over the exterior world. The authors argue that making home includes making oneself for the asylum-seekers, while their struggling for home involves fighting for the self.

Also, we see the creativity and capacity for home-making in Massa's article: evictees effectively domesticate a traffic island through the establishment of routines and the creation of material and symbolic thresholds. It was through their creativity in fashioning a home from an otherwise symbolically empty space that they gained public visibility. They were fighting for their right to a home by deploying the language of vulnerability, including slogans such as "We are refugees" or "We are not terrorists." Crucially, rather than oscillating between identities that are imposed on them or self-selected, they instead employ identifications as a means of articulating their home-making. To recognize individuals' capacity for making home, no matter how difficult their situation, is to avoid pigeonholing them within certain fixed categories. Home-making, as Nigel Rapport (2018) argues, is at once a universal capacity of our species and a notable feature of individual lives.

To conclude, this theme section subscribes to the complexity of migration discourse, experience and normative apparatus, but it does so trying to see through and beyond the diversity of the three cases presented in each article, recovering the criticalities that stem from our ethnographic engagement with migrant attempts at home-making. Collating three different ethnographies of home, migration, and vulnerability has required a well-reasoned comparison of our fieldwork experiences that we hope may be generative of new critical global knowledge that only historically aware local insights can allow. As the pandemic keeps unfolding, localized studies that challenge the meaning and taken-for-granted-ness of "home" have never been more compelling.

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