

Transbodied Spaces: The Home Experiences of Undocumented Mexicans in Minnesota

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Abstract

Much of the scholarship around the notion of home draws on ethnographic and phenomenological studies. As a result, the emphasis is on *presence*, the physical and material existence of people, spaces, and objects. Through the experiences of six undocumented Mexicans living in Minnesota, this article expands inquiry into how private spatial realities intersect with homemaking processes and citizenship production. The argument is that *absence* is as critical in unraveling what home means as *presence*. Situating homemaking at the junctures of the presence and absence of bodies, spaces, and objects, the article positions homes as transbodied spaces. Conceiving of homes as transbodied spaces allows for an exploration of how “illegality” diversifies the domestic experience. The resulting production of a private landscape that accounts for presence and absence, endows some undocumented with an immigrant identity that is validated and spatially promoted. In parallel, the spatial constraints they endure can suppress their efforts to carve out meaning and identity, contributing to their “illegalization.” Cognizant of “illegality’s” challenges and that social inequalities are partly spatially constructed at both the private and the public levels, and are therefore malleable, scholars and practitioners can rethink their approach to those “living in the shadows.”

Keywords

home, identity, illegality, culture, Mexicans

Introduction

Much of the scholarship around the notion of home draws on ethnographic and phenomenological studies. As a result, both the place and the dweller are the primary foci: the location where homemaking occurs and the person or persons who occupy the space defined as home. It is the dwellers’ agency that scholars strive to unravel, positioning home as the site of dwellers’ emotions (González, 2005); a place that holds memories (Davidson, 2009), and supports activities, meaning-making and homemaking processes, like gathering with friends and family to share stories, cooking favored foods and generating familiar smells and tastes, practicing religious customs and traditions, and decorating using colors, textures, and objects that create a preferred aesthetic (Després, 1991; Hadjiyanni, 2007; Hadjiyanni & Helle, 2008; Hayward, 1977;

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Joyce & Gillespie, 2000). In these discourses, the emphasis is on *presence*, the physical and material existence of spaces, people, and objects.

Under the lens of globalization, migration, displacement, transnationalism, and multiculturalism home attains a dynamic quality, one that warrants a rethinking of how the construct of home relates to *presence* and vice versa. This is a time when home is no longer understood as a static and permanent place, one that is linked to a specific location and physical structure. Instead, “dwelling is better understood today as that which *takes place* in terms of relations” (Latimer & Munro, 2009, p. 328), relations with things, people, rituals, traditions and other forms of building connections. And these relations “may be performed and reiterated even while traveling” (Molz, 2008, p. 330), positioning home as movement.

Narratives that configure mobility as home or home as movement abound (Gibson, 2007; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Massey, 1994; May, 2000; Rapport & Dawson, 1998). Home, for those on the move, has been noted to remain materially and emotionally significant (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Rapport & Dawson, 1998). Yet the ways in which home and relationship-building relate need further investigation. Rupturing the concept of home as movement are complications that result from differences among types of movement—some are constituted as legal while others as “illegal.” An estimated 12 million people currently live in the United States without legal documentation, as many as half of whom are Mexicans (Levine, 2007). Often labeled “undocumented” or “illegal,” these immigrants experience additional challenges in finding a new place to call home and creating a sense of belonging. De Genova (2002, 2005) challenges scientists to examine “illegality” not just in terms of its consequences but in uncovering the ways that “produce historically informed accounts of the sociopolitical processes of ‘illegalization’” (p. 419). Enclosing the term in quotation marks speaks to the adoption of De Genova’s conception of “illegality” as a problematic category.

Through the domestic experiences of six undocumented Mexicans in Minnesota, this article builds on De Genova’s call and explores the production of home under conditions of “illegality.” Earlier studies brought to the foreground the constraints faced by undocumented immigrants in terms of finding or creating a supportive home environment (Baker, 2007). These can be lumped together under two primary categories, which are closely interrelated but are separated here for the sake of clarity: limited income and access to quality affordable housing. Coming from lower socioeconomic strata and lacking English proficiency, many undocumented are often limited to menial and low-paying jobs that also help ensure their anonymity as they are typically hired “under the table” (Garcia, 2002; Herrera-Sobek & Maciel, 1998). In fact, over one third of all Mexicans living in the United States have incomes that fall below the poverty level, compared with 13% of the total U.S. population (Garcia, 2002; Martinez, 2001), and end up spending a larger portion of their income on housing (Wellner, 2002).¹

Familism and togetherness have been noted as core Mexican cultural foundations (Pader, 1993; Stodolska & Santos, 2006). Separation from family, however, is inherent in “illegality” and comes at a tremendous financial and emotional cost to undocumented immigrants. The regular monetary remittances to family members still living in Mexico place strain on their financial circumstances (Marcelli & Lowell, 2005; Stodolska & Santos, 2006). Forced to live “in the shadows,” many undocumented face serious constraints in terms of their ability to travel to Mexico to visit family and friends and therefore feelings of homesickness can be dramatically exacerbated (Thornburgh, 2006) and can trigger mental health problems (Boler, Hargreaves, & Ulrich, 2001). Some also face loneliness and extreme depression as a result of that separation (Thornburgh, 2006). Although studies have found that typically Mexicans do not intend to live in the United States forever and plan instead to return to their home country (Norris-Tirrell, 2008), citizenship is seen as a vehicle that allows undocumented immigrants the freedom to connect with family members across the border (Coutin, 2003).

Under conditions of “illegality” then, the question that confronts us is not whether home as social relations matters but *how* it matters. Home’s fluid character manifests itself as a social, cultural, or political construct that changes and evolves in response to fluctuating borders, a multiplicity of identity definitions, and varying layers of sense of belonging. Exploring how social relations are formed and the role that spatiality plays in the process is critical when we disassociate home from place. If home is conflated with *presence*, how is a home’s spatiality produced through *absence*? And, what are the implications of those means of spatial creation in the production of “illegality”? I propose to call spaces produced at the junctures of presence/absence *transbodied spaces*.

The mere presence of the millions of undocumented people in the American landscape confounds discourses on home and citizenship as well as their legal erasure (Benhabib, 2004). Current theoretical undertakings do not fully capture their story due to the invisibility and relative absence of the undocumented from public discourses. In this article, I argue that *absence* is as critical in unraveling what home means as *presence*. As locations, homes become the interplay between presence/absence, achieving a materiality that is identifiable. Home has long been reified as a space for family togetherness, the place where family members forge relationships with each other. Exploring how the physical *absence* of bodies informs the creation of homeplaces and the experience of the dweller adds new layers to our understanding of what it means to be human, and in this case, what it means to be undocumented. It is because of the relational aspect of presence/absence that the notions of body, culture, and power are inherently woven into discourses on the production of space and in turn, home and citizenship.

Delving deeper into the notion of home as social relations, I revisit Heidegger’s (1978) insights on being-at-home. The goal is to uncover how presence/absence informs the human experience and the production of home spaces. Who do we refer to when we speak of *being*? Whom might we be missing? And, what are the implications of this way of thinking about home? The body has long been conceived as a multiplicity, made up of the physical, social, body politic, consumer body, and medical body (see Low, 2003). The dweller, I posit, cannot be understood in the singular. It is a plural notion; the concept of the body that dwells is partly informed by other bodies and experiences, some of which are physically present and at the same location and others that are apart, physically absent. Bodies are thereby, defined by the connections of body to body and body to other bodies, in the past, present, and future; connections to those before them, those who are experiencing life with them, and those who will come after them. The physical and the temporal become home in the body, as do other bodies.

It is how bodies in their plurality construct, and are constructed by, spatiality that I seek to understand. Deconstructing the assumption of a shared experience by those who dwell, I explore how the individual experience comes to be defined spatially within a network of other experiences, both present and absent. Through the plurality embedded within the dweller, home spaces become *transbodied spaces*; spaces that speak of intersections, produced out of connections, out of both the presence and absence of human experience. Complicating how we investigate home-making processes allows us to unearth the nuances behind life on the margins.

Blending Discourses on Home, Body, and Citizenship

Theoretical understandings of the production of space have long included the notion of the body. In some cases, the body cannot exist without a space. Ingold’s (2000) *dwelling perspective* posits that a person’s immersion into an environment is an inescapable condition of existence. In others, the space is intertwined with the body. Setha Low’s (2003) conception of *embodied space* thinks of space as “the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form” (p. 10). Low positions embodied space as able to “communicate, transform, and

contest existing social structures” (p. 16), which ties discourses on power and marginalization to spatiality.

When it comes to the production of home as a spatial construct, the notion of the body itself has not been thoroughly explored or theorized. From Heidegger’s *dwelling* (1978) to Bourdieu’s *habitus* (1973) and López and Sánchez-Criado’s *habitality* (2009), the body as a center of agency has been noted to bring about distinct cultural and social relations. The continuities between people, things, and action are explored in Barac and McFadyen’s (2007) special issue on *Connected Space*, which positioned homes as connected spaces where areas, objects, and activities overlap, as do the disciplines that examine them. How those home connections occur and the role that a plural body plays in the process needs further investigation. This is particularly the case when studying the experience of migration and displacement, both of which inherently speak to disconnected spaces as well as bodies.

Here, I propose that the spatial implications of movement under conditions of “illegality” will never be fully understood unless the study of home is enmeshed with the study of body and citizenship and I therefore call for more discourses around this topic (Blunt, 2005). Scholarship on citizenship has exposed the power struggles that are employed as disenfranchised minority groups try to invest citizenship with multiple meanings (Appadurai, 1996; Blackburn, 2009; Leitner & Ehrkamp, 2006). Aihwa Ong (1996) uses the notion of cultural citizenship to “refer to the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory” (p. 738). Ong considers citizenship a “cultural process of ‘subject-ification’ in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations” (p. 737). She calls for more attention to the “everyday processes whereby people, especially immigrants, are made into subjects of a particular nation-state” (Ong, 1996, p. 737).

In parallel, space has entered discourses around citizenship as a “guiding metaphor for understanding the political dimensions of citizenship . . . an allegory for exploring how cultural citizenship is articulated and negotiated” (Díaz-Barriga, 2008, p. 136). Much of the scholarship on the spatial production of citizenship, however, has been largely drawing from public representations of immigrant identity (Dunn, 2003; Ehrkamp, 2008; Ho, 2006; Kofman, 2005; Mains, 2000; Mitchell, 2004; Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008; Secor, 2004; Sundberg, 2008; Veronis, 2007). Mexican immigrants for example, have been noted to create meaning and a sense of attachment by demarcating public spaces and making them their own, a form of strategic essentialism that redefines notions of citizenship (Veronis, 2007), through activities such as cultural festivals (Díaz-Barriga, 2008), ethnic-looking neighborhoods and community centers (Veronis, 2007), and symbols like Mexican murals, flags, and statues of national heroes (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas, 2003). As tangible evidence of their presence in the landscape, these public spatial manifestations of *difference* problematize the distinction between citizens and noncitizens, documented and undocumented, those who belong and those who do not.

Building on this line of work, I ground the study of citizenship in studies of domestic space use and practice. Homeplaces have been positioned as sites of resistance from mainstream values and ideals, private spatialities that enable immigrants and minorities to retain and nourish their sense of difference (hooks & Mesa-Bains, 2006; Shami, 2000). Houses have also been theorized as transnational spaces that produce new modes of constructing identity (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003; Miller, 1996). This theorization builds on the multiplicity of ways by which home is produced in order to speak to the diversity in experiences and hybrid identities that characterize border crossings and modernization processes (Bammer, 1994). People can act as what Ureta (2007) calls “moving targets” and actively choose which elements of their culture to change and how to change them. In many cases, choices can be bounded by limitations brought forward by the housing conditions, and instead of having the choice to appropriate their living environments

to support their way of life, those displaced can only choose between adapting their behaviors to their spatial boundaries or doing nothing (Hadjiyanni, 2007).

Linking discourses on home, body, and citizenship, I explore how undocumented Mexicans in Minnesota claim a domestic spatiality. As dialogues of how citizenship and place-making intersect must encompass the private sphere, a study that dissects homemaking processes under conditions of “illegality” contributes to discourses on citizenship production and vice versa. Contextualizing home studies in studies of citizenship, scholars can illuminate how the production of citizenship overlaps with the production of home, and along with that cultural, ethnic, racial, immigrant, and gender identity, shedding new light on the spatial implications of what it means to be different (Liu, 2000; Painter & Philo, 1995).

Transbodying Home in “Illegality”

As a way to untangle the complexity behind the production of transbodied spaces, I follow the homemaking process adopted by six undocumented Mexicans. With an understanding of the dialectic between presence/absence, we can better relate to how people construct and reconstruct material/immaterial connections between people and objects, community and family members, spaces in the home, different cultural understandings, as well as the past, present, and future.

Domestic environments, as we will see, are the sites from where these immigrants transcend spatial and temporal boundaries, connecting to their loved ones, their homeland, to each other, and to the larger community, putting in place a process through which their adaptations of interior spaces become performances that showcase their right to a homeplace. The spatial constraints they endured in conjunction with their “illegal” status were negotiated along with the rules and regulations that propel them. The experiences of two single men, a couple with children in Mexico, a young family of three, and an undocumented woman married to a legal citizen shed light on the conundrum of how spatiality and “illegality” relate.

Two Men

Gender is inextricably tied to transbodied spaces and plays a role in how these spaces are produced and defined. The stereotypical image of the undocumented is that of single men, who come to the United States briefly to earn money and help support family members in their homeland. The two single Mexican men we interviewed shared a rental house on company property where they worked, 2 hours north of the Twin Cities. They were young, ages 22 and 24 and have been in the United States for a little over a year. The younger one, Jorge,² was proud of what he provided and continued to provide to his family, in Mexico:

I built the house myself for my mother and sisters and nephews. I don't have a father. I'm the man of the house there. She [mother] depends on me. I built the house from bricks. It has five rooms in all: three bedrooms, a kitchen, and 1½ baths. There's a dirt patio in the front to play in and for potted plants.

With each brick that he placed, Jorge built a home that bears his mark, one that holds in it his body's efforts and spirit of sacrifice. Through the materiality of that house, he established the position that was bestowed on him with the passing of his father. In his absence, Jorge continues to be the “man of the house” through both, the spaces he created for all to live in and the monetary support that he sends every month. Earned with the toil of his body, Jorge's lack of physical presence is translated into the shelter, foods, clothes, and amenities that his financial contributions provide.

Similarly, the physical absence of the women here in the United States, gave Jorge additional variables to negotiate in “illegality.” Gender differences in who uses domestic spaces had to be reframed in a home inhabited only by men. Typically, in the Mexican culture, women are the primary food preparers and users of kitchens (Hadjiyanni & Helle, 2008). Jorge talked about the forced break with gender roles that he was enduring as an undocumented worker:

In Mexico, neither one of us cooked. It was always a sister or mother who did the cooking. So when we came here, we had to learn quick! Now we both [men] cook, but we don’t like it.

The presence of the male body in the kitchen transformed the space into a transbodied one, where spatiality was reframed according to maleness. To Jorge, nourishing the body, with both the nutrients and aromas he was familiar with, was more important than gender prescriptions of bodily practices. Tortillas were everywhere on the kitchen counters as having food on the table did not mean just any food—the two men claimed to eat primarily Mexican foods, which corroborates studies that have shown that in general, Mexican immigrants to the United States hold tightly to their Mexican culture while often finding little need to assimilate (Herrera-Sobek & Maciel, 1998). Learning to cook became an activity through which both men connected to each other, to the mothers and sisters they left behind, and to the spatiality that hosted them. The purchasing of the right ingredients, the careful chopping of the vegetables, the mixing of the spices, the selection of the pots to use, and the stirring of the mixture on the stove became embodiments of the movements of the female cooks they grew up with. Using the bodily sensations of smell and taste as guides, the two men turned into conduits that pass the knowledge of food creation down from generation to generation and from one person to another.

The additional six men who would share the house with our interviewees in the summer also defined the young men’s spatiality. Our interview took place in the winter months but in the summer, when the company is busy, the house accommodates up to eight men. In anticipation of the change, the descriptions of their living conditions oscillated between *now* and *then*, adding a temporal dimension to their transbodied domestic experience: “Right now we have our own room, but in the summer with eight guys, we will be two guys to a room, but with our own beds,” Jorge declared. Sharing a room with a stranger was acceptable, sharing a bed, was not. The act of dwelling puts in place boundaries that dictate distances that align with privacy and cultural norms. A body’s spatiality is a location that is very much defined by the closeness or farness of other bodies (Hall, 1966).

For Jorge, the experience of the bedroom was partly defined by having to share and navigate his relationship to the other, the future roommate. For Manuel, the second young man, the future was staged along a line of aspirations. He added, “When I have my kids, I want them to each have their own room.” Manuel transbodied his domestic spatiality by placing his aspirations on bodies not yet born. Defining his own existence through those of his unborn children was Manuel’s way of committing to the choices he made and his life as an undocumented.

Negotiating who shares what and with whom carried over into the other spaces of the home. The company added two extra bedrooms so no one had to sleep in the living room anymore. But, they did not add a bathroom:

There’s only one bathroom and we’d prefer to have two. Right now with two guys living here, it’s not a problem. But in the summer, we will have eight guys, and it’s crowded.

Jorge explained that the solution to this limited spatiality was that of taking turns, which extended into the kitchen: “It’s whoever gets home here first, he gets the kitchen first.” A dweller’s spatiality crisscrosses other dwellers’ spatialities and activities as well as practices are planned around others’ needs and wants. The visual imagery of “bodies in line” does little to explain the urgency

that comes from needing to use the restroom or being hungry. Assumptions about a body's ability to wait, are enmeshed with feelings and understandings of the body's corporeal functions as well as emotional and psychological sense of belonging. The act of transbodying domestic environments is thereby, intertwined with respect and acknowledgment of the rights of others to also claim that spatiality for their own needs and wants. Establishing rules to follow eases the tension that can arise from conflicting claiming processes.

A Couple (With Children in Mexico)

A couple in their 40s, Maria and Alonso, have been working in rural Minnesota for 7 years. Like the young men above, they also rented company housing that they shared with another family and a single male worker. Their savings went into building their own house in Mexico. Retaining connections to their homeland and to their children, who lived in Mexico, was what mattered. For all these years, the Mexican flag, prominently displayed in their living room, paid tribute to who they are and where they belong. Seeing their children's smiles in photographs hanging from the walls and hearing their voices in video recordings, helped bridge the spatial divide and kept them focused on their goal:

We are building our dream house in Mexico that we will return to within two years if all goes according to the savings plan. This new house is already being constructed in phases, as we send money down to the builders.

Material possessions, in this case a flag and photographs, along with technology are mediums through which these migrant workers transbody their domestic environment into one that houses both those physically present and absent.

The father built the small wooden structure the couple left behind himself. With pride, he showed us his hands, crediting them with providing shelter for his children:

I built the house myself, with my own hands. It wasn't that hard. I didn't know anything about building a house. I just figured it out. That's what poor people do!

Learning to build became the embodiment of a practice that would secure his children in his absence. In spite of the miles that now divide his family, Alonso is comforted to know that his children feel his presence through the physical structure he built for them. In turn, he can feel his children's presence through the feeling he carries in his hands of creating those spaces, a feeling that nourishes his sense of fatherhood and purpose in life. He laments the fact that he is not there to help build the new house. But, as in the previous story, the absence of the parents is translated into the presence of the money they sent back, which covers the building of the house. It is only through the parents' hard work and bodily absence that the new house can take form and become in the process a transbodied space.

The old house was a small wooden structure with a palm leaf roof. It had one bedroom to sleep four people (the two parents and their two children), a small kitchen, and an outdoor patio, with a hammock and garden area. The new house speaks to their accomplishments:

It will be a cement structure with five bedrooms and two modern bathrooms and a kitchen on two stories as well as have an outdoor patio and garden. (Figure 1)

Blending the local and the global, this couple's spatial practices created a sojourners' spatiality, one in which the *here* and the *there* strive to become one. Unlike bodies, border crossings are inconsequential to spatial aesthetics: The house, both in its conception of necessary rooms as

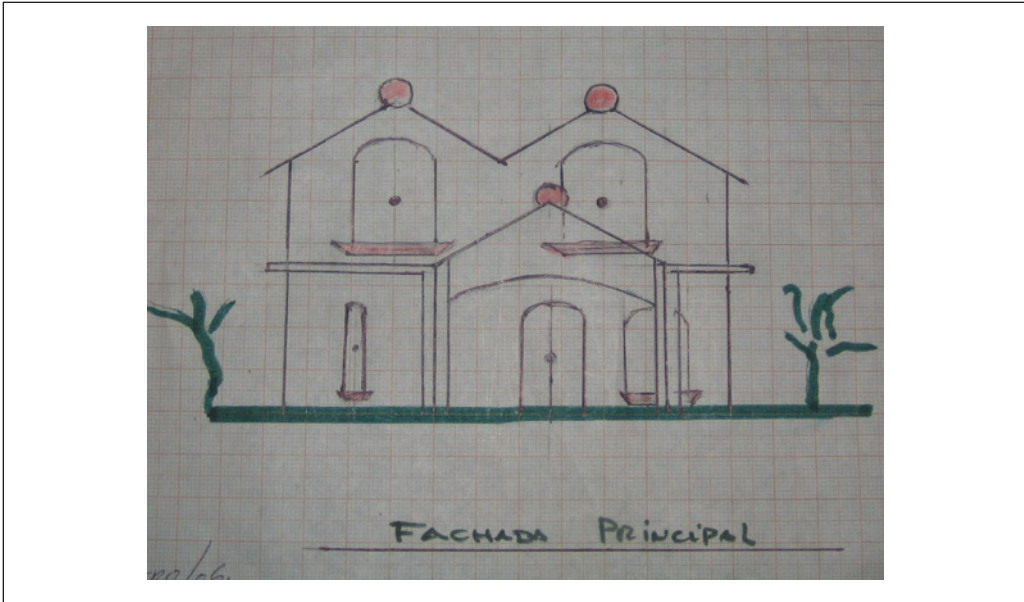


Figure 1. A dream house being built in Mexico is testimony to a sojourner's spatiality, 2006, photography.
Source: Author.

well as its visual presence looks American, giving hints to the couple's years in the United States, their rising aspirations, as well as what Pader (1993) argues are “conflicting conceptual and spatial frameworks [that] become a means by which the dominant society attempts to assimilate and control subordinates” (p. 114). The sacrifices these parents and their children endured to match American spatial expectations can be construed as another form of colonialism.

In Minnesota, it was the hammock and the garden that helped them re-create a sense of home away from home. Alonso cleared the land around the company house to put up a hammock, “just like in Oaxaca.” Transbodied spaces allow for the multiplicity of ways by which bodies relax and create memories. Even when not inhabited, the hammock holds a space within it, one that resembles the womb, the space where all of what it means to be human begun (Walter, 1988). Laying in the hammock connects this couple back to their home and family in Mexico, fostering those immaterial connections that nourish a transnational belonging.

Home as relations can also be nurtured through the land. With access to a yard, Alonso was able to raise vegetables used in traditional Mexican cooking: jalapeños, tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, corn, watermelons, cantaloupe, and zucchini. As a practice, gardening can also inform our understanding of how the body relates to space on both a physical and a psychological level. Bodies must be nourished and where a dweller accesses foods and what kind is an instrumental part of the process of understanding how transbodied spaces are produced. Maria and Alonso also cooked just Mexican food: mole, tamales, pozoles (stews), beans, rice, tacos; all from scratch, using fresh ingredients, many of which came from their garden. The rest, they purchased from Mexican *mercados* or mainstream grocery stores, which now carry many Mexican staples. Bending over the American land, transforming it through acts such as planting, watering, fertilizing, and so on into a land that caresses Mexican foodways, they demarcated their presence in the American landscape.

This couple's homemaking process was also complicated by a shared spatiality. The house had three bedrooms: Maria and Alonso were in one, another couple with two children (a baby and a 4-year old) in the second one, and a single male in the third. They shared the kitchen, living

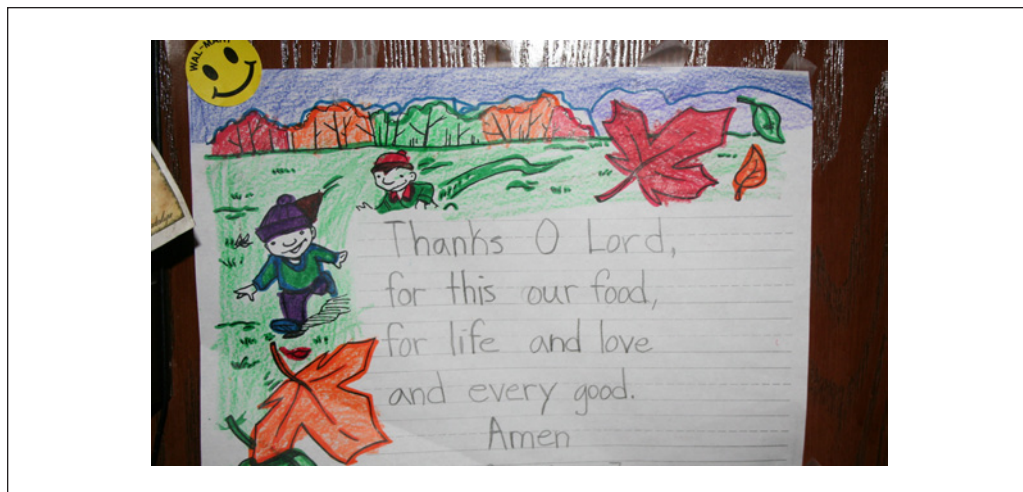


Figure 2. English proficiency is celebrated in a prayer that captures how food intertwines with faith, 2006, photography.

Source: Author.

room, and laundry with the other family and the bathroom with the single male. In a connected spatiality, navigating differences can be a challenge, especially among nonfamily members. Maria sometimes ate in the bedroom to be alone and away from the others. In Mexico, she said, guest bedrooms would be on the main level and the family's rooms on top, with a physical separation that allowed for cohabitation. Transbodying spaces is a practice that is found at the intersections of connected and disconnected spatialities, one that operates on the deconstruction of spatiality into different rooms and levels, each serving different needs of the body.

A Young Family of Three

She does not like to rent, Carmen told us. The homeownership rate in Minnesota is higher than the national average (74.6% vs. 66.2%), making rental properties stand out. Furthermore, housing units in multi-unit structures are only 22.3% of the total housing stock versus 26.4% on the national level, which again makes apartments and townhouses not fit with the norm (Minnesota Census, 2000; <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/27000.html>). Lacking “legality,” as evidenced by citizenship documents and a social security number, her family could not access publicly funded affordable housing. Eligibility criteria include being a U.S. Citizen or National or having eligible noncitizen status (Minneapolis Public Housing Authority [MPHA], 2011). Instead, the private rental market, with its looser regulatory policies, provided an avenue for them to claim a domestic spatiality in a foreign country.

Carmen, a 28-year-old woman, lived with her husband, 8-year-old daughter, and 31-year-old brother in a two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn Park, a Twin Cities suburb. The young family shared one of the two bedrooms and the brother the second one. All of them were undocumented and in the case of the adults, their English was very limited—Carmen was taking English lessons at the time of the interview but she felt more comfortable speaking to us in Spanish. Her 8-year old girl, however, was fluent in English as she attended school. Her English proficiency was celebrated as her prayer, written in English, was displayed on the kitchen door (Figure 2). In those few words, the girl's prayer captures how the bodily practices of language and food intertwine with faith, an anchor in many Mexicans' lives that acts “as a mechanism for both *coping* with current conditions and *hoping* for a better future” (Irazábal & Dyrness, 2010, p. 361).



Figure 3. An altar endows domestic spatiality with spiritual dimensions, 2006, photography.
Source: Author.

Language imbues transbodied spaces with dimensions that unearth meaning-making processes. The prominently displayed television set was a physical manifestation of the duality of languages used in this home and the residents' diasporic identities. Retaining one's native language is no longer seen as an impediment to citizenship (Ochoa, 2004), and just like Carmen's family, the television could go from a Spanish-speaking program to an English-speaking one. Yet sound has no boundaries and Carmen felt that the sound of Spanish gave away who the residents in the apartment might be, becoming a form of racialization. With its ability to permeate walls, sound attains a spatiality of its own. The presence/absence of language coupled with how the family looks, constructed difference in a building that was occupied by people of all races and backgrounds.

Juxtaposing the materiality of the television was a small altar, placed across the room, in the corner behind the dining area. The soft glow of the candles and their sweet scent endowed the domestic spatiality with spiritual dimensions that enabled the residents to transgress space and time. Relation building does not stop with people, objects, and spaces. It includes the sacred, the unknown (Figure 3), what Heidegger (1978) called the fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Connecting to God through the scent of the candle was a way for Carmen to claim a domestic spatiality in which she felt safe. But, just like language, scent is a bodily practice that can detect and magnify difference.

Translating the immaterial preference for traditional Mexican foods and the familiar aroma that is generated to a spatial layout, Carmen preferred a traditional closed or partially closed kitchen versus a more typical and mainstream open kitchen layout. Reasons for preferring a closed kitchen were the steam, heat, smoke, and odors that result from the frying and hot peppers used in the preparation of traditional foods. With the proper ventilation, a closed-off kitchen could keep these smells from permeating the rest of the apartment. Finding such a kitchen in rental units was however, arduous and often the ventilation systems did not work well. Differential experiences of bodily senses like smell could propel "illegalization" processes:

I bake and fry. Sometimes the alarm goes off from the smoke and steam. The building staff doesn't want us to open the front door to let the air ventilate.

Operating in a society in which definitions of smell control and dictate peoples' behaviors and actions on levels that range from the personal (deodorants) to the spatial (home air fresheners as well as mechanical ventilation), management felt uncomfortable permitting smells to leak out into the public areas of the corridors of the apartment building. Having to choose between bearing a steamy and hot cooking environment or upsetting the management as well as her neighbors, Carmen had to negotiate the ways by which she claimed home. Through the presence of smells and absence of bodies, the corridors of this apartment building became transbodied spaces, where the notion of "illegality" was problematized and disputed.

An Undocumented Woman Married to a Legal Resident

Holding her infant child tightly in her arms, with tears falling openly, Alta lamented about her loss. She owned the two-bedroom house she shared with her husband, who was a legal resident, and three children, who were U.S. citizens. She began to cry during the interview:

If I could exchange this house for the old house [in Mexico], I would do it in a second. Even though here we are well-equipped with everything we need, and there we had nothing. . . . Here, we are all separated. My father is in Mexico, and weeks can pass that I don't see my mother and sisters here in Minnesota. I miss the days we were together. We were a family [in Mexico]. When you leave Mexico, you leave everything. It would be impossible to recuperate what we lost.

Having been in the United States for 13 years and being married to a legal resident, she was the sole conduit for the rest of her family to cross the border.

Her older sister, also undocumented, and her three children lived in Alta's house. Local ordinances and regulations in terms of how many people could live in a place have been used as means to limit a city's undocumented population (Varsanyi, 2008). Definitions of overcrowding were among the regulations that came under negotiation in the spatiality of "illegality."³ With three adults and six children sharing a two-bedroom house, there was no room for her mother and younger sister to join her in the same residence:

I would really like to have space to accommodate my sister and my mother here. We want a finished basement with an outside entry. Right now we have a basement that is partially finished, and it has an outside entry, but it's too cold down there.

Falling into the realm of overcrowding, her living arrangements could flare-up a power struggle with potential financial implications for their already tight budget.⁴ To make the monthly mortgage payments, they were renting the partly finished basement to a single Mexican. Being registered landlords would imply a house inspection which meant they would be exposing themselves to authorities, risking unwanted attention. Furthermore, they could not have passed the inspection as without a source of heat, the basement would be considered substandard housing. For this family, domestic spatiality was a vehicle through which to map their way toward citizenship for everyone, regardless of whether protocols were followed.

The absence of her mother did not prevent Alta from endowing the basement with characteristics of a transbodied space, one that would craft home and bring the whole family together:

We want a basement that feels like a main floor. . . . We could also have a small kitchen down there for her so she can make her own food if she wants. She loves to cook, and she likes everything really clean. . . . I want a basement that's finished off to be as nice as the rest of the house, so you don't even know you're in a basement. That would be an area for my mother to live, have some privacy and space of her own, with her own entrance, but for us to be all together.

The acceptance and willingness of many undocumented to live in crowded and low-quality housing can be construed as backward and reinforce the image of the undocumented as aliens and as not belonging in the American landscape (Chavez, 1991; Horton & Barker, 2009). Overcrowding can jeopardize their relationships with landlords, neighbors, and city officials. Redefining overcrowding is a start toward policies that allow for diverse claiming processes to homemaking. Envisioning her mother in the refinished basement, cooking, cleaning, feeling safe, was *home* to Alta.

Closing Comments

Delving deeper into the realm of the private sphere for a population that is perceived as inherently “on the move” answers cross-disciplinary calls to expand inquiries around citizenship through concepts such as scale, place, and mobility (Desforges, Jones, & Woods, 2005). The domestic experiences of six undocumented Mexicans living in Minnesota allowed us to build on Ong’s (1996) call to pay more attention to the “everyday processes whereby people, especially immigrants, are made into subjects of a particular nation-state” (p. 737). Their stories point to home being constructed through claiming processes that interweave the presence and absence of people, objects, and spaces, negotiating each in the process.

I think of this intersection between presence and absence as a spatial domain and I call it transbodied spaces to provide a more textured and nuanced account of the way home is inflected by mobility. Home is produced not only out of dwellers but of nondwellers—it is a way of being and belonging in the world for those who are absent as well as those who are present. The idea of transbodied spaces does not erase the idea of the dweller but multiplies it and adds to it further dimensions that speak to the connections of people-to-people and people-to-places.

Homemaking is more complicated and difficult to untangle than dictated by the present scholarship on home. Presence/absence can be found at different locations and can consist of different forms of spatializing bodily movements. We can discuss them apart or together, or with respect to how they interweave and inform each other. Decorating with photographs of loved ones, speaking one’s native language, cooking favored foods, and engaging with God, are performances that confer home attributes to locations such as bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, and basements. Through the purposive acts of transbodying their domestic spatialities, the Mexicans we interviewed could overcome their social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal constraints, nurturing connections that mend their identity definitions and build a sense of continuity in their lives.

Expanding inquiry into the role of space, and in particular private spaces, in how citizenship is produced, articulated, and negotiated, the article unravels the often dialectical relationship between spatiality and “illegality”—or, as used in this article, the *condition* of living without proper documentation. Because of their “illegal” status and limited incomes, all of our interviewees had restricted access to appropriate and suitable housing and faced inadequacies in spatial allocations and overcrowded conditions. With a unique and challenging set of circumstances in attaining supportive housing, these immigrants navigated a domestic spatiality that was constricted and expanded in ways that align with their cultural values and beliefs as well as their financial and legal circumstances.

Whether a renter or a homeowner, whether living with loved ones or with others, whether living in a single-family house or an apartment, all faced spatial constraints that were partly defined by their “illegality.” Situated at the intersections of presence and absence, these domestic spatialities became transbodied spaces that could support or hinder “illegalization.” The findings support that private spaces become homeplaces through claiming processes that give one a sense of control and nurture a sense of belonging. By theorizing homemaking as a series of claiming processes, the article sheds light on the many factors that come into play and intersect with

immigrants' attempts to belong. Mediating both material and immaterial facets of space—from its size, location, users, uses, ownership levels, layout, to meanings—these claiming processes are impacted by citizenship status in ways that define race, gender, ethnicity, and social-class differences. The resulting production of a private landscape that accounts for presence and absence, endows these undocumented with an immigrant identity that is validated and spatially promoted. All imbued the spatiality of their domestic environments with qualities that mitigated between their Mexican and diasporic identities. In parallel, the spatial constraints they endured often suppressed their efforts to carve out meaning and identity, contributing to their “illegalization.”

Private space can become a forum for political expression for immigrants; albeit a quiet, private, and nonvisible form of political expression. City regulations as to how many people could live in a house and what constitutes a suitable living space were disregarded by Alta's family. Building rules, such as not opening the apartment door to the corridor, were examples of a private spatiality that became part of the sociopolitical processes of “illegalization.” Choosing when and if to obey, Carmen challenged private space and how it is regulated, mobilizing informal means of political discourse.

These undocumented interviewees were actively engaged in readjusting their spatial realities to fit their life circumstances. By exposing their active engagement, the article strips the colonial remnants of the viewpoint of the undocumented as aliens to expose instead their Americanness, an Americanness that was produced through their embodiment of values highly prized in the American setting, like adaptability, flexibility, resilience and hard work ethic, that enabled them to create a spatiality that allowed them to be. Through this balancing act and the production of transbodied spaces, undocumented residents marched toward claiming citizenship in ways that use spatiality to challenge political constructs. Home spaces, as it turns out, are sites where the divides between citizens and noncitizens, legal and illegal are blurred and contested.

Investigations into how space and citizenship intersect must encompass both public and private spaces as well as the junctures between the two. Private spaces are as much a part of negotiating space as public spaces and as such, they have important implications for the study of citizenship as a place from which to claim rights, responsibilities, and identities. Theoretical explorations of how citizenship relates to spatiality that deconstruct space into public, private, and everything in between can add layers to the study of citizenship that would otherwise remain unexplored. Cognizant of “illegality's” challenges and that social inequalities are partly spatially constructed, and are therefore malleable, scholars and practitioners can rethink their approach to those “living in the shadows.”

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Notes

1. In the Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines median income to be \$84,000 (<http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il/il10/mn.pdf>), which would have made interviewees eligible for housing assistance from agencies like Habitat for

Humanity (families that qualify are about 30% of median income, which for a family of four would be approximately \$25,200). Eligibility criteria for Minneapolis Public Housing define extremely low income as \$23,550 or below for a family of four and lower income at \$59,600 (MHPA, 2011, p.73). As a result of their low incomes, almost half the participants spend more than the HUD-recommended 30% of their income on housing, leaving little for non-housing expenses like food and transportation (Eggers & Moumen, 2008).

2. All names are pseudonyms.
3. In Minneapolis, the minimum and maximum occupancy limits for admission and continued occupancy for each size and type of apartment in public housing is as follows (MHPA, 2011, p. 36):

Unit size	Minimum	Maximum
0 Bedroom	1 Person	2 Person
1 Bedroom	1 Person	2 Persons
2 Bedroom	2 Persons	4 Persons
3 Bedroom	3 Persons	6 Persons
4 Bedroom	5 Persons	8 Persons
5-6 Bedrooms	8 or more persons	

4. The five-person family's income ranged from \$20,000 to \$40,000, which is considered low—see Note 1.

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