Carrying Home: Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Politics of Attachment and Belonging

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Abstract

Each person has a deep, unconscious sense of what feels like *home* to them. Formed in one's earliest experiences, the term *home* is another way to describe what psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas calls the "unthought known." One's unthought known creates a longing in one and motivates one to search for *home*—to recreate the earliest childhood experiences that feel like *home*. Theologically, we might say that the longing for *home* is, in part, the longing for God, wholeness, and what is Good. *Homing,* or the process of recreating *home,* is not a neutral process, however. Rather, it is one fraught with political, economic, and psychological challenges born of exclusion and injustice. Pastoral practitioners can facilitate processes of mourning, witness, agency, and change.

Introduction

Religious, literary, and epic traditions are replete with stories about the longing and need for *home*. Moses' search for the promised land in the book of Exodus and Ulysses's search for his home after the fall of Troy are some of the oldest and best-known examples. Each reader likely has his or her own touchstones that evoke *home* and the process of *homing* for them. For example, as a child and as an adult I have related to other literary accounts of trying to keep a sense of *home* while wandering. I understand Caroline Ingalls's ("Ma's") deep attachment to her china doll (Ingalls, 1963). As the Ingalls family wandered as "pioneers" across the plains of the Midwest from the Big Woods of Wisconsin where Caroline had grown up, her daughters—including the author Laura—would hold their breath as Ma unpacked the delicate figure from her sawdust bed and place the doll on the shelf above the hearth in each new place they settled (see, for example, Ingalls, 1963, pp. 118–119).[1] As I

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[1] I am aware of the critiques of the Laura Ingalls series's explicit racism, especially in the volume from which I am quoting, and I agree with those concerns. However, because I am referring to a book I read many times as a child and to the way I related to it—then only dimly aware of the racism in it, I am sorry to say—I choose to draw on it here.

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read, I paused, too, to see if the fragile doll had made it intact. Even as a child, I understood the figurine to represent the *home* Ma and the rest of her family had left behind: a *home* of close community, of "civilization," and of familiarity with the way life was practiced in the place Ma and her daughters had spent their earliest years.

I also understand Seneca's tight grip on the letter left behind by her suddenly disappeared mothering sister. Seneca is one of several central characters in Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* who travel long distances from the South, enduring unnamed hardships, searching for *home* ("paradise"), following the well-worn routes of previously enslaved peoples heading West to seek safety, freedom, belonging, and new life (Morrison, 1998). Seneca found the letter in the breadbox after her sister Jean had been gone for five days. Seneca was barely old enough to recognize her own name that Jean had written in lipstick, but after intuiting that the letter was for her, Seneca folded the piece of paper and carried it in the bottom of her shoe for the rest of her life, "hiding it, fighting for the right to keep it, rescuing it from wastebaskets... until it became simply a sheet of paper smeared fire-cracker red, not one decipherable word left. But it was the letter, safe in her shoe, that made leaving [the home she had shared with her sister] with the caseworker for the first of two foster homes possible" (Morrison, 1998, pp. 127–128). After leaving the only safe place she had ever known, and in perpetual hope of reconnecting with her sister, Seneca's search for *home* took her into faraway, dangerous, and unknown territories; it was the letter in her shoe reminding her of Jean and the *home* they had once made together that helped her survive.

More recently, I have related to the story of Nadia and Saeed, immigrants from the Middle East to London and then the United States. In his award-winning novel *Exit West* (2017), Mohsin Hamid tells the story of Nadia, who wears her robes first in the "country of her birth" because it is the law: women must cover everything but their eyes in order to protect men from their own sexual arousal. Nadia also wears them "so men don't fuck with [her]" (Hamid, 2017, p. 17). Nadia learns how to dress for self-protection and how best to deal with aggressive men and the police and aggressive men who are the police (p. 23). But beyond fulfilling legal orders and protecting her personal safety, Nadia's robes are a way she protects her own identity, her sense of self; they help Nadia "resist the claims and expectations of the world" and maintain her sense of her being as an unusually independent Middle Eastern woman (p. 48). For Nadia, her robes send a signal that she wishes to send about her deepest self (p. 114). Indeed, as Nadia emigrates from her home country to London and then to the United States, she continues to wear her robes—"inexplicably" to those around her (as it is not the law in her new country of residence) and even though the robes seem "self-segregating" (p. 215). Nevertheless, Nadia reflects that she wears the robes because she feels more comfortable in them: more at *home* (p. 187). Nadia's robes cloak her in a sense of safety, keep her connected to her country of origin and its traditions, allow her to hide, and bolster her sense of identity—they help her carry the deepest sense of *herself*.

Each of these material objects—a doll, a letter, a robe—can be understood as an effort to *home*. *Home* and processes of *homing* are gaining increased attention among researchers interested in the idea of *home* and its social, political, emotional, national, cultural, personal, and psychological relevance and complexity. Exploring the meanings, functions, and processes of *home* is a significant means of understanding the experiences of persons

and their hopes, needs, griefs, and deepest longings. However, studies of *home* and the processes of *homing* do not typically bring together intrapsychic, interpersonal, socio-cultural-political, and theological understandings of the origins, processes, and importance of home. Indeed, although the ideas of *home* and *homing* have been examined within political, cultural, and social disciplines, pastoral theologians (whose work often seeks to integrate these perspectives) have not explored the concept adequately using psychological and theological resources. Nor have we named the need to *home* as both a spiritual and political need requiring understanding, support, and advocacy. This article is an effort in that direction.

Home as a fundamental human experience and need

Understanding "home"

"*Home*," writes architect and social theorist Joseph Rykwert (quoting T. S. Eliot[2]), "'is where one starts from'... home is at the center" (1991 p. 51, emphasis added) of life and human experience. The idea of *home* often denotes one's origin, a starting point, the roots of one's personal story; when one refers to *home*, the term typically indicates a "meaningful life space" that was there at the very beginning of one's life, often different from what has come later (Boccagni, 2017, pp. 70–71). The idea of *home* is associated with where one spent one's early years, a meaningful location associated with powerful memories. Quoting David G. Saile, Boccagni (2017) writes that *home* is often understood as "a 'secure and familiar base from which people explore their world... and in which they return for rest, regeneration, and sense of self-identity,' as opposed to the outer, less familiar, secure, and controllable world" (p. 71). As such, *home* tends to be associated with positive experiences and emotions, as captured by the phrases "Home, sweet home," "Home is where the heart is," and "Home is a haven in a heartless world" (Lasch, 1995). *Home* is often understood as something desirable, even a requirement, for individual fulfillment (Blunt & Dowling 2006), despite the fact that *home* can be—and often is—a site of intimate violence, abuse, loneliness, and deep despair. In fact, there is significant scholarship in feminist and other critical studies on the "puzzling disjuncture" between the warm connotation of the word *home* and the often "all-but warm, invisible social practices that any domestic space may host, and that a naïve conceptualization of the concept *home* may legitimize" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 14). This disjuncture highlights the fact that *home* as a domestic sphere, with its attendant roles and practices, is the site where potentially oppressive gendered scripts, sexual and identity norms, and violent relational practices have been most deeply enacted (Mallett, 2004). The "right to privacy" that is associated with family domestic life has made violence against women and children difficult to see and to prevent. Thus, it is important to remember that despite the emotionally warm connotations *home* may evoke, it may also involve many practices that are marked by oppression and violence as well as by deep-rooted inequalities along lines of race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, legal status, and age.

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[2] "Home is where one starts from. As we grow older / The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated" (Eliot, 1973, "East Coker," Sect. 5).

And yet, despite the possibility that *home* is often the site of inequity and violence, the idea of and longing for *home*—as a familiar place and particular relationships and a set of practices—can be found across human cultures and, indeed, across history (Jacobson, 2009).[3] Political philosopher Heller (1995) has gone so far as to argue that the need for *home* is "perhaps the oldest tradition of the homo sapiens" (pp. 1–2). Heller goes on to assert that "privileging one, or certain, places against all the others" is "one of the few constants of the human condition" (pp. 1–2). *Home* is often understood as an implicit building block of society (Chapman, 2001, p. 136) and thus can be studied for its insights into the fundamental character of human experience both individually and together.[4]

In its ideal sense, the idea of *home* suggests security, privacy, and welcome. Italian social theorist Paolo Boccagni (2017) argues that *home* suggests a place where "outsiders should not have free access and one's identity—[no matter what] that means—is not in question" (p. 7). The word *home* invokes a sense of familiarity—an emotional sense that includes experiences of emotional and physical intimacy and comfort. *Home* also has cognitive connotations; the term means a particular orientation in space, some level of stability, routine, and continuity (Boccagni, 2017, p. 7). Finally, *home* suggests a place and time when one had a certain amount of autonomy and control; there one could satisfy one's needs and tastes, predict the development of events that would occur, and express oneself "out of the public gaze and judgment" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 7).

However, scholars of *home* distinguish between *home* as a "thing" and *home* as an "experience" or "process." *Home* as a "thing" refers to place (e.g., a geography, a topography, the brick and mortar of a particular dwelling, one's nation of origin). *Home* also refers to "experiences" of *home*, in particular the relationships one has. That is, besides being a place, *home* is the affective experiences of interpersonal relationships with persons one associates with *feeling at home.* Architect and founder of the field of environment-behavior studies Rapoport et al. (1995) writes that.

> the *mental states* seem to involve an *affective core*, feelings of *security, control, being at ease and relaxed*, are related to *ownership* and to *family, kinship, comfort, friendship, laughter,* and other positive attributes; it involves *personalization, owned objects,* and *taking possession*. It can apply to larger entities and involves *positive*

[3] For this reason, among others, the study of *home* has gained significant traction in recent years. For example, scholars in architecture, sociology, urban studies, anthropology, history and geography, material culture, emotions and belonging, and environmental psychology have underlined the significance of long-inhabited dwellings as a biographical, even intergenerational "warehouse" of memories, practices, relationships, routines, needs, and symbols to its inhabitants (Boccagni, 2017), p. 6). One sociologist writes, "The 'home environment' itself is 'a sociocultural artifact,' whose 'meaning and use can be understood only with respect to its socio-geographical context" (Lawrence, 1985, p. 117). Pastoral theologians might add their own interests to this list.

[4] To underscore this point, Italian social theorist Paolo Boccagni puts forward the notion that the idea of *home,* how people *home,* and whether people can *home* has political implications because it is "a 'setting through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced'" (Peter Saunders and Peter Williams, as quoted in Boccagni, 2017, p. 12).

evaluations of the attributes of environments matching certain *schemata or ideals* (p. 29, emphasis in original).

The idea of *home,* then, points to a complex, intriguing set of emotions, thoughts, geographies, and relationships.[5] *Home* is both a place and a unique relationship with certain people, objects, and practices. It is a "unique source of attachments, desires, needs, and dilemmas" that undergirds the rest of our lives (Boccagni, 2017, p. xxi). *Home* is "an interactive environment imprinted with individual choices, styles, relationships, and histories" (Mitty, 2009, p. 1). *Home* is, evidently, a universal need and experience. The word *home* connotes the place that gives us "our first orientation to the world," acting as a lens through which we order the rest of our lives (Jacobson, 2012, p. 181). *Home* matters deeply, but it can exert "a certain degree of tyranny" over each of us (Boccagni, 2017, p. xxii).

If the origins of one's sense of home exert a kind of tyranny over us, Christopher Bollas's psychodynamic understandings of *home* (its origin, experience, and the longing for it) and the writings of theologians such as Paul Tillich and Wendy Farley can help explain the phenomenon.

Psychodynamic and theological origins of home

"In the beginning was the word. But there is also the wordless," American psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas writes (Bollas, 1987, p. 281). By this Bollas means to highlight the importance of the earliest caregivers in creating what feels like *home* and what does not. Bollas argues that a person's sense of *home* begins in preverbal experience. Because parenting figures[6] sustain and facilitate an infant's survival (Bollas, 1987, p. 13), they define the infant's world and teach the preverbal infant their own particular "logic" of life. One's earliest caregivers are the "total environment" (Winnicott, 1965) or, better, they become identified with a process that effects all the internal and external changes infants experience (Bollas, 1987, p. 14). In Bollas's words, earliest caregivers become "transformational objects" that become identified as environment-altering as well as self-altering (Bollas, 1987, p. 14). Primary caregivers constantly change the infant's environment to meet his needs. Primary caregivers "actually transform [the infant's] world" (Bollas, 1987, p. 15) in keeping with the infant's needs and desires; caregivers pick up a child when he is afraid, feed her when she is hungry, change his diaper when he is wet. During these processes, primary caregivers help integrate all of an infant's being, including instinctual primal needs, cognitive aspects, affective experiences, and the material environment (Bollas, 1987, p. 14). Primary caregivers instill a sense of *home* for the infant, developing a familiarity of practices and relationship through their "deep instruction" (Bollas, 1987, p. 60).

Thus, primary caregivers teach the child their own "logics of [doing], being and relating" (Bollas, 1987, pp. 60, 279). Bollas asserts that these logics of doing, being,

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[5] It should be remembered that one's idea of *home* as a sense of familiarity is not always positive. The cycle of abusive relationships some persons engage in could be understood as their finding *home*, but this is an example of *home* being familiar but not necessarily positive.

[6] Bollas (1987) consistently uses the term "mother" in his writings, and although it is true that mothers are the first primary caregivers and thus the first "transforming object" (Bollas even allows that they function while the infant is a fetus in utero, pp. 8, 51), I prefer the term "parenting figures" to acknowledge the role other parents and multiple caregivers often play in the developmental process, both while the mother is pregnant and after the child is born.

and relating (one might say the unconscious "idiom of *home*") are taught to infants through caregivers' ways of holding them, responding to them, and selecting playthings for them as well as the ways they interpret and respond to the infant's internal needs (Bollas, 1987, p. 60).[7] The infant's very self-state is transformed by the caregivers, from hunger to full, cold to warm, afraid to secure (Bollas, 1987, p. 34).[8] Thus, before the small child is capable of "topographically significant mental representations" (that is, thinking about or consciously reflecting on his self, caregivers, or environment— or what is *home* for him), the child "already knows the basic essentials of human life, in particular, of *his* human life" (p. 280, emphasis added). In the dynamic interplay between primary caregiver and infant, then, caregivers teach an "aesthetic of being" that becomes a significant part of the infant's self and life (Bollas, 1987, p. 13); the caregivers' "idiom of life" or *home* becomes the infant's first aesthetic (Bollas, 1987, p. 32). It is the "unthought known."

For Bollas, the "unthought known" is a fundamental part of one's self that develops as the "core" of the self continues to mature. In Bollas's thinking, the "core" or "true" self develops in the interplay between the infant's inherited disposition (genetics, tendencies, etc.) and the caregivers' modes of attention. One's "true" self emerges at the interplay between one's inherited tendencies and one's earliest experiences of caregiving in life.[9]

Bollas (1987) understands the "true" self as the foundation of the "unthought known" (p. 278).[10] The unthought known is the "shadow" of the transforming objects (the caregivers) who transformed the state of the infant and taught him the rules of doing, being, and relating—in other words, the ego structure of the developing person. Ego structure (what is often experienced as one's *self*), then, is the trace ("shadow") of relationships to people, places, and ways of doing. As the developing ego interacts through relationships with particular people, places, or practices, these people, place, or practices evoke something that feels like *home* to the developing child (Bollas, 1987, p. 50). *Home* as the "unthought known," in Bollas's thinking, is the feeling of being

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[7] Bollas (1987) argues that the self is developed in the interplay between what the infant brings to the world (her "inherited or intrinsic logic") that interacts with the intersubjective logic of caregivers. Bollas asserts that the infant will alter the caregivers' logic or form compromises between the logic of the infant's own being and her caregivers' (p. 279).

[8] It is important to note that transformation does not necessarily mean gratification. Growth is partially promoted by gratification and partially promoted by frustration. Thus, "One of the mother's transformative functions must be to frustrate the infant" (Bollas, 1987), p. 29).

[9] In using this terminology, Bollas recalls Winnicott's use of the terms "true self" and "false self," by which Winnicott meant something very specific. Bollas, (1987) argues that the true self is "the historical kernel of the infant's instinctual and ego dispositions" (p. 51) or the "inherited disposition" (p. 278). By drawing on Winnicott, Bollas suggests that a false self "is derived from the [parenting figures'] communication of [their] assumptions about existence," which may or may not be accurate (p. 51). False selves are learned, for example, when children are told, "You are not to say what you feel, and you are to appear as if you agree with the false presentation of events" (p. 55). False selves also develop when children take on unwanted parts of their parenting figures through the processes of projection, transference, and countertransference (p. 281). In addition, parenting figures can deposit their own trauma into their children (Volkan, 2017, p. 47). Turkish psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan argues that caregivers deposit "tasks" to their children to fulfill parental needs. For example, he writes, parents can implicitly send messages to their children such as "Restore my self-esteem for me" or "Be assertive and take revenge for what has happened to our family" (Volkan, 2017, p. 88). Volkan notes that unfulfilled needs that parents have passed down to their children create a powerful network among millions of people around the world (Volkan, 2017, p. 88), often resulting in networks of inclusion and exclusion and violence.

[10] In Bollas's schema, "The ego is the constitutive factor in the unthought known" (1987, p. 9).

cared for, belonging, being seen and understood. One's earliest sense of *home* is famil-iar (*known*) because it is learned from one's earliest experiences, but it is not *thought* in the sense that it has not been cognitively processed and consciously understood (Bol-las, 1987, p. 280).

One's unthought known (*home*) is relational, somatic, and geographic. Though Bollas does not say so explicitly, one can surmise that common smells, sights, sounds, the feel of the air, the view of the mountains, and connections to particular objects—one's sense of *home*—are lodged in the subconscious as well as in the structure of the ego (i.e., the struc-ture of doing, relating, and being). In other words, we learn the contours of *home* in the facial features and touch of our primary caregivers but also (eventually) in the topography in which those features are embedded.

Scholars of *home* do not address the concept in ultimate or ontological language, but theologians such as Tillich (1973) and Farley (2005) do. Tillich describes God as the "Ground of Being," Being-Itself, the Power of Being, and occasionally as Abyss or God's "Abysmal Being." Tillich's ontological view of God imagines that God is the foun-dation or ultimate reality that "precedes" all beings. God is the ground upon which all beings exist. Humans cannot perceive God as an object that is related to a subject because God *precedes* the subject–object dichotomy; God as Being-Itself exists before humans' rational ability to think about God. Tillich (1967) echoes psychoanalytic language when he argues that "there is no place to which man (sic) can withdraw from the divine, because it includes the ego and is nearer to the ego than the ego to itself" (p. 271). Although Til-lich does not use the word *home* explicitly, it is implicit in his theology. Farley, how-ever, draws specifically on the metaphor of *home* to describe her ontological, theological anthropology.

Farley (2005) suggests that the deepest longing humans have is that for "Good Beyond Being"[11]—it is a motion of the heart that the "things of the world" cannot completely satisfy (p. 3). This desire, Farley asserts, tells us something about ourselves as human beings—that we long for the "great emptiness, which is beauty and love without limita-tion" (Farley, p. 13). Desire for the great emptiness testifies to the divine image and the great and precious beauty in each of us that "cannot be blotted out" (p. 19).

Farley (2005) asserts that we all have a deep desire for *home*, community, and love, something that religious systems, at their best, provide some account of; their message is that we are, "deep, deep down," all knit together, and we cannot go so far astray that this solidarity is completely broken (p. 3). Farley writes, "However far beneath our conscious experience, awareness of the preciousness of *home* remains alive because we are connected to others" (p. 4, emphasis added), whether primary caregivers or, perhaps below the level of awareness, our neighbors, both immediate and global. The longing for *home* shows that we have "some memory, some hint or clue, some incontrovertible evidence of a light glint-ing through darkness that shines on our heart's *home*" (p. 5, emphasis added). Longing, she notes, is "the motion of the heart toward that which it does not or cannot possess" (p. 3). The memory of *home,* then, is there, "precious and perfect, even if we must remain exiled from it" (p. 5). Farley goes on to assert that some memory of *home* is not rooted in one's actual experience. She writes, "Abused or orphaned children can long for a mother they never had; their hearts 'remember' that the absence of a caring mother is a deprivation.

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[11] Farley intentionally uses a variety of names for the power that is stronger than what limits us (p. xiii). She suggests "more or less" Christian names for this power, including Divine Eros, Good Beyond Being, the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit (2005, p. xiii).

Refugee... children can feel, even if they cannot know, that to be raised without a culture, community, or roots is to be defrauded of something crucial" (p. 6).

All people, then, carry *home* within them, both in psychic terms and also theological ones. However, because the earliest childhood experiences are preverbal, precognitive, and subconscious, they are not easily accessed. Nevertheless, *home* is longed for and continuously sought. Bollas argues that human beings long for that early life when they were held, their needs were met, and their state was (ideally) transformed in positive ways: from hunger to fullness, cold to warmth, loneliness to comfort. Tillich advocates for an image of God that grounds all that is, and Farley suggests it is the spark of the Divine that has existed in us before birth that "remembers" love and beauty without limitation. In each of these accounts, persons are in constant search of *home,* sought through the objects, practices, people, and places that will make it so.[12]

To make this point from a psychodynamic perspective, Bollas draws on the work of critical theorist Murray Krieger to suggest that the logic of *home* learned in one's earliest years is an aesthetic experience for the infant; that is, an aesthetic object evokes preverbal feelings and experiences that cannot quite be thought but are deeply known (Murray Krieger, as cited in Bollas, 1987, pp. 34–35). He argues that aesthetic objects are "fundamentally wordless occasions, notable for the density of the subject's feeling and the fundamentally non-representational knowledge of being embraced by the aesthetic object" (Murray Krieger, as quoted in Bollas, 1987, p. 31).[13] That is, aesthetic objects invoke the unthought known, the sense of being *home*. Desire for and connection to particular objects is intense "because its taproot is infinite desire" (Farley, 2005, p. 6). People use aesthetic objects to *home,* to create *home* wherever they are, much like Seneca in Morrison's novel used the letter from her sister and Ma Ingalls used the china doll to *home* as pioneers moving West.

By examining the aesthetic objects to which a person is attached, one witnesses a "kernel" of the self being acted out and preserved (Bollas, 1987, pp. 112–113).[14] Aesthetic objects contain imprints or the shadow of a time when one felt held, safe, and whole. In

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[12] Farley (2005) suggests that religious rituals as well as practices of love and justice embody the Divine, making the sacred immanent (p. 30). Psychoanalytic theorists such as D. W. Winnicott argue that persons seek this integration and transformation through transitional objects. Transitional objects are the first "not-me," but they are never totally "not-me" (Winnicott, 1953). A transitional object links "not-me" with "mother-me" and is a temporary construction toward a sense of reality and security (Volkan, 2017, p. 22). With a person's creation of transitional objects, "The transformational process is displaced from the mother-environment (where it originated) into countless subjective-objects, so that the transitional phase is heir to the transformational period, as the infant evolves from experience of the process to articulation of the experience" (Bollas, 1987), p. 15). Thus, the connection to various aesthetic objects represents a desire for a transformational experience. In addition, aesthetic objects signify a continuation of the experience of transformation known first with one's primary caregivers. Marketers capitalize on this longing. Bollas (1987) suggests that the advertising world makes its living on the trace of this aesthetic object because the advertised product usually promises to alter the subject's external environment and hence their internal experience (p. 16).

[13] Volkan (2017) terms these "linking objects" "externalized versions of introjects of lost persons (or things)" (p. 20).

[14] Bollas (1987) argues that moods are "registers of the moment of a breakdown" between a child and her parents and that they are important, functioning both to hold on to an important experience of being held by the caregivers before the break and for the rich information they hold about the core self (p. 115).

other words, aesthetic objects are mnemic (that is, "restoring an earlier state of things," Bollas, 1987, p. 117).

Bollas writes,

> In adult life, therefore, to seek the transformational object [in the form of aesthetic objects] is to recollect an early object experience, to remember not cognitively but existentially—through intense affective experience—a relationship which was identified with cumulative transformational experiences of the self. Its intensity as an object relation is not due to the fact that this is an object of desire, but to the object being identified with such powerful metamorphoses of being. (1987, p. 17)

The deep connection to an aesthetic object, then, is the quest for the transformational object (Bollas, 1987, p. 33). People use aesthetic objects such as a lipstick-smeared letter, a china doll, and religious robes to evoke and invoke the transformational object(s) that will invoke for them a sense of *home*. In other words, when one is deeply connected to an aesthetic object, she briefly re-experiences, through "ego fusion" with the object, a "psycho-somatic memory" of the earliest holding environment provided by her caregivers. It is a preverbal knowing, "essentially a pre-representational registration of the [caregivers'] presence" (Bollas, 1987, pp. 17, 39). In other words, we *feel* at *home* when we psychically "fuse" with or deeply connect to an aesthetic object that invokes the feelings of *home*. Like Tillich, and Farley, Bollas, (1987) notes that aesthetic objects often have a religious quality to them. When a person engages an aesthetic object, the moment feels "familiar, sacred, reverential... where the experience of rapport with the other was the essence of life before words existed" (p. 32). Thus, whereas Tillich and Farley relate *home* to deep communion with the Divine and Sacred source of life, Bollas originates persons' sense of home in the womb and earliest childhood experiences, where needs and desires ideally were fulfilled without the infant's conscious effort. In this way, Bollas relates *home* to one's sense of self.

The *self* in Bollas's understanding is a history of one's inherited capacities and their interactions through myriad relationships with both persons and material environments (p. 9). The *self* comes into being through a dynamic process between internal and external worlds. Not surprisingly, although the *self* has some consistency and stability, it is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life; the self must constantly be transformed or re-established through at least temporary fusion with aesthetic objects (Bollas, 1987, p. 14). Because the recreation of *home* is never fully realized in adult life (just as one was not always completely gratified in earliest life), the search for feeling at *home* is a lifelong one (Bollas, 1987, p. 16). As Farley puts it, seeking *home* in a theological sense is experienced as a pull by "something" that lacks any face or word that conveys what it is (Farley, p. 14).[15] *Home* may be the closest human beings can get to experience being "knit and oned to God" (Julian of Norwich, as quoted in Farley, 2005, p. 19), which is a metaphor that expresses both our ontology and our deepest desire. It is not surprising,

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[15] Farley (2005) notes that the sacred can be approached only through the symbols, traditions, wisdom, distortions, practices, and philosophies of the world's religions (p. 14). Bollas (1987) would likely agree but would nuance Farley's point by asserting that the sacred is phenomenologically known in the earliest experiences with transformational objects. Pastoral theologians have asserted as much. For example, pastoral psychologist SteinhoffSmith (2004) argues that the experience of being held by one's earliest caregivers is the foundation of faith, hope, and love.

then, that human beings continuously search for the time when they felt the most whole and cared for. The unconscious memory of these earliest experiences manifests itself in the person's search for an object ("a person, place, event, ideology") that promises to transform or re-establish the self, and the deep desire and search for this is lifelong (Bollas, 1987, pp. 14, 17).

Each of us, then, carries a sense of what *home* feels like, and we sometimes exert enormous effort to carry that with us (like Seneca "fighting for the right to keep it"), often in the form of aesthetic objects. However, despite the fact that all persons have a sense of *home* that they carry with them, *home* is also a verb—a process that must continually be enacted. Life is, one might say, a constant process of *homing*.

Processes and problematics of *homing*

Home has been understood as an instinct, a spark of the Divine in each of us. It likely began in utero, when all of one's needs were sated and alienation and fear did not exist. As one scholar of *home* suggests, whether understood as "the womb, the cradle, the nursery, the parental home, or any actively pursued home arrangements... our search for *home* or the need to make a *home* is definitive of the human condition" (Jacobson, 2012, p. 178). The phrase "actively pursued home arrangements" suggests the process of *homing*, and, indeed, the word *home* is short for *homemaking,* or the ordinary interactions through which individuals try to appropriate and make meaningful, personal, and secure a variety of different places (Boccagni, 2017, p. 9). *Homing* is the process in which we all seek to reconstruct the set of emotions, feelings, relationships, settings, and senses that are familiar. Home is a matter of *home-making* (Blunt & Dowling 2006) or the creation of a set of "specific social relationships that are negotiated and reproduced over time, more or less successfully, against a variety of material backgrounds" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 12). As a process, *homing* is a natural one, "all but... predetermined" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 9). Nevertheless, it requires "significant emotional and practical efforts" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 9). This is especially true when people leave familiar geographically and materially located homes and seek to *home* in a new setting.

Homing is the word used to describe this dynamic. *Homing* is the emotional, cognitive, and relational process of becoming attached to a particular place, but it is not dependent on one place. "Home-as-relationship is something actively pursued and oriented to distinctive material and social settings, which affect it in turn" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 4). *Home* is an emotional and cognitive process connected to material and geographical aesthetics that help us remember and revisit the past, imagine the future, and shape the present. For sociologists, the term *home* "refers to a set of social practices, values and symbols that, while setting-specific, can be transferred and reproduced into different settings over time—or even out of any specifically bounded place" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 5).

Home is "worked out" by each person, then, as a social experience; furthermore, one's sense of *home* has societal consequences. The question, then, is how people make *home*. Although material objects and relationships are critical to the experience of *home*, *home* is not a fixed entity. Indeed, scholars of *home* write of its "portability," the possibility of a person carrying with her the "sensual density of the spatial home experience," including "familiar fragrances, sounds, and things" (Heller, p. 14). The experience of *home* is an ever-changing "assemblage" of cognitions, emotions, and practices that can be attached

(through the processes of one's unthought known) to domestic artifacts, appliances, decorations, practices and rituals, geographies, etc., that help reproduce a deep (if not necessarily realistic) sense of the past *home* (Boccagni, 2017, p. 62).

One's sense of *home* gains special significance when one leaves it (Moore, 2000, p. 211). Thus, migrants' and other wanderers'[16] experiences are particularly important for what they tell us about understanding the need for and processes human beings have for *homing*. Studying the experience of migrants and other wanderers is informative as it reflects on the fact that "we are beings who are always making ourselves at home and always such that we are never completely at home. We are forever *becoming at home*" (Jacobson, 2012, p. 181, emphasis added). By studying migrants' participation in familiar rituals, forms of relating, use of first language, dependence on "traditional" ways of performing functions (the tasks of being and doing), one can learn of the subconscious and conscious attempts to make *home* in this particular population as indicative of the process for the rest of us (Boccagni, 2017). In addition, however, studying the experiences of migrants as they attempt to *home* makes it very clear that *homing* is a politically charged endeavor, not just for migrants but for all of us.

Sociopolitical challenges to "homing" among migrants, displaced persons, and other wanderers

The need for *home* is most acute during periods of upheaval, yet *home* can be most difficult to establish when it is needed most. Indeed, *homing* is not just a matter of determining to be at *home* or make a *home*; people's ability to *home* has much to do with the external structure of opportunities available to them (Boccagni, 2017, p. 23). Because migrants must emphasize "routes over roots" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 108), their need to *home* wherever they find themselves is especially acute (Volkan, 2017, p. 4). In fact, *home,* especially through the eyes of migrants and displaced persons, is often "conspicuous in its absence," only emphasizing its importance (Boccagni, 2017, p. 2).

The challenges of *homing* are not only psychological, theological, and material, they are also sociopolitical and structural. One's ability to *home* depends on one's access to resources both tangible and intangible. The idea of *home* is both an inclusive one (where oneself and one's loved ones belong) and an exclusive one (where those who are not kin do not belong). The process of *homing,* then, is not just a matter of living in familiar topography or carrying one's aesthetic, transformative objects from place to place. It is a complex matter of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and not belonging, not having and needing; thus, *home* has a normative dimension. Given the fact that millions and millions of people are on the move every year (some voluntarily, many not), opportunities and the lack thereof for *homing* demonstrate the ethical and moral dimensions inherent in the concept.

Persons' ability to *home* is significantly affected by economic and political factors. In fact, the opportunity to *home* is an unequally distributed asset that mirrors broader

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[16] Here I include persons internally displaced by violence and those seeking a better life by their own election. Formerly enslaved peoples, migrants fleeing war in their home country, as well as those seeking refuge from unsafe *homes* should be included.

geographies of power and unequal social and civic stratification. What is clear in the contemporary global debate about immigration is that *homing* is not just about a particular place or familiar things; it is also a claim for visibility, recognition, and ownership. Migrants' attempts to *home* "are critically influenced by the structure of legal, social and material opportunities accessible in their receiving and sending countries" (Boccagni, 2017, p. xxvi). Thus, *home* as place and the aesthetic objects that help one *home* are not politically neutral; one learns through earliest experiences the idioms of doing, being, and relating that give shape to *home* for oneself, and these idioms can be the origins of exclusion and violence.

Parents are the representatives of society for their children; children learn to attach to physical characteristics, language, nursery rhymes, material objects, food, dances, religious beliefs and practices, myths, flags, geography, heroes, and narratives of historical events (Volkan, 2017, p. 87). In other words, primary caregivers are the sources of our deepest and often unconsidered values. Psychoanalytic theorists have been particularly explicit about the ways primary caregivers mediate and communicate their cultural, social scripts to their young.[17]

Volkan argues that early on in their development, children identify with the individuals closest to them. Initially, a child's "group" is small, comprised of immediate caregivers, beginning the bias toward their own kind (Volkan, 2017, p. 85). The sense of belonging to a larger group identity develops later in childhood, after identifying the characteristics of their caregivers that have become *home* to them (Volkan, 2017, p. 86).

Children slowly stop being "generalists" (that is, very young children do not understand that there are differentiators between us in regard to gender, class, race, etc., and the meanings those differentiators have been given socioculturally). To very young children, we are all indistinguishable (outside of the sense of familiarity of caregivers). Children learn to identify with the cultural markers of their personal transformational objects as they grow older. Indeed, as one's sense of *home* develops in the context of a caregiver's idiom, so does one's increasingly exclusive sense of *home*; this is when the sense of "us vs. them" begins.[18] When one group develops fear of "contamination" by another because the other group is not familiar, *home* becomes an exclusionary and oppressive process (Volkan, 2017, p. 101). The deepest sociocultural and political values that inform *home* in us are often opposed to the "memory" of the Good that each person longs for and seeks. *Home* and the prevention of *homing* by "others" can result in violence, oppression, and chronic suffering.

Given the contemporary global climate regarding migration and immigration, which includes deep-seated nationalism, seemingly intransigent large group identities, and xenophobic exclusion, persons who have left their *homes* (voluntarily or not) have poor prospects for *homing*. Their desires to be respected, recognized, and included on equal terms (much less their acceptance as they try to create *home*, given their ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds) are often unmet. For the many millions of displaced persons worldwide who have poor prospects for integration, return, or resettlement, feeling at *home* may be an "unaffordable luxury" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 80).

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[17] See psychoanalytic theorists such as Bollas (1987), Sigmund Freud (1964), Harry S. Sullivan (1953), and Heinz Kohut (1985), who all held that parents mediate the norms of society to their children.

[18] Although having "enemies" is a typical part of human experience (it is a way of creating boundaries and space between oneself and another), "enemies" are often the repositories of unwanted idioms of being and doing and projections of unclaimed parts of oneself (Volkan, 2017, p. 99).

Because one's sense of *home* is formed in earliest childhood experiences, *homing* is often a deeply contentious process. Especially for those who no longer reside in the countries of their youth, their ways of relating, being, and doing, especially around expected divisions of labor, familiar lifestyles, and religious beliefs and rituals, can seem divisive and burdensome to others. Bringing one's sense of *home*, and the expectations for such, can create deep divides between those already *at home* and those seeking to make one.

Home and human flourishing

It is important to appreciate how much feeling at *home* matters. *Home* is an important site of emotional, cognitive, and relational dynamics, and *homing* seems to be a deeply shared need of human beings. It is a theological—even ontological—concept. *Home* is the foundation of faith, hope, and love (or lack thereof, as in the case of deprivation). Pastoral psychologist Roy SteinhoffSmith, for example, argues that.

> by some time in the first half of the second year of life, babies have learned what they can hope for; what they can trust in themselves, others, and the world; and the extent and limits of love. Their interactions with their caretakers, others, and the world have decisively formed their bodies, contoured their souls, and directed how they relate to others in the realm of the spirit. Although later experiences may alter these lessons, this global orientation or faith remains as the primary foundation for how they will respond to life. (SteinhoffSmith, 146)

Our earliest caregivers, then, instill a sense of *home* in each of us in our earliest years and this is an experience we search for our entire lives: we want to find or recreate it again.[19] Whether leaving one's *home* voluntarily (the Ingalls family) or involuntarily as displaced persons (Seneca, Nadia), leaving home creates many challenges and a deep sense of loss and feelings of grief. Thus, the need for *homing* is acute and urgent. It involves reestablishing (or continuing to establish) one's very *self*.[20]

Since re-creating *home* is not entirely possible, each must, to some degree, grieve the loss of the ideal of *home* we carry in us. As Bollas puts it, we must mourn the idealized past and also our compensatory hopes for certain futures (p. 106) that we are, inevitably, reluctant to give up (p. 108). Nevertheless, part of the maturation process is coming to terms with what is, which includes mourning what can no longer be and probably never fully was.[21] Mourning what is gone (or what is hoped for but seems out of reach) as well as mourning the loss of the ideal is an important part of developing as a human being.

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[19] Farley (2005) posits that this longing for a place we feel we belong and are "seen" is a shadow (to borrow Bollas's language) of the divine spark within us (p. 5).

[20] Pastoral theologian Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (2014) demonstrated in her research on "bi-(or tri-) cultural" (p. 10) people that life in multiple cultural contexts requires constantly navigating different expectations, values, customs, practices, and roles, which requires constant vigilance, adaptation, and resilience—and enormous amounts of energy (p. 104). The challenges posed by people trying to *home* is especially acute in children, whose developmental and maturational processes can be "short-circuited" without a *home*.

[21] Bollas (1987) notes that various psychopathologies emerge from the failure to be "disillusioned from this relationship" (p. 17), suggesting that psychopathologies develop from failing to be disillusioned from our relationship to our fantasized transformational objects (p. 17). Boccagni (2017) notes that immigrants who are returned to their country of origin often do not feel at home; things have changed too much for them to recognize it and feel familiarity. Thus, they must grieve, whether they stay in their new country or return to their former one (p. 40).

Leaving "home" is, perhaps, inevitable, at least psychologically (our caregivers will always fail us in some ways—even in "good enough" situations—thus requiring us to leave the idealized version of home and try to re-create home in new, perhaps more realistic ways for the rest of our lives). In an often violent and unjust world where people leave the communities of their earliest years seeking a better life, leaving *home* as a geographic, material reality seems probable. Growing up implies being disabused of the fantasy of the magical transforming object in favor of more realistic expectations. The need for *home* seems universal; mourning the inevitable loss of *home* is, as Volkan (2017) puts it, an "obligatory response" (p. 13).[22]

Even so, though our memories of *home* may be romanticized and idealized and need to be mourned, they can still be meaningful; memories of *home* (and hopes for a future *home)* can be a bulwark against the hardships and vicissitudes of life. Understanding one's sense of *home* can provide useful insight into the hopes, expectations, and concerns regarding one's future. And the longing for *home* has a sacred quality; it is the deepest longings in us for care, for being seen, understood, accepted, and for belonging. Creating welcoming communities, honoring others' (and our own) aesthetic objects, and welcoming others' domestic and religious practices can all help persons *home.*

The search for *home* is the desire for the Good that "remains in us like a silver thread that leads us back to genuine self-knowledge" (Farley, 2005, p. 21) of being knit and "oned" to each other and to God. But experiences and longing for *home* must be held up against theologically informed values such as love, inclusion, and justice because some understandings and practices of *home* are not reflective of human beings' deepest experiences and do not allow all persons to meet their deepest needs. The ability to be at *home,* then, is not a matter of merely choosing to bloom where one finds oneself (as the aphorism recommends) and creating opportunities for the *homing* of all requires critical reflection and just practices and the welcome inclusion of the "other."[23]

If *home* is a universal need, it should be considered a human right to be able to *home*. In caring for those who long for *home* and are having difficulties *homing,* pastoral practitioners can affirm that deepest desire, the longing for the sacred, the womb—safety, security, and belonging. They can accompany the mourning that each person must engage in as they let go of the idealized sense of *home*. Finally, we must all reflect critically on the sociopolitical challenges in attempts to *home*. We are called to be vocal and public witnesses to unjust impediments and to practice solidarity with those who are displaced and "disinherited."[24]

Conclusion

Pastoral theologians are committed to supporting thriving in individuals and communities. Understanding the significance of *home* and what it tells us about the human condition highlights the importance of processes of *homing* and helps us understand and appreciate the processes by which people attach and seek to belong using the aesthetic objects and

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[22] Volkan (2017) posits that grief is "a more transitory matter" than mourning, which is a process—and often a lifelong one (p. 15).

[23] Bollas (1987) notes that extremist political movements can be interpreted as an indication of a "collective certainty" that their revolutionary ideologies will affect a "total environmental transformation that will deliver everyone from the gamut of their basic faults" (p. 27).

[24] This is Howard Thurman's (1976) term for those whose "backs are against the wall," usually those in nondominant and targeted groups (p. 7).

the practices of *homing*. Understood through the psychological and theological lenses of Bollas, Tillich, and Farley, especially, *homing* practices and the aesthetic objects that support them can be appreciated in new ways. Though we can only experience the *home* we most deeply long for in limited and fragmentary ways, aesthetic objects and practices can keep the yearning for the Divine, or Good, alive. Still, though it is a universal human need, efforts to *home* have deep psychological, theological, social, and political meanings. Thus, our individual and collective notions of *home* must be examined and challenged when the deepest values that shape the unthought known are not inclusive and just.

In this light, aesthetic objects can be understood as an urgent demand for welcome, inclusion, justice, and love. Whether carried in a shoe, packed in a crate, or worn on one's back, the objects that help each of us *home* have a sacred quality to them; they are the ways we carry *home* every day, longing for the Good both behind us and ahead. Welcoming and honoring people's sacred objects, whether something meaningful to an individual (such as a worn letter) or something with cultural and/or religious significance (such as a robe), has both psychological and spiritual significance. Whether one is engaged in listening to narratives of loss and grief over losing one's aesthetic objects of home, or advocating for persons' rights on the border, or helping create a sanctuary church or city, these are acts of witness, of care, and of resistance to what dehumanizes others, and they are forms of love. Supporting practices of *homing* through the use of aesthetic objects, other material realities, and ritual is a way of bringing together the past and the future, the now and the not-yet, and helping people become more whole.

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