Conflicts of Home-Making: Strategies of Survival and the Politics of Assimilation

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Confl icts of Home-Making: Strategies of Survival and the Politics of Assimilation

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ABSTRACT
Latinx communities that shape the US cultural landscape and assimilationists who reject this influence each have a desire to feel at home in the US. Nevertheless, people hold conflicting intuitions about which group’s home-making practices are morally justifiable. Some feel that those belonging to the cultural majority have the right to determine membership through the admission of only those outsiders who will not disrupt their way of life. Others sense that when assimilationists express the need to feel at home in their country, this seems to be, at the very least, tinged with a morally distasteful xenophobia. In this essay, I provide an account of each of these conflicting intuitions. Drawing from Mariana Ortega’s notion of hometactics and from Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s discussions of rasquachismo, I propose that many immigrants and Latinxs’ home-making practices involve efforts to create a sense of familiarity and identity affirmation in a place where they are regularly reminded that they do not belong. Meanwhile, an examination of early and contemporary US nation-building practices demonstrates that assimilationists’ ability to feel at home also aims at identity affirmation, but it is intolerant of difference and requires the eradication, rather than the incorporation, of that which is foreign.

KEYWORDS
Migration studies; assimilation; home; belonging; Latinx identity; settler colonialism; mixedness

Introduction

In 2017, students of a New Jersey high school walked out of their classroom in protest after their teacher insisted that the students in the classroom speak English. The teacher argued that soldiers are not fighting for Americans’ right to speak Spanish, but for the ‘right to speak American’ (Madani 2017). This event resulted from a tension between Latinx students’ expression of their culture and the belief that such expressions are inappropriate in the United States. Confrontations like this one are not uncommon. Indeed, communities throughout the US can appear as cultural battle zones. Neighbourhoods and public spaces across the country are being shaped by the presence of Latin American immigrants and US-born Latinxs who call the United States home. At the same time, those who reject this cultural change push back at airports, schools, parking lots, and voting booths. Around every corner, Latinxs who do not appear to fit into dominant cultural norms face barriers to developing a sense of home. Assimilationists push for policies and laws...
that are hostile to cultural outsiders, express attitudes of mistrust and disapproval through body language, tone, and refusals to help, and sometimes engage in directly hostile confrontations. They insist that immigrants and Latinxs speak English—and otherwise fit in better with white American culture—or go back to where they came from. In addition to preventing Latinxs from feeling at home, this atmosphere foments social tension and inhibits the development of genuine multicultural communities.

This paper seeks to illuminate some of the psychological aspects of the home-making practices of these two groups—assimilationists and Latinx outsiders. I use the term ‘outsiders’ to refer to people who do not fit into dominant cultural norms because of their race and ethnicity. Latin American immigrants and US Latinxs frequently fall into this group. People hold conflicting intuitions about the tension between assimilationists and outsiders. Some feel that the majority of people living in a country have a right to feel at home in that place and to determine membership through the admission of outsiders who will not disrupt their way of life. Meanwhile, those who are sympathetic to the plight of immigrants have the intuition that when assimilationists express the need to feel culturally at home in their country, this seems to be, at the very least, tinged with a morally distasteful xenophobia. Both groups have a deep desire to feel at home in their communities, so what explains this difference in intuitions? After all, it seems perfectly legitimate for everyone to want to feel at home in the country where they live.

In this paper, I argue that Latinxs and assimilationists are both seeking to mould their environments in order to feel at home in the US and in order to preserve and affirm their identities, but the nature of these two groups’ practices and attitudes towards home-making are at odds with one another in an important sense: namely, assimilationists are intolerant of ethnic difference that seems to encroach upon their existing way of life, and they thus seek to eradicate, rather than adjust to, that which is foreign. In contrast to the cultural purism of assimilationists, cultural outsiders tend to focus on creating and nurturing their own fragile pockets of belonging while immersed in a foreign space. While they may self-segregate, they tend to have complex, ambivalent, and adaptive ways of navigating social membership within dominant culture. The problem, then, is that each group’s home-making practices is in tension with the other group’s distinctive way of feeling at home.

In order to make this case, I begin Section Two by briefly discussing what is at stake in feeling at home. Then, I build a characterisation of the home-making practices of Latinx communities, as well as of US assimilationists. In Section Three, I highlight three domains in which these sets of home-making practices differ: they differ with respect to their approach to social norms; they demonstrate different attitudes towards the notion of cultural purity; and they reveal differences in the nature of social and political belonging. Finally, I consider two recent responses from Native American communities to anti-immigration policy. These perspectives caution us to avoid coming to any simplistic conclusions about either immigrants or US assimilationists’ entitlement to settle.

It is important that I make a number of qualifications before I proceed: first, not all people who hold the belief that civic, social, or even cultural assimilation is valuable share the xenophobic impulses I will describe here. People who hold assimilationist attitudes may also sometimes be forced to adapt to their environments and ‘make do’ in order to survive—practices that I describe as being more typical of cultural outsiders. With regard to assimilationism, then, I am referring more to a characteristic set of attitudes...
about home and a social orientation with respect to those who are deemed ‘outsiders’ than I am to a particular group of people. Second, I recognise, of course, that Latinxs are a very diverse group. Some are even, themselves, white US assimilationists. My analysis is meant to illustrate a pattern that characterises the experience of many Latinxs who do not conform to dominant cultural norms because of their race and ethnicity. I think that describing these patterns is useful for illuminating a social problem, even if there are people who do not fit the pattern.

Section Two

Having a home—or rather, having reliable access to a place in which one can regularly feel at home—is, for most people, a deep psychological need. Home consists in the sense of security, belonging, and familiarity that nurtures a person through countless material and practical affirmations of their identity. The idea of home usually refers to a place where one lives for long periods of time, a place where one carries out daily activities of survival and self-care. As important as the regularity and use of the space is, the expression ‘to feel at home’ connotes the sense that one is safe, can be themselves, and can engage in the activities of daily living—utilising the space and objects around them—without reservation. Home is a particular kind of comfort, then. It is the ability—on a consistent basis—to let down one’s guard and simply be who one is. It provides a kind of restful nurturance that is vital to our physical, psychological, and existential wellbeing.

As intuitive as these assertions about the nature and importance of home may seem, the questions of what constitutes home and what home affords are complex. Scholars have thus warned against overly simplistic representations of home. Mariana Ortega notes that the question of home is particularly complex for multiplicitous selves, or those who have ‘two or more cultural and/or racial views/understandings/values, etc., that the individual has to negotiate’ (2008: 71). She notes that ‘reflection on such a question paradoxically shatters any illusion of there being a definitive place of belonging’ (2016: 196). Ortega thus wrestles with the mythical and ‘unreal’ aspects of home, while taking seriously the desires for safety, comfort, and belonging that are associated with home.

Often, the culture into which a person is born and raised shapes their notion of home. Hence, it is no surprise that when we try to make a home, we arrange our personal space so that it reflects the atmosphere and traditions that we grew up with (or, perhaps, to cast off traditions that felt imposed and alienating). It is also a place that we sometimes share with family and those with whom we are intimate. The sense of deep familiarity and intimacy that comes with a home may be more associated with the people with whom the home is shared than with the space.

Beyond one’s private residence, one can also feel more or less at home in a community or nation. In this context, the broader culture, as well as public institutions and spaces provide the environment within which one is or is not at home. A community can afford greater or lesser degrees of one’s ability to feel a sense of security, belonging, and familiarity. It can also affirm or resist aspects of one’s identity. One can feel more or less welcome to simply be who they are.

For many Latin American immigrants who have left their homes to come to the United States, a significant aspect of their experience involves the push and pull of, on the one hand, being reminded that they are not at home in their place of residence and, on the
other hand, engaging in practices to make for themselves a home in this foreign place. At every turn, immigrants are channelled into modes of being and interacting that are unfamiliar. From the available items at stores to the ways in which strangers and neighbours interact, one finds constant pushback against one’s cultural know-how, a constant demand to be in ways that are not habitually engrained. Beyond this cultural and material channeling of one’s mode of being, immigrants also confront subtle and overt responses of disapproval when they fail to meet behavioural norms, or otherwise fail to fit in. This lack of familiarity, lack of belonging, and lack of affirmation is incompatible with the vital sense of being at home.

In the face of these constant reminders that one is not at home, immigrants often engage in home-making practices, or ways of interacting with or modifying their environments to create a sense of home. In many instances, practices of home-making are just matters of daily living. The meals a person prepares for themselves, or the way one treats an illness, tells a joke, or cleans their house, are reflections of one’s deeply engrained cultural knowledge. Other times, home-making moves from being simply habitual, cultural know-how into a more deliberate resistance to the social and cultural forces that would erode one’s sense of their own identity.

Examining the everyday ways in which immigrants create a sense of home, Ortega describes hometactics as a praxis that immigrants and cultural outsiders employ ‘in order to have a sense of familiarity, ease, or sense of belonging in a space or location, even though the space is a new or foreign one’ (2016: 205). Hometactics are ways of ‘making do’ when a robust sense of belonging is not a possibility. Ortega writes that they:

> might range from painting the walls of your apartment with bright colors, such as the ones that remind you of a childhood home or your country of origin; “reusing” your environment in various ways so as to make it more welcoming; [and] making and sharing foods you used to eat in your past by improvising with ingredients that are available. (2016: 206)

Hometactics are a practice of moulding oneself and one’s environment in order to create a feeling of home—however incomplete and imperfect—in a world in which one finds oneself alienated or out of place.

Importantly, hometactics also involve compromise on the part of an outsider who cannot replicate an old home in a new place. For example, Ortega explains that hometactics might include ‘rethinking, refeeling the meaning of family by developing new relationships with a neighbor, getting so close that he becomes family, too’ and also ‘switching languages in different contexts or integrating words from familiar languages to feel more at ease’ (2016: 207). In these examples, one creates a sense of home in a way that does not wholly reject, but creatively incorporates aspects of the particular place in which one finds oneself. While such behaviours might be ways in which one begins to adapt to a new environment, Ortega notes that hometactics ‘do not necessarily have to be used in such a way to become complicit with dominant norms (e.g. passing, acting white, etc.)’ (2016: 207). Instead, they are often used ‘in order to feel comfortable in strange or unwelcoming worlds, while at the same time being deeply aware of the oppressive nature of dominant norms in those worlds’ (2016: 207).

While Ortega recognises the way that personal day-to-day practices are often in some sense political, she asserts that hometactics are ‘not necessarily aligned to a specific political project’ (204). Ortega clarifies her stance on the relation between hometactics and more
calculated practices of political resistance by distinguishing hometactics from what María Lugones calls ‘tactical strategies’. Lugones’ notion of tactical strategies blurs Michel de Certeau’s (1984) distinction between strategies that aim to abolish a system of power, and tactics, which are ‘blow by blow’ negotiations of opportunities as they present themselves. For Lugones, liberatory projects are ‘based on concrete, embodied subjects at the street level’ who engage in ‘critical interventions against structures of domination’, but which do not need to be guided by a strategist or mastermind (2003: 203–4). Ortega’s account, in contrast, de-emphasises the political because it is focused on the subjective experience of the person practising hometactics. It is concerned with that which already happens in the everydayness of those who are only seeking ‘to alleviate the stress, pain and anxiety that arises from a life of in-betweenness’ (2016: 207).

I find that when these practices of survival are considered in the broader social context, however, they cannot be disentangled from their political significance. Hometactics can become politically resistant when the society in which one lives would rather one not survive—would prefer that one either comply with dominant norms or leave—and one persists in a non-assimilated way nonetheless. The person utilising hometactics may not be intentionally aiming to subvert dominant norms, but their hometactics may still have that effect. Consider for example, the act of speaking Spanish in school in the US. Certainly, the Spanish-speaker may not be doing so for political reasons. If this act is viewed in broader historical context, however, its political significance becomes more apparent. Following the US’s incorporation of the Southwest states in 1848, many schools implemented ‘English only’ policies (Saldaña 2013: 59). As part of a program for assimilation, Mexican and Mexican-American students often underwent harsh, humiliating, and traumatic corporal punishments for speaking Spanish. These policies officially lasted until the 1930s, though some people in the education system recall them being enforced long after that (Saldaña 2013: 59). These Americanisation projects resulted in linguistic loss across generations, the destruction of cultural difference, and they reproduced an ideology of white supremacy and Mexican inferiority (2013: 60). Because of this historical context, the act of speaking Spanish in a US school—even now—can be read as resistance to white supremacy, regardless of whether the speaker intends for it to.

Furthermore, assimilationists may be unable to distinguish between Latinxs’ hometactics as a mode of survival and the expression of identity as an intentional form of resistance. In making a home for themselves in the US, immigrants and outsiders change the cultural and material landscape. This change constitutes a challenge to dominant norms, and the social uptake does not always correlate with the intentions of the person practising hometactics.

The character of hometactics can be well-illustrated by the Chicano notion of rasquachismo. Chicano scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto describes rasquachismo as a bicultural sensibility among Mexican Americans, an expression of an underdog perspective of survival – of one who is down, but not out. It is the result of a resourcefulness, the ‘compendium of all the movidas deployed in immediate, day-to-day living’ (1989: 5). It can manifest as a form of aesthetic expression by those who inventively utilise the crummy, broken, or discarded objects that are available to them to create elaborate and flamboyant ornamentation, a way of blinging up one’s bicycle, car, or the carrito out of which one sells goods on the street. Rasquache expression offends wealthier and whiter aesthetic sensibilities as being vulgar and in bad taste. In rejecting those norms, however, it also conveys a
potentially political message by insisting on the beauty or value of what – or perhaps who – would otherwise be considered too crappy to keep.

I find that as a sensibility, rasquachismo illustrates the attitude underlying the home-making practices of many immigrants because it values communion and confluence over purity and simplicity. Old things are recycled into a new context and given new meaning—coffee cans into flower pots, bathtubs into shrines—and what results stands as a visual testament to one’s biculturalism. Furthermore, as Ybarra-Frausto explains, ‘things that are rasquache possess an ephemeral quality, a sense of temporality and impermanence—here today and gone tomorrow’ (1989: 6). But even while things are mended on the spot with whatever is on hand, time and attention are nonetheless given to create something beautiful. In the lives of members of undocumented immigrant communities, we also find the admirable resilience of those who do their best in spite of the precariousness of their present existence.

In contrast to the amalgamated ‘making-do’ of struggling cultural outsiders, I describe those who insist upon absolute compliance with dominant cultural norms as ‘assimilationists’. This category includes white nationalists and overt anti-Latinx racists, but also folks who do not think of themselves as racist or xenophobic, but who feel and/or express the view that immigrants and other cultural outsiders ought to assimilate. They long for neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, and towns that feel like home—that reflect their racial and cultural identities back to them and do not challenge their ability to unguardedly be. Assimilationists may not be wholly anti-immigrant, but they might claim that immigrants should speak English when in public, should not disrupt the aesthetic of a neighbourhood, should not participate in the informal economy, or should not engage in what are considered odd living arrangements. Rather than being simply anti-immigrant, assimilationists might have attitudes about good and bad immigrants, where the categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ tend to track whether an immigrant is integrating into dominant US culture versus subverting or transforming it.

The xenophobia of assimilationism is a complex matter, but I propose that it is at least partially rooted in a desire to feel at home in one’s community. It can arise for assimilationists when they sense that their home is threatened by the presence of cultural outsiders. As Ortega notes, concerns about assimilation have been brought to the fore following the 11 September, 2001 attacks. She explains that

the concern about the well-being and safety of the country is translated into a concern about “unity” in the body-politic in a time of crisis. This unity, it is said, is one in which citizens (as well as long-term visitors) stand united against “evil” forces coming from outside or already here in the form of immigrants and minorities. (2008: 66)

In other words, growing concerns about assimilation have been a reaction to a sense of vulnerability.

I want to suggest, in addition, that we can better understand the US assimilationist’s attitudes and practices regarding home-making by thinking about them as part of a legacy of northern European settler colonialism that, through various means, sought to eradicate those who were deemed outsiders. Characterising current US assimilationism in terms of the history of US nation-state building is justified because it represents dominant attitudes over long periods of time. This method also avoids the risk of relying for its characterisation on the words or deeds of ideologically anomalous or extremist groups.
The history of US nation-building is one of creating a home for northern European settlers and their descendants. It involves centuries of instituting policies, practices, and norms that preserve white ethno-racial purity and supremacy. As a result, non-whites have long been either excluded from political membership, or granted social membership only on the condition that they comply with dominant cultural norms.

To begin, the commitments to ethnic and racial purity that characterise US nativism are not ubiquitous among all colonising groups. Spanish colonialism, for instance, officially promoted miscegenation as a practice of conquest. The Spanish crown awarded larger land grants and encomiendas to those soldiers and officers who married indigenous women. Historian María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo notes that intermarriage and childbearing were also utilised ‘as a form of governmentality—of distributing rights, privileges, and obligations’ and ‘as a form of physically transforming the landscape, from one of indigenous territorial control to one of Spanish dominion’ (2016: 116). Centuries later, when Mexico gained independence from Spain, the Mexican government would come to embrace mestizaje as the pillar of national identity.

Meanwhile, in the US, the view of assimilation that developed came to be represented by the metaphor of the ‘melting pot’—a cohesive national identity that was made up of various elements. However, as Linda Martín Alcoff argues, the ability to assimilate into this melting pot ‘has notoriously been restricted to European ethnicities, and it has worked to assimilate them all to a northern European WASP norm’ (2016: 165). Over time, the melting pot discourse was used to describe the US ethno-racial composition, but it was not intended to promote the blending of the nation’s peoples into a complex, multiethnic, heterogenous whole. Rather, it ‘was used to bolster northern European-Americans’ claims to cultural superiority’ (2016: 166). That is, those who could successfully assimilate into the WASP norm were supposedly fluid and flexible, and this fluidity was contrasted with and presented as a higher cultural achievement than the (supposed) fixity and rigidity of colonised cultures that were unable or unwilling to comply with the dominant cultural norm (2016: 166).

Finally, in conjunction with the melting pot ideology, the US government has, since its inception, implemented laws and engaged in practices that expelled and excluded non-whites from social and political membership. In the case of Native Americans, this exclusion took the form of ‘the massive dispossession of indigenous lands by nineteenth and twentieth century policies of removal, reservation, and allotment, in the interest of white European immigrant settlement’ (Saldaña-Portillo 2016: 54). Anglo colonists did not see Native Americans as peoples to be incorporated into the expanding nation. Instead, the US government passed laws, like the six statutes that make up the Nonintercourse Act, setting the boundaries of Indian Reservations, and the 1830 Indian Removal Act, creating ‘Indian territory’ west of the Mississippi River.

For many immigrants, citizenship was denied to them on the basis of their non-whiteness. (Mendoza 2016: 212–13). José Jorge Mendoza compellingly makes the case that even after the whiteness clause was removed from the US’s immigration policy in 1952, anti-immigration strategies nonetheless produce groups of what he calls ‘perpetual foreigners’ on the basis of race. ‘Attrition through enforcement’ is the strategy of expanding immigration policing into a variety of everyday community channels. Employers, local law enforcement, landlords, doctors, school administrators, and others are now often charged with the task of verifying others’ immigration status. Mendoza notes that this strategy is
intended to make the US inhospitable to immigrants so that they voluntarily leave, but it also has the effect of impacting ‘those who happen to be affiliated with groups that make up a disproportionate percentage of the undocumented immigrant population’ (2016: 218). In other words, those who look and behave like Mexicans always appear potentially illegal.

This legacy of home-making through settler colonialism and via the eradication of that which is non-white remains a feature of contemporary US social and political life. A recent example is the decades-long legal battle over the Tucson Unified School District’s Mexican American Studies Program (MAS), which reached a final adjudication in the US District Court in August of 2017. The idea behind the creation of MAS was to ‘engage Mexican-American students by helping them to see “themselves or their family or their community” in their studies,’ and the purpose of the program was to close the historic achievement gap between Mexican-American and white students (González v Douglas 2017: 2). The notion of being able to see oneself reflected in their education is a practice of home-making on the part of MAS developers—a way of showing students a United States that reflects their Mexican American identity.

In his ruling on the case, US District Court Judge A. Wallace Tashima explains how, capitalising on growing fears about the Mexicanisation of Arizona, politicians sought to shut down MAS, in spite of its proven success in improving retention and graduation rates among Latinx students. Politicians used code words like ‘Aztlán’, ‘Reconquista’, ‘La Raza’, ‘MEChA’, ‘illegal immigrants’, and ‘un-American’ to refer to MAS. The use of these code words was done in conjunction with mischaracterisations of MAS educators and students in order to incite anger in citizens of the state who already felt anxiety about the state’s shifting demographic (González v Douglas 2017: 31–32). Ultimately, the US district court found that legislation aimed at eliminating MAS ‘was enacted and enforced with a discriminatory purpose’ (2017: 38) and that the ‘passage and enforcement of the law against MAS were motivated by anti-Mexican American attitudes’ (2017: 39). I put forth this case as an example of assimilationists’ resistance to the home-making practices of Latinx communities. It is no surprise that assimilationists would target MAS, given the important role of public education in shaping children’s understanding of their country, its history, and their place within it. MAS builds a resistant narrative by centring Latinx perspectives and challenging the national self-understanding that has allowed the dominant demographic to feel, comfortably, at home. It creates a foundation for the reconstruction of a narrative of history and cultural belonging. That is, it contests assimilation as the only option for belonging. Rather than requiring students to change in order to be included, it transforms the conception of the place in which students find themselves so that they recognise that they already do belong.6

Section Three

I have proposed that what distinguishes assimilationists’ home-making from that of Latin American immigrants and other marginalised Latinxs is that while assimilationists are intolerant of the corrupting influence of cultural difference, social outsiders’ home-making practices are centred on navigating an ambivalent belonging, participating in new modes of being by making do with what is available, and in the process, transforming their environments. We can observe this difference in three domains. The first domain is
the way in which home-making practices relate to social norms. Assimilationists embrace dominant, or long-standing, social norms and find their sense of home threatened when those norms are transgressed. For that reason, they insist that immigrants and members of cultural minority groups adopt and comply with these norms. Meanwhile, although home-tactics are a way of making do within a new environment rather than rejecting it, these practices do not require accepting nor fully rejecting dominant social norms. One might learn the norms so as to better navigate them, survive them, and adopt, integrate, and modify some of them, but this does not mean that one wholly embraces them or is unaware that they may be oppressive. The second difference between the two groups’ home-making practices concerns attitudes regarding cultural purity. US assimilationists have long sought ethno-racial purity, a home for them alone. This purity requirement implies that all foreign elements either conform or be pushed out. Marginalised Latinx communities, on the other hand, are constantly incorporating different aspects of the various worlds they inhabit. Food, language, customs, relationships, and ways of identifying are blended. In that vein, they must often compromise rather than insist on things being a certain way. The third domain concerns the nature of social and political belonging. Assimilationists exclude from membership those who have not assimilated, cutting off access to the social and political goods that allow a person to thrive. Cultural outsiders manage belonging in more complex ways. Where a robust sense of belonging is not possible, they find ways to subsist, to build connections, to meet needs, and to occupy liminal spaces.

In Section One, I described some of the key features of home: home affords us a sense of security, belonging, and familiarity; it affirms our identities and reflects them back to us; and it allows us to let down our guard—our concern with how we are being seen and judged by others—so that we can simply be. With the immigrant or cultural outsider, a robust sense of belonging and familiarity within the broader community is often not possible. Hometactics are therefore a way of bringing about some sense of being settled in an otherwise precarious and foreign space. Meanwhile, the assimilationist is unsettled by the presence of the unfamiliar, even when they do have an otherwise strong sense of belonging. With regard to security, someone who appears as an outsider is inevitably less safe when entering a place that is hostile to foreigners. Yet, it is the assimilationist who perceives the outsider as potentially threatening, criminal, and morally corrupt. For the cultural outsider, home-making practices shape the material world in order to create some reflection of one’s identity where one is out of place. For the assimilationist, such changes to the environment appear as a threat that foreigners are taking away their home. Although the dominant culture remains dominant, its lack of ubiquity is a threat to the assimilationist.

One of the purposes of this comparative analysis has been to challenge the taken-for-granted centring of the perspectives, needs, and concerns of US citizens who are alarmed by immigration by shifting the focus to all people’s shared need for home. The lesson, however, is not that all outsiders’ practices of home-making should simply be accommodated because they are based on a universal need. Reflecting on the perspectives of several Indigenous scholars and the experiences of certain Native American tribes challenges us to avoid overly simplistic framings of the antagonistic relationship between assimilationists and outsiders. To consider the impacts of the practices of home-making in the US without considering at least some of the perspectives original inhabitants of the land would be to
commit a serious oversight. After all, are immigrants not also, in a sense, ‘settlers’ in lands that were stolen from Native American tribes? I argued that the US nation was built on the elimination of Indigenous peoples from the land, but we might also wonder whether immigrants’ practices of home-making implicate them in or disrupt settler colonialism?

The answers to these questions seem to be site-specific and complex, and they are not without debate among Indigenous scholars. However, recent anti-immigrant policies have led some Indigenous nations and activists to speak out. For instance, the US-Mexico border has literally divided Tohamo O’odham people. The border has been a disruption to numerous vital cultural practices, such as visiting family members and sacred sites. As a result, the Tohamo O’odham Nation has expressed public opposition to the construction of a border wall. At the same time, some of the Tohamo O’odham people living in villages near the border have suffered from break-ins, theft, and the accumulation of trash that results from being located in a transit zone for undocumented border crossings (Filzen 2013). The Tohamo O’odham Nation nonetheless reiterates its claim to be able to manage these lands without the construction of a border wall.

Similarly, when the 2017 Travel Ban went into effect, Indigenous activists were at the forefront of airport protests. Dine’ activist Melanie Yazzie shifted the message of the airport protests with the creation of the slogan ‘no ban on stolen land’, which later became a widely used social media hashtag. Nick Estes, who is from the Lower Brulé Indian Reservation in South Dakota, describes the activists’ motivations for participating in the demonstrations:

> It’s not that we have to say we’re pro-immigrant for people to come and steal our lands. It means that if people are gonna come here and coexist peacefully, it has to be on the terms of the people whose land it is to begin with. (Monkman 2017)

Estes also stated that, ‘We took in some refugee and Muslim families and recognised their humanity in distinction to the United States which claims exclusive ownership over who and what counts as human’ (Monkman 2017). Interestingly, the activism of Indigenous people against the Travel Ban brings together at once the claim to Indigenous sovereignty—including a right to administer lands that were stolen from them—and the rejection of the US government’s ban, which affects primarily Muslim immigrants. The reason these two commitments are not contradictory is that the discriminatory exclusion of Muslims is part of the same settler colonial legacy that undergirded the massive removal of lands from Native American tribes. These Indigenous perspectives add a challenging, but important layer to our assessment of outsiders and assimilationists’ conflicting claims to feel at home. They suggest that the central concern is not simply keeping outsiders out, but the liberation from the ongoing legacy of colonialism and the preservation of Indigenous life and land.

What conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing analysis? My analysis points to a shared need to feel at home among Latinx outsiders and assimilationists, while also describing the ways in which each group’s home-making practices gives rise to a tension that poses a challenge for co-habitation. While drawing out the ethical or political implications of this analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, I have mapped a terrain that may contribute to normative evaluation in the future.
shared need of many people to feel at home. Bringing this shared need to the fore creates a space in which cultural outsiders’ moral claim to make a home can, at the very least, resonate. If we recognise that the basic human need for home extends to outsiders, then we may be able to hear outsiders’ claims to settle in a new place in a way that preserves aspects of their cultural identity.

In this way, my approach taps into different intuitions than some of those that have informed traditional political philosophical approaches to immigration. Several well-known political philosophers, like Michael Walzer and David Miller, often assume the standpoint and of the dominant cultural group (as well as the legitimacy of that group’s position of dominance), and they do this even as they present their theories as neutral and detached. In a chapter titled ‘Membership’ (1984), Walzer argues that the dominant cultural group within a nation has the right to determine the nation’s makeup and character through immigration policy. He pays little attention to cultural minorities or the peoples who have been displaced in order to make room for the dominance of a particular group. Also assuming the standpoint of the dominant cultural group, Miller (2016) raises concerns about the ways in which immigration and ethnic diversity diminish social trust. But rather than critically examining or normatively evaluating this distrust, he takes it to be a simple fact of the matter to be accommodated. Miller is not interested in whether the distrust is the problem; rather, he sees the distrust as pointing to a problem with society that must be solved through political means (2016: 17–18). Inadvertently, then, he affirms the legitimacy of this attitude. Taking for granted the standpoint of the dominant group limits the ways in which social and political problems are framed and skews the sorts of normative conclusions that can be drawn. By countering the intuition that only current US citizens are entitled to experience a sense of belonging in the United States, my account may challenge the claim to the right of US citizens to exclude outsiders from membership on the condition of their failure to assimilate.

Second, this paper gives us a basis to challenge assimilationists’ expectations that Latinxs should culturally assimilate by revealing the nature, origins, and effects of these expectations. It becomes evident why we might have the intuition that Latinx outsiders’ home-making is a sign of admirable resilience, while assimilationists’ efforts to realise their vision of home may seem morally objectionable. The assimilationist’s intolerance of difference, the inability to feel at home outside of a space in which their identity is affirmed totally, may strike us as pathologically fragile. Furthermore, we can see that insisting that Latinxs fully assimilate would be, in effect, to deny the outsider’s ability to feel at home, which requires the creation of a space that reflects one’s cultural identity back to them. Thus, the need for a total sense of familiarity is incompatible with a multicultural society in which all members are treated as moral equals, as equally entitled to the basic goods required for a good life, including the ability to feel at home.

Notes

1. Not all people experience or establish a sense of home in the same way, but I argue that we can still conceive of the sense of having a home as a deep and widely shared need. People with nomadic lifestyles, for instance, do not depend on remaining in a fixed physical location. It is worth noting, however, that many nomadic tribes nevertheless have very significant relationships with particular lands or territories, even if they do not settle in a single place within
those territories or hold property in legally recognised ways (Gilbert 2007). Psychologists have found that place tends to be an object of strong attachments (Lewicka 2011). They have also suggested that it may be useful to think of place as consisting in social and not merely spatial or physical dimensions (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001). These considerations suggest the need to adopt a flexible notion of home, while still acknowledging its relation to important psychological needs.

2. For an in-depth treatment of the question of home and being-at-home, especially in relation to racialised bodies, See Chapter Three of Helen Ngo’s (2017) *The Habits of Racism*. With regard to the necessity of the home, Ngo writes, ‘We need the home because it allows us to function, to go about our daily projects unimpeded by an objectifying—and ultimately inhibiting—gaze, and indeed because habits themselves, insofar as they are understood as a bodily habituation or orientation, supply the ground or launching pad for action and creativity’ (120). For other, critical, stances on the notion of home, see Maria Lugones (2003). Lugones identifies home for some not as a place of comfort and ease, but rather a place that contains violence that is on a continuum with the violence on the street and elsewhere. Also, Celia T Bardwell-Jones (2017) worries that for many displaced people the ‘recovery of home may be seen as a lost cause that leads to a romanticising nostalgia that inevitably essentialises one’s cultural homelands’ (152), though she ultimately argues for a notion of home-making as a positive process within a transnational context.

3. For the purposes of this paper, I am not able to take up these particular complexities in detail. However, it would be worthwhile in future work to consider relevant question of how our guiding conceptions of home shape the ways in which we dwell within our environments and how we treat those with whom we co-habitate.

4. There may be cases in which the claim that an immigrant ought to learn English is motivated by something other than xenophobia. For instance, if one sees that the child of an immigrant is being overburdened as a translator or that an immigrant has a particular goal that requires interaction with a broad public, the claim that the immigrant should learn English may not be a form of assimilationism. This benevolence can easily slip into assimilationism, however, if it is supported by the overall attitude that what is best for the immigrant is, generally, to comply with dominant norms.

5. The point of making this comparison between Spanish and US colonialism is not to suggest that one approach to conquest was preferable, or less devastating to those people who were affected by these practices and who continue to be impacted by the legacy of colonialism. Rather, this comparison demonstrates that colonisation has been carried out through various means, and my aim is to highlight the distinctive commitment to cultural purity that characterised US colonialism.

6. I thank Emma Velez for her help in fleshing out this insight.

7. This point should not be conflated with the mistaken view that anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, or cultural nativism do not exist in Latin America.

8. Whereas I have argued that a feature of assimilationism is the eradication of the foreign, Ngo (2017) argues that white being-at-home (or being-at-ease) is, rather, predicated on racialised not-being-at-home and creates the conditions for racialised uncanniness. In her words, ‘Whiteness gets installed as the normative centre by virtue of this pushing out of racialised bodies to the margins; the canniness of white bodies is predicated on the uncanniness of racialised ones’ (125). In other words, whereas I have argued that assimilationists desire or prefer cultural homogeneity, Ngo contends that what is peculiar about white homeliness seems that it is based on, not merely the need to feel at home, but the need for others to be not-at-home.

9. See, for example, the work of Lawrence and Dua (2005) and of Sharma and Wright (2009), which debates the question of whether differently positioned people of colour are settlers. Also see the notion of ‘arrivants’ in the work of Jodi Byrd (2011), which describes those who are implicated in settler colonialism without being the same as white settlers.

10. See the Nation’s video: <http://www.tonation-nsn.gov/nowall/>.
11. For a discussion of the ethics of assimilation that focuses on evaluating the actions of the one who assimilates in light of the possible harms of assimilation, see Ortega (2008). Responding to Callan (2005), Ortega argues that given the relational, contradictory, ambiguous nature of subjectivity, it may be very difficult, if not impossible, to make blanket determinations about whether one ought to assimilate or, for that matter, how much agency a person actually has to determine the extent to which they assimilate. One normative implication of this view, I take it, is that imposing blanket expectations of assimilation may be unfair (if not harmful for the reason that I have described).

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