

The unhomely: conversations around uncanny places



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Home is often experienced by people, and researched by scholars, through its opposite, namely, the loss, lack, or denial of dwelling and living conditions that may live up to the normative standard of home, or to the Western moral and emotional repertoires associated with it. Moreover, it is not infrequent that the same place and housing conditions elicit ambivalent reactions – feelings of home, and non-home – in different timespaces and different people.

Over the past decades, the notion of 'unhomely', loosely drawn from the Freudian *unheimlich*, has been used across social sciences and humanities to capture the potential 'dark side' of places, settings and relations people would normally call 'home'. This may be equally salient in the here-and-now – for the coexistence of 'positive' and 'negative' reactions toward the same place – or, from a temporal perspective, out of a sense of estrangement and alienation from whatever – places, people, objects, countries – used to count as 'home'.

While a number of case studies and individual reflections have been carried out along these lines, still lacking is a systematic and critical conversation across the various threads of research. A number of intriguing questions open up here:

- How to capture the manifestations and the feelings of the unhomely, and how to describe its 'territories'?
- Which institutional, environmental and personal circumstances are more likely associated with the unhomely, across different social and cultural backgrounds?

- How far has this to do with marginalization, oppression and inequality – such as for people forcibly on the move, or so-called ‘homeless’ – as opposed to endogenous developments in the household and family life?
- What is the contribution different theoretical and methodological approaches – either established or emerging – can give to understand the unhomely, situate it in broader social and political constellations, and represent it to both a scholarly and lay audience?

A few preliminary references

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