

Re/claiming the past—constructing Ojibwe identity in Minnesota homes

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Interviews with 13 Minnesota Ojibwe families in their homes shed light on how domestic spaces can support or suppress efforts to restore social, cultural, spiritual, and temporal continuity. Having lost their past to forced relocation, assimilation, and discriminatory policies, Ojibwe are employing visual and performative cultural expressions like the display of Native objects, craft making, spirituality, traditional foods and eating patterns, and strong family and community connections to re/claim what was lost and to construct their Ojibwe identity. With an understanding of how homes mediate continuity with the past, designers can create culturally sensitive housing solutions that support well-being.

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Both history and the present are rife with examples of cultural groups whose pasts have been lost. Studies of displacement and forced assimilation have long pointed to how detrimental these can be to cultural identity and in turn to mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Bammer, 1994; Adler, 1995; Papadopoulos et al., 2004)—in fact, the effects of losing one's cultural connections and sense of continuity, which describes a relationship to an environment over time and ideas about permanence, stability, and familiarity (Hayward, 1977), can carry forward through generations (Hadjiyanni, 2002). As a result, many studies have called for policies and programs that assist displaced people in re/claiming lost pasts and in re/invigorating cultural identity definitions (Shryock and Abraham, 2000).

Limited work though has been done to better understand the role of domestic spaces in re/claiming the past. Given the diverse American cultural landscape and the steady numbers in refugee and other displaced groups, understanding how minorities use the spaces they live in to create temporal continuity, one that nourishes connections between the past, present, and future, has both theoretical and practical implications for the design fields. Answers to questions such as: 'How do homes mediate the reconstruction of the past?', 'Which

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activities do they support and which do they suppress in the process?', and 'What are the implications of the dynamic among design, culture, and identity under conditions of displacement for how notions like home, gender, and community are constructed?' can inform conceptual and programmatic decisions surrounding housing design. Designers who are cognizant of how the built environment relates to culture and identity can create spaces that ease people's lives, meet diverse needs, and support varying ways of living, i.e. culturally sensitive housing (Hadjiyanni, 2005; Hadjiyanni and Robinson, 2005; Hadjiyanni, 2007). This paper's purpose is to explore the above questions and start a dialogue around culturally sensitive housing.

Much of the theoretical framework behind culturally sensitive housing stems from anthropological discourses which position domestic spaces as cultural mediums both impacting and being impacted by culture and identity (Duncan, 1981; Low and Chambers, 1989; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). In parallel, these discourses conceive of cultural identities as dynamic and fluid entities that are constituted by both *similarity* and *difference* and are affected by the 'ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (Hall, 2000, p. 23). With the past being a 'foreign country' (Lowenthal, 1985), memory (Hadjiyanni, 2002), language (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), objects (Forty, 1999), as well as performative ceremonies and ritual acts that involve bodily practices (Connerton, 1989) are all means by which societies remember and teach about the past.

Many of these purposive acts of 'engendering social memory' take place in the home and therefore, under conditions of displacement and forced assimilation, homes accumulate additional dimensions of meaning, becoming sites of resistance from dominant mainstream values and ideals (Hooks, 1990; Shami, 2000). In the shelter of the home, behaviors like gathering with friends and family to share stories of the past, cooking traditional foods, dressing in a traditional manner, practicing one's religion, and decorating according to a preferred aesthetic all help to fortify the aspect of *difference* as it relates to identity (Hadjiyanni and Robinson, 2005; Hadjiyanni, 2007).

Such a conception of home adheres to the selective and appropriative nature of cultural change (Pilkington et al., 2002). According to this body of work, members of cultural groups actively choose *which* elements of their culture to change and *how* to change them. Choices though are often *bounded* (Hadjiyanni, 2007), partly due to the spatial constraints families encounter—instead of having the choice to appropriate or adapt their living environments to support their way of life, families often must choose between changing their behaviors to adapt to their spatial boundaries or doing nothing. Either scenario can be stressful, as the inability to practice cultural traditions can impact cultural *logic*, the glue that holds different cultural elements together (Fischer, 1999), leading to the loss of a culture and/or its related elements. Ellen Pader took this argument

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