Interview with Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (USC University of Southern California)
Conducted by Alejandro Miranda, Aurora Massa and Sara Bonfanti on 24 May 2017

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Southern California. Her research examines how Latino immigrants negotiate challenges with informal sector work, varied legal status, and changing gender, family and community relations. In her recent project, "Latinas/os in South Los Angeles (LiSLA)", she studies the social processes of Latina/o integration in historically African American neighborhoods of Los Angeles, looking at public parks and urban community gardens, considering the extent to which these sites create a sense of place, belonging and civic culture. More information here

HOMInG Team: What does home mean to you in light of your work and disciplinary approach?

Hondagneu-Sotelo: Well, looking at the experts you've been inviting here, home emerges as a feminine space largely investigated by a generation of now older women.

As for me, I was shaped by socialist feminist perspectives in the 1970s and 80s, when I was in college and graduate school. It was an effervescent time, when the so-called second wave of Feminist Studies aimed to bust this 'home-sweet-home' myth. New studies in anthropology, history, sociology and psychoanalysis wanted to reveal how households and homes are often ruled by patriarchy, inequalities, sometimes even by violence. In my dissertation book, Gendered Transitions, which tells the story of Mexican immigrant settlement in the US, I highlighted conflict within family and households, showing how migration projects do not arise from cohesive and harmonic households, and also highlighting the fluidity of gender. I also showed the power of women in creating home, through daily practices that connect kin ties with other social relationships, as well as through anchoring with labour and social services.

Since then, most of my work has not been on home expressly, but my research has focused on work and social justice movements, looking at how *Latino* immigrant laborers are exploited and how they seek meaning while working in other people's homes. In particular, I considered *Latinas*' paid domestic work in Los Angeles, women hired as cleaners or nannies to perform a labour within the home of others.
People often disregard care work, which is a type of work done within the home by a woman, It does't appear to be real work, since real jobs are said to be located elsewhere, in a factory or an office. This came across so many times in my interviews: people saying that this is my hobby. The work of care and cleaning is often reread as a labour of love.

I also studied *jardineria*, labour maintenance gardening, which may be seen as the male parallel of domestic work, in a city such as LA where many private homes have lawns and elaborate gardens to tend. It's a job performed primarily by Mexican immigrant men. My current project with collaborators on the Latinos in South Los Angeles is prompting me to think about home in new ways.

Fundamentally, I appreciate the definition of home as a place of security, routine and familiarity, but I also think of home as a site of social reproduction, a place to express love and labour.
A lot of feminist scholars have focused on unpaid labour, on women caring for others, but this labour of love needs not necessarily be experienced as oppressive despite its critical literature. We should be open to the idea that this work can be a site of fulfillment and transcendence. I'm kind of attached to this old Marxist idea of labour, before conception and execution were divided, as a site of self-realization, and it's possible that this happens more in homes than in workplaces today.

Last, home also has an existential angle. Suffering is part of the human condition, and home, can be a site of restoration and respite from that suffering, as much as a site of contrast, a repository filled with 'un saco de preocupaciones', with its own concerns. Home is a unique endless site that way.

H: What are the most relevant empirical and methodological challenges that you identify in researching home and migration?

H-S: There are so many. To begin with, in my own approach to sociology in general, not only about home, I always strive to keep the micro and macro in constant conversation, as a recursive relationship.

For instance, in understanding migrant homes, we don't necessarily have to break things down in stages and categories, although the experiences of home-making that occur with migrants and refugees, from newly arrived to long-term stayers, are different from those of people who have conditions of greater security and stability. It's a matter of legal status as much as of temporality, among other variables.

Since home is a personal private space, methodological challenges would include respecting privacy and dignity while getting as close as possible to diverse intimate subjectivities. There are pluses and minuses in focusing on smaller numbers of people, closer and deeper.
We should ask ourselves: to what extent does our research practice disrupt things, to what extent is that considered an invasion to privacy? In ethical terms, what do we, as researchers, offer to the homes of those we are studying, or are we only grabbing information for us? We need to think carefully about ethics and power relations in researching home and migration.

I also love some of the new approaches to understanding the materiality of home. I think it is a great opportunity that is still to be mined. As for myself, I am drawn to how plant nature is used in migrant homemaking.

The last thing I would say about empirical and methodological challenges, is that I think it's important to stay open to surprises and counter narratives. Right now, we have so many papers focusing on the role of social media and different technologies in creating transnational homes and so on. But when we read about the use of social media and cellphones, in the popular press there is a new concern that these lead to extreme loneliness, that these are technologies of separation and social isolation more than of connectivity. Is it possible that such dynamics would not happen in migrant homes? It's just one example of counter narratives that might appear.
H: Our project is framed around processes of home-making in relation to contemporary

migrant trajectories. What do you think this approach can add to the field of migration and social integration?

H-S: I'm really enthusiastic about this project.
For a long time, perhaps 20 years, assimilation and transnationalism have been the only two viable theoretical paradigms out there. I think that the emergent home-making paradigm in migration research gets us closer to immigrants subjectivities, desires, agency, to the micro that we need to understand. And it also helps us understand the issue of societal transformation, the current era of migration which is very different from the one that Europe or the US experienced in mid-20th century. Many ideas are still located there and are quite stale by now. The home-making paradigm is a leap forward.

H: We are approaching homing as a special kind of relationship with place that involves domestic environments as well as larger entities such as neighbourhoods and cities. What kind of relationships do you identify between these spaces of attachment?

H-S: This question takes me to Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, to rights to the city, to the nation, to specific locales. It allows us to push the definition of home beyond the domestic dwelling.

My current research on gardens and public parks in LA is focused on the notion of hybridic places, where public and private blend and many people feel the sense of "home away from home". Interestingly, my immigrant interviewees are not talking of home away in El Salvador or some other nations, but of home outside their present domestic dwelling, which can be a container of responsibilities, anxieties, crises, domestic conflict. Parks and gardens instead takes us back to belonging at a larger scale. Cities, the neighbourhoods, and green spaces within them can be places where people enjoy a routine, where they feel safe and free and feel that they belong.

It's also important to grasp how migrants' homemaking changes the materiality of streets, parks and public space. In LA this might be the case of Latino urbanisation, which we see everyday in the iconography of shops or street food vending (now being decriminalized), with food trucks becoming popular, or even in private gardens where people grow corn, a symbol of rancho homeland, in addition to roses and lawns. Richard Alba and Victor Nee in their book on assimilation talked about immigrant 'influence' in this regard: how the society of destination changes due to migrants' arrival (as a reverse side of assimilation). I think it's possible to see immigrant home-making transforming the landscape of cities and neighborhoods too.

H: Considering your work about the role of extended domestic spheres (such as public parks and community gardens) in the production of home-like spaces, what are some key methodological and theoretical caveats that should be considered while investigating the

search for home?

H-S: Fundamentally, you need to be open to the broader social landscape and contexts of reception where home-making projects occur.

To take an example from the US, for newly arrived refugees or labourers, Somali refugees or migrants from Mexico, making a home in a city like LA or Chicago, is going to rest on sedimented decades of social movement organising, urban infrastructures, and relatively shared multicultural cognitive frames that conditions a different kind of politics, wage structure and commonplace interaction. Now, if these migrants go to a border town of Arizona, with an active KKK, police and border immigration authorities, where there is no legal representation and little social security, their homemaking project is very different.

Portes and Rumbaut gave us a definition of immigrant contexts of reception produced by politics, economy and community and that's a good sketch to keep in mind.
More recently, scholars suggest that we scale down to the region and the city. I was very influenced by this concept of 'cultural armature' that Jaworsky and other colleagues suggested, according to which different cities have different cultural apparatuses to create a different foundation for hosting or preventing immigrant homemaking.

So, that involves considering both the historical and local context for understanding migrant homemaking, understanding what is there in a particular place before migrants even arrive.

H: What kind of strategies would you suggest for studying intersectional dimensions of home-making practices?

H-S: One of the fundamental factors to keep in mind is fluidity. We need to stay away from static definitions of the social. Be open to change, to study homemaking practices in a locale, with a particular group over time, observing how positionalities change over time.

Secondly, when we think about intersectionality, gender, class, sexuality, race, but generation and age sometimes get tacked on, so studying intersectionality within homemaking practices is an excellent opportunity to study those marginal voices that are not normally considered. We might focus on the elderly and children, and how they participate in the migrant homemaking project.
A former student of mine, Lata Murti, did this study of South Asian grannies, in the US, who are mostly affluent and well connected in their diaspora. The study focuses on how these nannies circulate across the globe, staying perhaps with a son in London, and then another one in Kansas; sometimes they are being cared for, but often they are required to take care of their grandchildren, playing unexpected roles in immigrant homemaking while they themselves remain diasporic.
A current PhD student, Stephanie Canizales, is examining the case of unaccompanied migrant minors in LA, analyzing how they establish themselves and find a sense of belonging while totally bereft of parental support. Studies such as this one highlight the agentic practices and social struggles of migrant youth.

Another issue is looking at youth as agents of their parents' migration projects. There is interesting work done by Marjorie Orellana, which investigates how children assume the role of translators assisting their parents' in homing elsewhere. Immigrant children learn languages fast, and become mediators for their parents' migration process. There is also work by former USC students, Hye-Young Kwonand and Emir Estrada, studying Korean and Mexican children that make possible the process of their parents' homemaking. In separate studies, they each look at the improvisations, negotiations and risks that these migrant children take, sometimes taking on adult roles that flip the responsibility on the family from parents to children. All of this research underscores the important contributions that immigrant children and youth make to immigrant homemaking projects.

H: Is there anything else you would like to add?

H-S: In my current work, I've been interested in understanding how connections with plants and nature creates a sense of home, and how the migration of plants and ideas about gardens transforms place. That's what my book 'Paradise Transplanted' covers. More recently, as I'm developing the work on South LA, I've been inspired by the concept of geographic habitus, a concept from the book 'The Last Best Place', a great ethnography of Mexican migrant homemaking in the plains of Montana written by Schmalzbauer. That is a hostile environment, an unwelcoming context of reception, where the labour is harsh and women face social isolation and hardships. Yet lot of migrants report feeling at home, mainly because of the landscape, which reminds them of the 'rancho' they left in Mexico.

So the whole world of plant nature, with its multi-sensorial connections (food, visual, tactile, scent), which also requires being cared for, is an important part in home making, especially for people who come from rural backgrounds. Tending nature may help them recover from a sense of loss. In fact, I think we all lose something when that connection is lost.

H: Thanks so much for sharing this with us.