

“I’d Rather Be Homeful Than Homeless”: Homing Queer Corporeality and Uprooting Exilic Memory in Domnica Rădulescu’s “Exile is My Home”

“**E**xile Is My Home” follows the story of Mina and Lina, a queer East European couple who traverse three outlandish planets in search of a home before landing on the bigoted Planet America. The author, a Romanian-American writer currently living in the United States, where she arrived in 1983 as a political refugee from the communist dictatorship of her native Romania, is a lecturer at Washington and Lee University and the author of three novels, *Train to Trieste* (2008), *Black Sea Twilight* (2011) and *Country of Red Azaleas* (2016). *New York Theater Review* (2016) describes the eponymous play in Domnica Rădulescu’s anthologised collection (2020) as “a sci-fi, post-apocalyptic fairy tale, [...] the haunting story of Mina and Lina, a refugee couple from the Balkans travelling through the galaxy in search of a planet to call home,” as the play blends elements of “absurdist comedy, irony, and suspense to raise consciousness about the current international refugee crisis and the complexity of issues related to it.” The two middle-aged women are described as opposites as far as their personalities are concerned. While Lina is artistic and flamboyant, Mina is the more precise and pragmatic mind that perpetually strives to rationalise Lina’s flimsy endeavours. Both are *exilées* from ambiguously defined East European countries that become conflated into a “backward” unity of linguistic mutability (which nevertheless hints at a supposed commonality of grim suffering specific to Eastern Europeans since Mina is described as a citizen of “Lugubria”). Their intergalactic journey forces them to relive the excruciating circumstances that triggered a colossal memory loss and thus carries them to the shores and hills of eerie planets that demand the emotional work of remembering, re-encountering, and processing their traumatic past.

On *The First Planet*, the only survivor of a masculinist war that left the landscape in ruins, now become a ramshackle scenery of waste and debris,

is a young girl in her twenties who works as a massage therapist, offering her services to “tired bodies who have landed on her planet from Planet America, or from a West European country or an East European country” (Rădulescu 2014, 2). The war was started by men on grounds of phallic dominance, but the effects continue to be reaped by the remaining natives and immigrants (all of them women except for two male survivors), those “bodies of the population” who are now “in terrible shape, disjointed, out of whack, hunched over, crippled or twisted” (7) and in need of the young girl’s massage expertise. Touch becomes a mode of restoring bodies to health and momentarily reconnecting the community to a shared sense of humanity. However, its effects are short-lived since “the next day [the girl’s patients] start arguing again” (7). Similarly, the Girl on the First Planet’s massages are “rough,” but they promise to make one “as good as new,” for she “deliver[s] what [she] promise[s] and live[s] by [her] principles” (7). Lina and Mina contribute to the repopulation of the planet – a controversial (if not appalling) choice given the (already unstable) queer/lesbian nature of the narrative – as well as its urban reconstruction. Given the devastation of the country in the aftermath of phallic bloodshed, the duty of nurturing it back to health falls on the two women. However, the commodification of the lesbian body as a mere reproductive vessel can be likened to a phallic colonisation of non-normative lives.

On the Second Planet, a “mysteriously and alluringly fresh, sparkling and colourful” landscape becomes eerily edible under the force of nostalgia. The febrile act of remembering pieces of the past makes Lina throw a tantrum and childishly demand “a place to call [her] own” (13). Overpowered by an extreme sense of hunger, she literally ingests the natural landscape. This act figuratively renders what the institutional figures of the Men in White Gowns call a “condemn[ation] to death by yearning” (16), and they attempt to subdue Lina by administering tranquilisers.

The Third Planet is entirely and “deceptively white” in order to “attract lonely tired travellers” (Rădulescu 2014, 25). It is ruled by the Woman Who Eats Hearts, who prefers “the hearts of lonely travellers who fall asleep or show the emotion of yearning for a home on her planet” (25). She is likened to a female Minotaur perpetually craving human blood. While on her planet, Lina and Mina are reunited with their son, Billy. The final stop on their journey is Planet America, which takes the form of an immigration office.

Exilic & homeful ontologies

The play engages with the traumatic memory of exilic displacement by casting its two queer female heroines as “intergalactic nomads in search of a place to belong” (Rădulescu 2018, 125). This quest frames notions of utopian belonging and radical female experience as political gestures. Through the accomplishment of an exilic utopia whereby individual banishment – either self-imposed or forced – marks the beginning of collective empower-

ment, the concept of nomadism becomes positive, as well as actively politicised and subverted. That is, even though the characters were exiled for a reason that they only elucidate at the end of the play, their nomadic ontology unfolds as a natural embodiment, since their bodies themselves are adapted to a rootless and peregrine existence. The characters come to embody a “nomadism of the mind” (Rădulescu 2014, 14) that seeks to universalise the “citizenship of the world” and never overlooks the social realities that ostracise and discriminate against refugees, immigrants, and exiles. The manifestation of their exilic consciousness is directly embodied; the two characters “each carry a miniature folding house that unfolds whenever they want to settle somewhere for the night,” and these backpack-sized houses are “equipped with everything they need to be modestly comfortable,” and they “also function as spaceships” (3).

I am interested in exploring the limits of the *politicisation* of exilic phenomenologies with regard to both the personal and collective dimensions of its unfolding within the play. The opening exchange features Lina’s statement that she “was born in exile” and that her affection towards Mina stems from the fact that neither of them was born “somewhere precise” (3). Instead, both women “were born in the air;” and their perpetual state of exile, as demanding on their memory as it may be, “is the best home there is” (4). By acknowledging exilic phenomenology as a driving conceptual force of the play, I remain in dialogue with Sara Ahmed’s well-known theorisation of queer phenomenology as rooted in the necessity of *orientations* which “shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies” (2006, 3). Since journeys are movements *from* one place *towards* another, the concept of exile begs the question of the existence of an inherent component of disorientation that need not necessitate a release of the tension therein. Existing in exile functions as a present continuous that moves Lina and Mina from one planet to another in search of a home whose materiality is constantly delayed. While the traumatic component of their life stories may force them to re-encounter memories that ultimately make Lina and Mina wish to *settle down* permanently as a way to manage their trauma and attempt healing, the eerie landscapes they traverse and reimagine as possible homes for themselves do not only rehearse the exilic condition of homelessness, but they equally mark exile as a positive state of discomfort and disorientation. Needless to say, the notion of “homefulness” that may be at times either sought or repudiated gains new *queer* meanings when one considers that the two travellers strive to contain, reverse, or subvert the realities of the planets, and, by the end of the play, Lina and Mina embrace an exilic *otherwise*, a new relationality that need not depend on earthly settings and the materiality of the domestic home.

On the one hand, homelessness is corporealised as a traumatic memory whose symptoms are symbolically displaced within the absurdist elements of the play (such as, among others, eating the landscape and devouring hu-

man hearts). Through their exacerbated physical reality and their symbolical concealment, these manifestations of trauma allow an intimate and empathic fashioning of nomadic ontologies in accordance with Julia Kristeva's (1991) notions of the *strangeness* of the immigrant and Sara Ahmed's (2000) theorisation of the "strange encounter" with the Other as being regulated by standards of their fetishist and often abject representation. On the other hand, the reality of "unbelonging" underlies its social and ideological components, which regulate rightful citizenship and engender patterns of women's oppression. It can be said that "Exile Is My Home" articulates the configuration of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari termed a *minor literature* whose narrow currency subsists on a deterritorialised vocabulary of the migrant (and by extension, exilic) minority, as theorised in their essay "What is a Minor Literature?" Its fashioning within the play actively questions what Homi Bhabha deemed *the unhomey home* (in "The World and the Home") that is perpetually projected onto the social reality of the world.

Queer homes, queer homings

However, the feminist undertones equally contain a problematic and superficial treatment of the intricate power relations inherent to queer women's lives. "Exile Is My Home" articulates an attempt at configuring minor literature which – given its further compartmentalisation as a queer feminist performance – only represents gendered experience without considering the specific oppression faced by queer women. In this way, through the co-optation of lesbian/bisexual partners into the story of exile, Rădulescu attempts a reterritorialisation of exilic experience that would – albeit narrowly – include queer uprootings and alternative queer(ed) homings, but *how* this endeavour addresses identity politics remains questionable. Rădulescu adopts a lesbian/bisexual (or alternatively, sapphic) partnership for Lina and Mina without further consideration of the implications of this marker of difference for her characters' lived reality and their understanding of family/kinship as being interrelated with matters of alternative homings. In an unexpected and unsettling turn of events, the women conveniently acquiesce to contribute to the repopulation of the First Planet by having children with the two remaining male survivors. Lina is astonished by Mina's "curiosity" and "sly" willingness to accomplish this mission (Rădulescu 2014, 7), but she is met with the latter's rebuff: "I thought we always had a home and we didn't want a home, home in the traditional sense but more like a planet home, a universe home, something open and indefinite where we wouldn't get stuck in all sorts of sentimental memories of the hallway to the bathroom or the window giving out to a lumber yard or shit like that which people recount from their childhoods and never get over" (Rădulescu 2014, 8).

Mina's declaration of the "open and indefinite" mode of relationality (re) states – paradoxically and alarmingly – an intrinsic "queer" mode within what can only be understood as a reprise of heteronormative domesticity, namely

the “universe” home that is not “stuck” in romanticised upper-middle-class railway apartments and suburban homes overlooking spectacles of proletarian life. Lina’s desired monogamous lesbian family is annulled by her partner’s flimsy politics that strives to supposedly *queer* the already queer, and by so doing, lands within the same domain of heteronormativity. While this vision of mass repopulation through a process of the commodification of women’s reproductive function is reprehensible, it becomes aggravated by, on the one hand, Lina’s protests about their exclusive lesbian love for each other, and Mina’s curiosity, her dismissal of the queer home as a mere “adorable little mobile portable” (Rădulescu 2014, 8) indefiniteness of experience, and her sense of serving a higher purpose through – in fact – the reiteration of cisheteronormativity. While the political dimensions of exilic identity are subverted and reconciled, the exploration of queer identity might be seen as vacuous without an in-depth examination of the politicised nature of queer identity, unless one accepts a vision of exile as an inherently *queer* process whereby one “struggles” with being assimilated and recognised. The harmful intrusion of masculinity within the domain of lesbian life – part of a casual plot-advancement technique – might be put down to the author’s convenient and fleeting embracing of identity politics, but it remains an aggression against the lived reality of the lesbian figure as the one who contests and is positioned outside all spheres that include the male. As Sara Ahmed points out, following larger debates, lesbian feminism can be understood as a “wilfulness archive” in which its radical component defines “wilfulness” as “standing against” (2017, 223) because “to become a lesbian is to queer woman by wrestling her away from him” (224). Standing against male-centred narratives is what defines lesbianism, and, as Ahmed notes, is what makes them “queer before queer” (2017, 224).

In this way, the notion of *home* as an ambiguous site of tension could be endowed with more productive meanings and analysed within a larger social context of (mis)belonging if one upholds the queer component of the characters’ lives. This is something that the author explores only partly — and perhaps accidentally. The home has a multifaceted significance within the play, as it is at once intimate and collective. The opening statements of the play set a nostalgic tone to the uprooted identities of Lina and Mina, who are both embodiments of global nomadism, having been “born in the air” (Rădulescu 2014, 4). In queer narratives, leaving the natal home is associated with the permitted plenitude of embodying one’s homosexuality in a haven away from home, a “coming out” that occurs at the same time as the “moving out” (Brown cited in Ahmed et al. 2020, 115). As the queer individual relocates their self elsewhere, they accomplish a homing that imparts “some kind of ontological security” (Ahmed et al. 2020, 115). Lina and Mina initially embody different attitudes to their birthplaces and homing desires; whereas Lina longs for a childhood landscape that represents much-sought domestic settledness, with its “regular house” near a “blue pond with a red flower in the middle” (Rădulescu 2014, 5), Mina aspires to perpetual “role-playing” (14), a perpetual

and free-flowing search for “new roles that we can put on and take off like silk dresses, like butterflies” (15).

Given the fact that the characters are queer women, the play brings to mind degrees of awareness of the childhood home as an oppressive site that refutes queerness. However, the reasons behind the characters’ migration are devoid of a queer – and specifically lesbian – contextualisation, even though it may be argued that their exile was not prompted by the desire to find a home elsewhere or to find a (queer) *otherwise*. In a different reading, Sara Ahmed reconsiders queer migrations as being not only opposed to the concept of the childhood home, since they could alternatively come across as attempts at salvaging, and therefore recasting it in a different light (2020, 116). This vision suggests the “double-life model,” which presupposes an opposition of *the natal home* – a place of unquestioned cisheterosexual and normative values, the “home as not-home” – with *the queer homing* – often a radical and rose-coloured apotheosis of the individual’s arrival at a *new destination* that reclaims their difference and comfort within the non-normative limits of their identity (Ahmed et al. 2020, 120).

The two approaches to the concept of *home* reflect themselves in the characters’ desires. On the one hand, Mina differentiates between her real and legal births: her immigrant mother had “crawled in the desert with [Mina] in her fruit bag,” a child “born in the country of Lugubria” (Rădulescu 2014, 5) but later accepted as a citizen and thus legally birthed “on the way to the market” (4). In this way, Mina’s birth in “the fruit bag” transposes a strenuous existence within the initial home that troubles claims to recognition and comfort. On the other hand, Lina’s yearning for a permanent home – as she miserably declares that she is “tired of homelessness” (13) – mirrors a *lugubrious* nostalgia that remains distinct from homesickness and her desire to return. As Roberta Rubenstein notes, homesickness stands for “a spatial/geographical separation,” whereas nostalgia is a “temporal” locus that stems from the idea of the birthplace as an idealised and creative site of memory (2001, 4). Lina’s sentimental memory of the house where she grew up, with “a potato garden and a blue pond with a red flower in the middle” (Rădulescu 2014, 5), is an overly domestic site that complicates her process of remembering the reality of the war that prompted her departure, and it suggests the workings of memory as a bittersweet negotiation of the tender and the traumatic. At the very beginning of the play, Lina and Mina repeatedly pose the same question to one another: “What do you remember?” (4). This torturous exchange, which features the same call to a stable answer – and by extension, the same demand for “remembering” a stable and unitary memory of childhood – is taken up time and time again throughout the play, and it morphs into a veritable chorus. In this way, Lina and Mina are revealed as lacking the awareness of their natal roots, which leads to a feeling of subjective and sentimental exiling – rooted in an insufficiency of memory – that contrasts with their legal war-imposed exile. In the end, Lina understands that a genuine home is one to which the individual craves to return and one that is willingly and clearly remembered (38).

Staging unhomely affect and homeful bodies

Initially, Lina's homeland resides in "a Balkan song," a symbolical representation of "a place of my own that I can eat and where I can feel its sweet juices fill my mouth," with the final request that she "want[s] [her] mama" (13). Following Bob Cant, Sara Ahmed argues in favour of understanding queer migration as a movement that allows the re-processing of the childhood home, and she privileges "two-mindedness," which can be understood as a sense of "an openness, however fraught, about the multiple belongings that one negotiates in one's life," as well as the opportunity to consider forms of belonging that do not compartmentalise identities (2020, 120). According to Rubenstein, the matter of belonging must be grasped as a "relational, reciprocal condition" in which "connection and community" are prioritised because the desire to belong intrinsically requires the desire for "not only being taken care of but *taking care*" (2001, 4; emphasis mine). This shows how the image of the natal home inhabits the genealogy of domesticity, as Mina, too, defines her origins within a *lugubrious* maternal loss, and the two women undergo the revelation of their real homelands after their reunion with their vanished son, Billy. While the children birthed on the First Planet are not paid any proper narrative attention (in the same way that the lesbian body acts as a mere physical vessel for reproduction), Lina and Mina's son haunts the narrative as an affectual trigger for their overpowering nostalgia. It can be said that maternal affects are rendered pathological through various techniques of forcing the characters to embody their trauma at the same time that both their home and memory are ever-uprooted. Therefore, the very memory of the original home is permeated by symbols of lost nourishment. For example, the fruit bag that serves as Mina's birthplace contains guavas and oranges (taken as spiritually-endowed symbols of "sweet" and "juicy" abundance, yet betraying a "lugubrious" dimension of Eleusinian loss and rebirth inherent to their seeded flesh). Similarly, flowers are ever-present throughout the narrative as ephemeral and Ophelian symbols, for the women carry portable flower-houses on their backs. And on the Second Planet, Lina's overpowering begins with the "delicious" sight of red blossoms in the desert.

Initially, Lina and Mina's knowledge of their homeland represents a collective understanding of Eastern Europe as a depository of stereotypes, the place where "they always start wars" (Rădulescu 2014, 5). The Balkans are reinforced as the locus of "a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (Todorova 2009, 3), where different countries are conflated with one another, since Lina announces that she is "Finnish and French and a little bit Slovakian or maybe Slovenian, it's almost the same" (Rădulescu 2014, 10). Regardless of geographical specificity, Eastern Europe is symbolically taken as the locus of the same *lugubriousness* that pervades the borders of all its national constituents, even extending its reign over Finno-Ugric and Slavic languages. Lina and Mina are the "most ethnographic women in the

galaxy” due to their intricate roots (Hungarian, Polish, Finnish, French, Slovakian, Slovenian, among others), which bears testimony to their desire for “role-playing,” equated with merely “another way of being nomadic” (14). The Balkan home as a romanticised place where – according to *The Girl on the First Planet* – “[her] grandmother [...] used to always sing sentimental Balkan songs to put [her] to sleep” that “made [her] yearn for something but [she] didn’t know what” (9) alternates with the same Balkan locus as war-ravaged and hostile. As she recounts, “those sentimental Balkan songs – the soldiers sang them in all kinds of sinister wars as they were massacring entire populations and raping women in rape hotels and getting drunk and slobbering all over their drinks to the sound of sentimental songs” (9). However, what is remembered as a nostalgically domestic place that underscores personal affect and maternal attachment becomes globalised as a site of oppression. In an interview for *New York Theatre Review*, Rădulescu explains that Lina and Mina were “chased from a planet earth ravaged by wars, apocalyptic climate destruction, mass rapes, famine, disease and hatefulness,” but that their intergalactic journey is beset by their nostalgic longing for the abandoned home. It is important to note that exile is revealed throughout the play as an ambiguous journey, a push-and-pull movement that is bound to remain within the parameters of an unstable – and perhaps naïve – yearning. Sara Ahmed discusses this process as hinting at *the double orientation of the home* because the intimate home and its familiarity remain a static “site where things and subjects stand still, and it is there to be left behind or desired” (2020, 116). Even more, leaving behind is never entirely devoid of the desire to return.

This being said, the home perpetually haunts the exiled subject. Exile implies an often alienating and provisional *homeostasis*, a vacillation between ancestry and the ambiguous destination. For Kristeva, the immigrant or exiled condition is that of a *fugue*, a condition including “an otherness barely touched upon and that already moves away” (1991, 3). Rădulescu’s own concept of the “nomadism of the mind” can be understood in a similar way as a condition of inhabiting and being inhabited by plurality: “We have always been nomads, haven’t we? We have been Bedouins and Gypsies, and travellers, we have always been walking, riding, crawling, swimming and running and then putting up our folding houses at night. We have always forgotten everything we remember, haven’t we?” (Rădulescu 2014, 14). Lina and Mina’s status of “intergalactic” wanderers marks them as “fanatic[s] of absence” (Kristeva 1991, 5) due to the traumatic memory which impels them to travel yet constantly remembers their *home* as a nostalgic origin.

The “absence” is experienced both on the corporeal level – as symbolically displaced injuries – and the collective level – as social realities that force dislocation and movement. Their exilic ontology is visible on their own bodies, which function as equipment that facilitates movement. Rădulescu clarifies that prior to the metaphorisation of exile in literature and philosophy, “exile first existed in and through the body,” and this is a testament to the series of either positive or negative traumatic effects and symptoms that displacement

has on the *exilée's* body (2002, 189), such as extreme hunger, depersonalisation, and fatigue. As she underscores, "like Dante's souls in hell, exiles are "doomed" to remember and to relive their traumas" (2002, 201). In "Exile Is My Home," trauma is poignantly physical, as Lina and Mina's journeys on different planets allegorise symptoms as tasks to be completed in a quest. On the Second Planet, Lina's yearning for a home manifests itself as extreme hunger: "I'm hungry. I'm hungry for home, I'm hungry for dirt, for earth dirt, birth dirt, native dirt. . . I'm going to eat everything. I'll eat everybody. I'll eat you all until I have a home" (2014, 17). Her overpowering appetite can be likened to the immigrant's pursuit of alternate homings in a foreign country and the consequent refusals and betrayals that this process entails. According to Kristeva, hospitality "begins with a food fest: . . . A meal, a nutritive communion. The one confesses he is a famished baby, the other welcomes the greedy child; for an instant, they merge within the hospitality ritual" (1991, 11). This represents a utopian "banquet of hospitality" which serves the migrant with "the cosmopolitanism of a moment" within "the brotherhood of guests who soothe and forget their differences" (Kristeva 1991, 11), but it feigns permanence even in the face of the immigrant's awareness of its transience (12). Lina's hunger becomes a frenzy that seeks to "sink one's teeth" into the native's phenomenology and seize it as a personalised reality that legitimises belonging. Alternatively, "eating away" at the foreign landscape traces the outbound route to one's homeland. To quote Rădulescu, "the memory of the exile has to *feed on itself* to some extent, to keep creating and re-creating itself in order to replace that which has been lost in the physical realm" (2002, 189; emphasis mine). Exile itself is described as "doubly. . . more greedy" for the newly encountered reality of a foreign country (2002, 200). For Hélène Cixous, too, appropriating a life in a foreign country implies a linguistic overabundance that mirrors an intoxicating fullness: "I fled [German], I spit it out, I vomited. I threw myself into *languelait* <...> so as not to see how the letters <...> reappropriate the blood of the tongues between their paws, their claws, and their teeth" (1991, 22).

Hunger is political

Rosemary Hennessy advances a productive discussion of the ways in which vital needs – such as hunger, thirst, or shelter – are rooted in the socialised dimensions of human life, and while they may reflect the conditioned hierarchies of importance within capitalist society (free access to healthcare, for example, may be seen as essential in certain societies, but not others), they remain within the sphere of historical – and historicised – collective practice (2018, 210). Following Marx, Hennessy argues that it is essential to acknowledge how hunger is "disciplined in the organization of labour, monitored by the state, expressed and made meaningful through culture-ideology" (214). For this reason, Lina's fevered hunger for the landscape and her feverish grasping at it with her bare hands – that is, uninhibited by social norms of proper etiquette – may be seen as an a-historical and implicitly queer reap-

propriation of the standards of appeasement within strict capitalist modes of production and consumption, as much as it is, too, a corporealised greed for a phantom childhood home.

The visual image of eating as a first-person experiential pursuit of ontological satiety is also paralleled with Lina and Mina's encounter with the Woman Who Eats Hearts, a despotic devourer of souls who rules over a pristine snow-covered planet. In the snow on the Third Planet, one can find "throbbing human hearts that writhe, cry, sing and talk" who "live just like miniature human beings" (2014, 18). Eating now acquires the violence of being consumed, in stark contrast with the planet's translucent landscape, which can be interpreted as a rendering of loss in visual and symbolical terms. Rădulescu notes that exile is both a "'within the body' and an 'out of the body'" experience, as well as a manifestation of both "fullness and of loss" (2002, 199), often concomitantly. The planet is also traversed by "other creatures [who] move across the snow or freeze in a pose, the memories and ghosts of devoured travellers" (2014, 18). Both manifestations of trauma might underlie what Julia Kristeva theorised as the foreigner's "aloofness," depersonalisation that "amounts to plain brutality" as the uprooted subject retracts into their "painless core [...] of humbleness" (1991, 7). The immigrant's internalisation of their unbelonging manifests itself as fatigue and lethargy, but it also includes a hypervigilance that can amount to self-torment. On the Third Planet, immigrants themselves are nothing but units of labour – they are abused and "consumed" by the despotic capitalist, in a metaphorical shift that understands human hearts as the affectual work put in by the immigrant before being swallowed by a system that renders them ghostly.

While on the Queen's planet, Lina and Mina are reunited with their son, Billy. Initially, the revelation of his name triggers an ethereal flashback of a "little boy in a sailor's outfit . . . playing with boats in a little pond" in a "colourful garden," together with "younger versions of Mina and Lina" (2014, 22), a poetic reproduction of an idyllic homeland. However, this idealised image suddenly evaporates as "frightening sounds of shooting and cannons are heard" while soldiers equipped with machine guns ravage the garden, abducting Billy and abusing Lina and Mina (Rădulescu 2014, 23). This prompts the couple to remember that Billy was "raised by Bulgarian Organ Thieves and Torturers," only to be later placed in American foster care by her adoptive American mother, and it equally makes them recall their Croatian identity (26). Quite relevantly, their epiphany occurs when Lina and Mina attempt to explain to Billy who Ophelia "is, [...] was" (23), and this can be most appropriately explained by the author herself, who highlights that "one remembers one's gender through the body as one remembers the ties with one's birthplace and family" (Rădulescu 2002, 189). In this way, Rădulescu connects the corporeal and intimate anthologies of symptoms and traumas which mark the immigrant's body with the social reality – the female cult of mourning symbolised by Ophelia – that engenders what Homi Bhabha termed the "unhomely," an alienated recognition of the home as uncanny (1992, 141). As

he explains, displacement merges “the border between home and world,” as it signals the “social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocation” (141). Sara Ahmed, too, notes that the foreigner appears as an *unmarked body* because it “appears contained, enclosed and separate” or because it can be seen as a body that is “*at-home* or *in-place*” within a national boundary that safely incorporated it along lines of difference and trespassing (2000, 46). Migration or exile represents ways of rethinking dislocation and appropriating nomadism – the existence without a fixed and singular home. Yet Ahmed argues for a rethinking of the journey of exile as a movement starting from familiarity and arriving at strangeness, as home itself carries degrees of strangeness due to how it stages “encounters between those who stay, those who arrive, and those who leave” (2000, 88). Often, home is delimited by the maternal presence, and “returning home” may be a return *to* the mother, in the same way that leaving may be a painstaking abandonment *of*. Along the same lines, the homing process unfolds within the parameters of the relationship between the mother and the daughter as well, since the death of the mother triggers a need in the daughter to recreate homeliness and the home within an alternative family or community (Ahmed et al. 2020, 121). Through exile, the body becomes politicised through a lugubrious notion of female experience that blends it with the world. Rădulescu confirms that, in Jean Baudrillard’s tradition of the original, she is interested in “‘the territory’ and not ‘the map’” (2002, 257). This intended purpose of rewriting the “radically feminist” – following bell hooks’ call for integrating the “margins” into “a space of radical openness” (cited in Rădulescu 2002, 266) – into the relative mainstream of exilic experience mirrors Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation of “minor literature” as a “deterritorialised tongue suitable for strange, minor uses” (1983, 16). The final utopian staging that confirms the citizenship of the world as a reaffirming “passport” – that subverts violent and genocidal practices against immigrants – consolidates nomadism as a state of existence rooted in communal and political existence. In the process of migration, the home itself is queered through its existence as an in-between space, a “site of struggle with multiple injunctions of being and ‘fitting in’ that comes from ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Ahmed et al. 2020, 125).

In conclusion, “Exile Is My Home” visualises a nomadic ontology which corporealises the *exile* into a lugubrious anthology of traumatic memory and gendered uprootedness. Queering exile is a matter of politicising the motions of attachment whereby the nostalgic childhood home is contrasted with the relations of power that may complicate and, in turn, lead to the *queering of* the meanings of belonging itself.

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