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When Home Isn't Home Anymore: Towards a Political Theory of Displacement without Movement¹

Introduction

Contemporary understandings of displacement within both international policy frameworks and normative political theory have been marked by a broad consensus: displacement entails forced movement. For instance, the International Organisation for Migration views displacement as ‘the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee...their homes or places of habitual residence’ (IOM, 2026), while Phillip Cole (2022: 8) similarly defines forced displacement ‘to include any person who is forced or obliged to leave their home’, and Serena Parekh (2017: 5) understands it as ‘being forced outside your country of citizenship’. Such definitions have generally continued to hold sway through a recent ‘displacement turn’ within forced migration studies, in which ‘the concept of displacement has become more central to both policy and academic discussion’ (Owen, 2024: 272, 276).

This situation might seem entirely unproblematic: perhaps our established usage is correct in treating displacement as a phenomenon that just *does* entail forced movement. If we look beyond normative political theory, however, we find work that potentially unsettles this view. According to various geographers, anthropologists and sociologists, the concept of displacement not only encompasses forced movement, but applies whenever people lose their homes – whether physically, socially or psychologically – even if they do so while remaining in their habitual locations.² In their view, such displacement may occur through a range of

¹ The ideas developed in this article greatly benefitted from feedback offered by audiences at conferences and workshops in Leeds, Glasgow, Potsdam, Manchester, York and Oxford between 2023 and 2025. I am grateful to participants at a workshop on displacement without movement held in January 2025 at the University of Leeds, and to anonymous reviewers for their feedback. I give particular thanks to Anna Milioni, Lukas Schmid, Toni Erskine, Jamie Draper and Rebecca Buxton for very helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

² For work within geography, see e.g. Davidson (2009) and Elliott-Cooper et al. (2020); within anthropology, see Lubkemann (2008a) and Ramsay and Askland (2022); and within sociology, see Feldman (2021) and Sullivan (2017).

processes including armed conflict (e.g. Ali, 2023; Celestina, 2016; Lubkemann, 2008a, 2008b), climate change (Askland et al., 2022; Kelley et al., 2022), or gentrification (e.g. Atkinson, 2015; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Kern, 2016).³ Instead of people being displaced through a forced change of location, this putative form of displacement is triggered by involuntary and negative changes happening around them. This phenomenon has been described variously as ‘displacement without migration’ (Lubkemann, 2008a: 213), ‘displacement without mobility’ (Feldman, 2021), ‘displacement without moving’ (Nixon, 2011: 19), ‘displacement in place’ (e.g. Lubkemann, 2008b: 454), and ‘in situ displacement’ (e.g. Feldman, 2021).

Clearly, the mere fact that scholars in other disciplines have adopted a broader understanding of displacement is not in itself a good reason for normative political theorists to follow suit. Nevertheless, I will argue that there is a strong case for such theorists to adopt a version of this understanding. Questioning the ingrained consensus that displacement entails forced movement, I contend, reveals that it is not only coherent to broaden our understanding of displacement in this way, but theoretically, ethically and politically advantageous in various ways.

I develop this argument across five main sections. First, I briefly survey different ways in which the concept of displacement has been broadened, mainly by scholars outside political theory, to include those undergoing place-based losses in their habitual locations, from fairly modest views that loosen but ultimately retain the conventional link between displacement and forced movement, to more radical positions that challenge it more thoroughly. Second, I outline and develop a novel account of displacement without movement. I argue that displacement is

³ Others examine displacement without movement in other contexts such as economic crisis (Ali, 2024), housing insecurity (Sullivan, 2017), the impacts of mining (Askland, 2018), land occupation (Vaz-Jones, 2018), access to ancestral lands (Mollett, 2014), othering (Siu, 2007), the social exclusion of minorities (Feldman, 2021), shifting borders (Brun, 2019), and statelessness (Belton, 2016).

fundamentally a loss of one's place and/or home that may occur either with or without movement, explaining and defending each element of this formulation. Third, I present a series of conditions under which place-based changes precipitate displacement without movement. Fourth, I contend that the notion promises at least two key theoretical, ethical and political advantages: it not only allows us to identify a common condition that unites the seemingly disparate experiences of those who lose their place and/or home through forced movement and those who lose it in their normal locations, but it offers a potentially valuable pathway to forms of solidarity among not only these two groups, but also non-displaced populations. Fifth, I discuss how broadening displacement in this way may dilute the normative status that is often ascribed to the concept in recent theorising. I suggest, however, that this implication is not problematic for my account, concluding that the notion of displacement without movement merits far greater attention by normative theorists as an important, yet overlooked global harm.

Overall, this argument suggests that engaging theoretically with the notion of displacement without movement offers an opportunity to enrich both normative theorising on displacement and the social-scientific work cited above. On the one hand, while some recent theoretical work has recognised that displacement may occur without movement (Espejo, 2024; Owen, 2024: 276), the full normative implications of this approach have not been examined systematically. On the other hand, although this social-scientific work is suffused by the idea that '[d]isplacement typically implies a form of injustice' (Roast et al., 2022: 626), its heavy focus on empirical case-studies worldwide means that such normative assumptions are largely left unscrutinised. Normative political theorists are ideally placed to bring these assumptions into the open and to develop, defend and critique them.

Mapping Displacement without Movement

There are various ways in which people may be said to be displaced without movement. These can be presented along a spectrum, stretching from fairly modest accounts at one end to more radical views at the other. At the most modest end, we find recognition of the fact that displacement frequently occurs without international or long-distance migration, instead involving ‘forced relocation’ within cities, regions or states (Ali, 2023: 1085). Although this approach allows for unconventional applications of the term to various issues in the global North that may involve relatively short-distance movement but are not standardly seen as involving displacement – such as housing evictions, homelessness and queer/trans internal migration (Buxton, 2024; Ritholtz, 2023) – overall it remains within the term’s conventional usage. After all, internally displaced persons (IDPs) have long been the subject of international policy and academic analysis (see Draper and Owen, 2024) and displacement is a well-established concept in the study of gentrification (e.g. Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020).

A second approach goes somewhat further, while nevertheless maintaining a close linkage between displacement and movement. On this view, advocated by scholars such as Ali and Mateja Celestina, displacement begins *before* movement occurs, and should be viewed not as a one-off *event* but rather as a cumulative *process*. In their examples of Iraq and Colombia respectively, armed conflict may place ever greater pressure on everyday life, eroding one’s sense of home and ability to remain until relocation becomes the only option.⁴ In such cases, the displacement process starts with altered patterns of short-distance mobility and micro-movements within people’s habitual locations, such as their decisions to take different routes to work to escape mounting threats to their personal safety (Ali, 2023, 1090;

⁴ This idea is also reflected in Peter Marcuse’s discussion of ‘the pressure of displacement’ in the context of gentrification in Western cities, in which socioeconomic changes to neighbourhoods render life there increasingly untenable for poorer residents, meaning that forced movement ‘is only a matter of time’ (Marcuse, 1985: 2017).

Celestina, 2016, 382). For Celestina (2016: 368), the ‘clock of displacement’ begins far earlier than is usually thought.⁵

However, while this view certainly loosens the conventional connection between displacement and movement, it nevertheless ultimately maintains it, for it understands pressures on everyday life and the gradual breakdown of home ultimately as *precursors* to eventual forced movement, as Celestina (2016: 373) claims that ‘movement...is always a part of displacement’. Consequently, this view points towards a broader, more radically distinct form of displacement, without taking us the whole way there.

Towards the other end of this spectrum lies this third, more radical claim, that displacement may occur *entirely* independently of movement. As Owen (2024: 276) has recognised, ‘the experience of displacement can...take...forms in which it is the place that changes, not (necessarily) the space occupied’. In such scenarios, it is not people who move, but rather their surroundings ‘move’ around them, as ‘the places they inhabit qualitatively change under their very feet’ (Lubkemann, 2008a: 193). This may involve physically losing one’s dwelling-place, or it can be a psychological condition wrought by physical and social changes while that dwelling remains intact. For instance, Espejo (2024: 239) highlights those ‘left behind’ by forced migrants, pointing to a loss of a ‘common world’ and a ‘network of place-specific obligations’ experienced by both those who leave and those who stay within a community. Through such disruptions, people find that their home is not home anymore, despite not having moved anywhere.

This view is reflected in definitions of displacement which posit no necessary connection with movement at all. For instance, although Ali discusses displacement as a process culminating in flight, his definition of it as a ‘process of coercive disruption to valued

⁵ This approach differs from the notion of ‘pre-displacement’ (see Marfleet, 2011: 108) because it sees the pre-flight phase as part of displacement itself, rather than simply a prelude to it.

ways of living and functioning’ (Ali, 2023: 1084) does not, in principle, require any movement at all. Similarly, Lubkemann variously defines displacement as a ‘process of lifescape reconfiguration’ (Lubkemann, 2008a: 192) and as a ‘disruption of key life projects’ (Lubkemann, 2008b: 468). In such discussions, scholars often link this third form of displacement to involuntary immobility (see Carling, 2002; Lubkemann, 2008b). On this view, displacement may be as much a matter of ‘material confinement and “stuckness”’ (Hammar, 2014: 3) or of ‘cultural and political incarceration’ (Siu, 2007: 332) as it may involve physical flight.⁶

This third view foregrounds the psychological dimensions of displacement, for once it is seen as potentially independent of movement, it becomes an ‘experiential’ (Askland, 2018), ‘affective’ (Butcher and Dickens, 2016) or ‘phenomenological’ (Lopez-Cantero, 2025) condition or ‘state of being’ (Askland, 2018: 232). Consequently, the difference between ‘a sense of’ displacement (e.g. Kern, 2016: 443) and displacement *per se* becomes more blurred. Some work emphasises the temporal dimension of these psychological states, observing how such displacement seriously disrupts people’s sense of their own futures in their habitual locations (Ramsay and Askland, 2022). Nevertheless, most of these authors focus on cases of displacement with a strongly material as well as a psychological dimension; a point to which I return later.

A fourth, most radical view posits that displacement is a practically universal condition affecting all humans to varying degrees. Some, at times without using the term ‘displacement’ explicitly, view the climate crisis as having a potentially displacing effect on us all: although Glenn Albrecht’s notion of ‘solastalgia’ refers to ‘a form of homesickness one gets when one

⁶ However, this link between displacement and involuntary immobility should be understood as contingent: one can be involuntarily immobile while maintaining a home, or conversely one may experience displacement without movement even while maintaining the option to leave. Involuntary immobility is, therefore, but one potential manifestation of displacement, rather than constitutive of it.

is still at “home””, he contended that such solastalgia may also be experienced by ‘people who strongly empathise with the idea that the earth is their home’ (Albrecht, 2005: 48, 49). Beyond academic debates, we find in some contemporary art and religious traditions the idea that displacement is a frequent part of the normal life-course, or even that ‘we are all displaced’. In her exhibition, ‘50 Rooms’, the artist, Natasha Davis, understood displacement widely as encompassing various common experiences, including menopause, deafness, painful family dynamics, abuse, or imprisonment (Pfoser and de Jong, 2017). In contrast, some strands within Christianity and Buddhism can be understood as implicitly viewing the transitoriness and insecurity of human life as denying us any ultimately stable home.

Defining Displacement without Movement

In this article, my principal concern will be the third form of displacement as a phenomenon that may occur entirely independently of movement. This is because the first two putative forms (of displacement involving only short-distance movement or beginning in situ) do not fundamentally challenge the conventional definition. The second approach is correct that displacement can begin before forced movement, but is limited by the claim that movement is necessarily its eventual outcome. As I discuss later, while some normal losses throughout the life-course do genuinely engender displacement, the fourth idea of universal displacement risks unduly diluting the concept by treating almost any loss as causing it.

Some of the terms used by scholars to describe this phenomenon are more apt than others. To begin, ‘displacement without movement’ and ‘in situ displacement’ are closely related or almost interchangeable. I have set aside ‘displacement without migration’ given that, literally speaking, it encompasses many forms of shorter-distance or internal movement that are already recognised in conventional understandings. Notions of ‘displacement in place’ and

‘homelessness at home’ (Bennett, 2011), have an air of paradox by implying that one can be simultaneously in place or homed as well as displaced or homeless, although this can be dispelled by distinguishing between different forms of place and home at play in the concepts.⁷ In contrast, the notion of ‘displacement without movement’ more directly and plainly captures the phenomenon being described.

It could be objected that, strictly speaking, the notion is a misnomer for, unless an individual faces near-total immobility within an extremely enclosed area, such as a tiny cell, displacement always involves *some* movement. However, this concern would be misplaced. Such displacement certainly *co-exists* with continued movement, for even if one experiences displacement without movement, one may still follow one’s habitual movements within one’s established locations. However, the displacement here is not *constituted* by this movement, but instead emerges independently of it, through the breakdown of one’s place and/or home.

The category of displacement without movement is intended to sit alongside, rather than to replace, the conventional understanding: ‘displacement’ here acts as an umbrella term, while ‘displacement with movement’ (or mobile displacement) and ‘displacement without movement’ are two more specific forms it may take. This then raises the question of how the umbrella term should be understood if it no longer refers to forced movement. I contend that we should understand displacement fundamentally as a loss of one’s place and/or home, whether this loss occurs with or without movement. On this view, movement is only one means through which displacement may occur: such movement becomes a sufficient, but not a necessary condition of displacement.⁸ To explain and defend this overarching definition, I work

⁷ Indeed, these concepts trade on a double meaning of place and home, where one meaning refers to a physical location, while the other refers to the significance that people imbue in that location.

⁸ This parallels Andrew Shacknove’s argument in favour of broadening the term ‘refugee’ beyond the 1951 Refugee Convention’s focus on persecution: while, for Shacknove (1985: 277), persecution is one ‘manifestation of refugeehood’, here movement is but one manifestation of displacement.

through each of its elements in turn, addressing conceptual questions and challenges that arise from them.

The Losses of Displacement

It is not difficult to identify severe losses all too often experienced by the displaced, which may amount to a state of ‘ontological deprivation’ (Parekh, 2017: 83). But, first, does displacement *necessarily* involve loss? It might be objected that this definition overlooks the possibility that displacement may not involve loss at all: in some cases, perhaps *only* forced movement or harmful in situ changes occur, given that many may never have had goods to lose in their habitual environments. Two responses can be made here, however; one conceptual and the other empirical. Conceptually, the notion of displacement is fundamentally diachronic: the prefix ‘dis’ implies a process in which a place is negated or lost. It is therefore within the term’s basic meaning that it involves loss. Empirically, people may identify with their normal environments even when they are harmful, resulting in some loss after leaving them. For instance, some evidence suggests that those whose home is dominated by an abusive partner may, given a process of ‘trauma bonding’, feel loss after their departure, despite its necessity (Lesiak and Gelsthorpe, 2025: 12).

Second, what does this loss consist of, if it is not necessarily a loss of physical presence in one’s usual location? Given the human tendency to form strong psychological attachments to material and social environments, displacement typically involves material, social and psychological losses. On the one hand, displacement generally involves material loss of physical environments such as dwellings, buildings and infrastructure, often in the form of ‘domicide’, which Porteous and Smith (2001: ix) define as ‘the deliberate destruction of home’. Relatedly, it may involve social losses, entailing the absence of valued people, or negative

changes to one's roles, responsibilities and relationships. On the other hand, displacement generally entails various painful psychological states which are frequently referenced in the social-scientific literature cited above, such as alienation, defamiliarisation, disempowerment, dislocation, disorientation, dispossession, disruption, dissonance, estrangement, instability, ontological insecurity and liminality. In paradigmatic cases of displacement without movement discussed in this literature, psychological losses are caused by severe material losses or human rights violations (e.g. Askland, 2018; Ali, 2023; Vaz-Jones, 2018). Even accounts of 'phenomenological displacement', which strongly foreground psychological states, root this displacement in significant material and social changes occurring in neighbourhoods (Lopez-Cantero, 2025).

However, if we move beyond these paradigmatic cases, we find the possibility that displacement without movement could conceivably involve only material or psychological losses. Could displacement without movement entail *purely* material or psychological loss, without combining both?⁹ These scenarios may be exceptional or even largely hypothetical, but engaging with them helps to clarify the nature of the losses entailed by displacement. On the one hand, while displacement without movement typically involves material losses severe enough for us to expect psychological losses to follow, it is at least possible that some can engage in 'cognitive reappraisal' (Lopez-Cantero, 2025: 18), allowing them to maintain or reshape their sense of place and/or home despite the material losses. In such scenarios, people would be displaced in one sense (materially), while remaining emplaced in another (psychologically), and we would need to specify the nature of their displacement to capture it accurately.

⁹ Note that this question does not arise when referring to mobile displacement for, although psychological disruption is typically an element of forced movement, it always involves a material change of location.

On the other hand, some may carry a psychological sense of displacement that has no material basis. For instance, people's perceptions of becoming 'strangers in their own land' (see Hochschild, 2016) may result from taking immigration as a threat to a national imaginary, despite it not concretely affecting their own neighbourhoods (e.g. see Kassam, 2024). It would seem odd to claim that they would genuinely experience displacement, given the absence of any relevant material or social changes in their locations at all. Although demands that people engage in cognitive reappraisal of their situations can be unjust (Lopez-Cantero, 2025: 17), this is a case in which it may be justified. Such cases would, therefore, involve a *sense* of displacement rather than displacement itself. While it is possible to experience material without psychological displacement, the converse does not seem to hold.

Third, how severe must a negative change be to constitute a loss? Not every negative place-based change constitutes displacement: ordinary people's lives in stable societies inevitably involve such change, but it would be a gross exaggeration to claim that we are all thereby displaced. We need to distinguish, if only roughly, between full-blown *losses* and milder *shifts* or *changes* in people's homes. Displacement without movement involves a loss of familiarity in one's normal location, but it would set the bar too high to require that a place be rendered *unrecognisable* to say that displacement has occurred, for one can lose one's place and/or home overall while that place retains elements of its previous character. Beyond this, there is clearly no sharp dividing line between losses and shifts in this context, for milder changes may cumulatively erode one's home until it is eventually lost. All we can say is that, at some point to be decided contextually, a disruption to one's home is mild enough to not warrant the term 'loss', and therefore displacement, at all.

Fourth, must the changes prompting displacement be involuntary? The term 'loss' in the definition heavily implies this. The involuntariness of mobile displacement is widely recognised for, as Owen (2024: 275) has recognised, 'one might speak of voluntary (re)location

but not voluntary displacement'. Likewise, displacement without movement differs from making chosen changes to one's environment also by its involuntariness. For such displacement to occur, these changes must *happen to* someone, rather than be autonomously *pursued* by them; otherwise we have not displacement but personal projects or home-building. These changes may be imposed through coercion or simply occur beyond the influence of the agent affected. The idea that one can 'displace oneself' makes sense in this context only if the choices prompting displacement are made within significant constraints and are painfully wrenching, as in the aforementioned case of someone escaping an abusive environment with which they nevertheless identify.¹⁰ However, those facing displacement without movement may retain some agency: just as forced migrants may exercise some choice within constraints over when, how and to where they flee, those displaced without movement may actively work to resist unchosen changes around them, and may shape their attitudes in response to them.

Place and/or Home

Fifth, why does this definition stipulate that displacement is a loss of 'place and/or home'? Notably, some of the leading definitions cited above – such as Ali's 'coercive disruption' or Lubkemann's 'lifescape reconfiguration' (Ali, 2023: 1084; Lubkemann, 2008a: 192) – do not explicitly refer to place and/or home at all. On their views, any coercive disruption or lifescape reconfiguration seemingly results in displacement, even if that left one's place and/or home intact. However, the term centres the notion of *place*: breaking it into its constituent parts of 'dis-place-ment' reveals that displacement is a process of losing one's place.

¹⁰ While someone might sabotage their home without having another in place, this seems likely to result from involuntary distress rather than autonomous choice.

This basic linguistic analysis can help to separate the concept's core from experiences that are typically but contingently associated with it. For, while displacement typically involves disorientation, disempowerment and all the negative states listed above, these do not *necessarily* translate into a condition of displacement unless they are symptoms of a loss of place and/or home. After all, there are many experiences of, say, disorientation that cannot be plausibly linked to this condition at all.

Although 'place' is at the core of displacement, my proposed definition also refers to a loss of home. It is, again, notable that some scholars define displacement directly in terms of home rather than place, as 'a form of un-homing' (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020: 503) or a 'loss of homeland' (Miller, 2024). Why should this definition refer to both place and home, and how should the relationship between them be understood? As a key term in geography, places are often understood as 'locations imbued with meaning that are sites of everyday practice' (Cresswell, 2009: 9), and as open, connected and fluid rather than bounded and static (Massey, 2018 [1993]). Such locations are typically structured and defined by norms, roles, shared narratives, culture, habits and language.

In contrast, home can, most prosaically, be defined as a place (or set of places) where one habitually lives. Beyond this, however, it can be understood as a 'particularly significant kind of place...within which...we experience strong social, psychological and emotive attachments' (Easthope 2004: 135-136). The richest sense of home goes beyond mere shelter or housing, instead being a 'place of belonging in which our core social needs are met' (Jenkins and Brownlee, 2022: 441) and a 'definer of personal and collective identity' (Lu, 2023: 19). Homes exist at different scales, from individual dwellings to neighbourhoods, cities, regions,

and beyond. As a place where one belongs, the notion of home fuses together both ‘material and imaginative’ elements (Blunt and Dowling, 2022: 9).¹¹

This, in turn, raises the question of what it means to belong. Belonging implies forming a part, or being a member, of something, and ‘suited’ or ‘fitting’ with it (Brownlee, 2020: 17).¹² Belonging is closely related to identification, for we typically feel belonging in a place that fits with aspects of our identity including our values, preferences, roles, abilities and activities. When at home, the place identified with typically becomes ‘part of our extended mind’ (Nine, 2018: 241). Identification, in turn, involves developing cognitive and emotional narratives (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 202) that connect us to something external to ourselves. Although where we belong may be imposed or assigned to us externally and involuntarily, it is often a voluntary and subjective process.

These definitions enable us to distinguish more clearly between place and home. Through them, we can appreciate that one can be emplaced without being homed: a migrant worker, for instance, may locate themselves within a meaningful social field elsewhere without viewing that place as their home. Conversely, one may conceivably be homed without being securely emplaced; for instance, in cases where stigmatised individuals may lack any accepted place in society but nevertheless develop personal belonging in a particular location despite this. Overall, although it is possible to be displaced without being unhomed, and vice versa, in many cases the two go hand in hand, for when people imbue locations with meaning, the belonging that is characteristic of home often results. The migrant worker may, during their

¹¹ However, the concepts of home and place can be decoupled: in the adage that ‘home is where the heart is’, loss of home occurs through loss of relationships, not a specific place. However, given my focus on *displacement*, I concentrate on paradigmatic cases where homes are place-based.

¹² Belonging often connotes idealised states of security and comfort (Easthope, 2004: 134). However, it is important to distinguish between *ideal* and *non-ideal* conceptions of belonging and, by extension, place and home: the terms can also be used to allow that one may be emplaced/homed in insecure and unjust situations, with feminist scholars emphasising the oppressive character of many homes (e.g. Young, 2005). If home is a place in which one belongs, and one may sustain belonging even in deeply harmful places, then we should favour the non-ideal conception.

residence, come to identify with their location such that it becomes their home. For this reason, I refer to displacement as a loss of place *and/or* home, to recognise both the distinctiveness of, and overlap between, the two notions. In contrast, defining displacement as unhoming, while appropriately recognising the strong overlap between the notions of place and home, misses these more subtle distinctions between them.

These definitions also help to illuminate the losses that may constitute displacement. If place is a meaningful social location, then its loss occurs when someone becomes unable to occupy it, either because of their physical relocation from it (in mobile displacement), or because it no longer exists despite their continued presence in the physical space where it was (in displacement without movement). If home consists of belonging in a place, then displacement occurs when the conditions that underpin this belonging can no longer be sustained. In mobile displacement, forced migrants often still feel belonging in relation to their places of origin, but lack access to those places and any sense of belonging in their new locations. In displacement without movement, negative change to one's home environment drives a loss of belonging, not a lack of access to a place that still exists. These changes mean that the site of home no longer fits one's identity or the narratives that one cultivated about it. This leads to a separation from one's place and/or home that can be understood as a form of alienation. As Leopold (2022) has suggested, alienation can be seen as 'the problematic separation of a subject and object that belong together', and in this context the loss involves an estrangement between a person and the place and/or home with which they used to fit and identify.

Beyond this, we cannot provide any definitive list of the losses precipitating displacement without movement, for all depends on what an individual's belonging with their place and/or home was based upon, which could theoretically be any aspect of their life. The loss of one aspect of someone's life could provoke displacement if it were closely linked to

their place and/or home, while the same loss for another person may not displace them in the absence of such a link. While many aspects of people's lives have *some* link to their place and/or home, it is possible to lose some of these while remaining fundamentally emplaced, providing their belonging is based on conditions that remain intact or sufficiently unaffected.

Nevertheless, some goods are typically linked very closely to people's place and/or home in practice, and so we can identify various losses that predictably often generate displacement without movement. Notably, many of these losses have also been highlighted in recent theorising on mobile displacement, including losses of autonomy, livelihood, status, community, health or homeland (see e.g. Espejo, 2024; Miller, 2024; Santi Amantini, 2024). Again, as such losses will only prompt displacement if they are linked to someone's place and/or home, they should be understood as contingent rather than constitutive, and sufficient but unnecessary, drivers of displacement.

Indeed, some scholars mistake contingent causes of displacement for constitutive ones, moving too quickly from their chosen case-studies to general definitions. For instance, understanding displacement as intrinsically coercive (Ali, 2023), or as necessarily resulting from dispossession (Ramsay and Askland, 2022: 615) overlooks various cases in which one may be displaced without being coerced or dispossessed by an agent, such as in cases of environmental disaster (Owen, 2024: 275). Similarly, in claiming that the notion of in situ displacement 'focuses on the plights of marginalized peoples who...remain in place', Feldman (2021: 272-273) overlooks the fact that such marginalisation is just one source of displacement alongside others.

The Conditions of Displacement without Movement

The foregoing discussion leads us to a set of conditions under which an individual undergoes full displacement without movement.¹³ Someone is displaced in this way when:

1. They experience a loss of place and/or home, consisting of an inability (a) to continue occupying a meaningful social field (a loss of place); and/or (b) to sustain their previous belonging in a place (a loss of home), while occupying the same physical location;
2. Their inability to sustain their identification with a place leads to alienation from it;
3. The loss is rooted in significant material and/or social changes to their habitual environments;
4. The loss is significantly involuntary;
5. The loss goes beyond a mere shift in their place and/or home, even if aspects of their environment remain recognisable;
6. The loss persists despite any cognitive reappraisal of their place and/or home they have undertaken.¹⁴

We can helpfully use these conditions to assess whether and how various political, social and economic processes precipitate displacement, from clear-cut to more marginal and controversial cases.¹⁵ First, many cases of military occupation are highly likely to meet all these conditions for most or all of those affected, as they often involve an alienating transformation of their social field and material environments that destroys their belonging, and which

¹³ Following earlier discussion, 'full' displacement refers to cases where someone is displaced not only materially, but materially *and* psychologically.

¹⁴ These conditions are listed in rough order of importance, based on their centrality to my account, rather than their order of exposition in the previous section.

¹⁵ I do not relate these conditions systematically to each case that I discuss, but apply them only illustratively.

cognitive reappraisal may be incapable of fully reversing. While cases such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine have prompted large-scale flight, they may also result in involuntary immobility and displacement without movement, with one Ukrainian volunteer who remained describing the situation as one where 'someone comes to our country and takes away the place [where] we live' (quoted in Rimpiläinen, 2022).

In another fairly clear-cut example, take processes of gentrification in Western cities, where the arrival of the more affluent into neighbourhoods marginalises poorer residents. While displacement in this context often involves evictions and short-distance urban mobility, it may also occur without movement. Even if residents remain in their usual dwellings, gentrification often seriously undercuts their belonging in their neighbourhoods, due to feelings of being 'othered' by newcomers (Valli, 2016: 1195) and that new services are not 'for us' (Atkinson, 2015: 385). This has been characterised as an 'affective' or 'symbolic' displacement (Butcher and Dickens, 2016; Atkinson, 2015). The material and social changes of gentrification are imposed on residents involuntarily, being typically decided by more powerful actors such as landlords and developers (Hoover, 2023: 947). Although in some cases adjustment may allow residents to remain emplaced, and changes may not remove all elements of their homes, a 'loss of place' (Atkinson, 2015: 382) is a predictable part of contemporary gentrification.

The conditions outlined above can also help to diagnose more controversial cases, such as the claim that immigration may displace local communities. This idea has become strongly associated with anti-immigration politics within the global North. For instance, one study found that between around 25-50% of respondents in various European countries agreed that 'there are so many foreigners living round here, it doesn't feel like home anymore' (YouGov, 2016). To better understand whether and how immigration may cause displacement, it is helpful to distinguish between different scenarios. Having already dismissed the possibility of purely psychological displacement, I set aside cases of people feeling displaced by immigration

despite living in communities unaffected by it. In contrast, there are at least two scenarios where displacement could be rooted in genuine material and social changes wrought by immigration, whether due to immigrants' choices to settle in certain areas or government dispersal policies. First, these changes may provoke 'xenophobic displacement', whereby some feel displaced given their racism or hostility to newcomers. Second, displacement may be driven by an 'affective ambivalence' which includes an 'existential unease in the face of cultural strangeness' (van Leeuwen, 2008: 147) and cannot be reduced to prejudice.

In many cases, these scenarios will not involve displacement, for unease or prejudice towards newcomers may modify residents' place and/or home, without entailing any fuller loss of it, as many of their normal place-based networks and activities may remain intact. However, in cases of larger-scale immigration that precipitates more significant material and social changes in neighbourhoods, some residents will find their belonging in their homes disrupted involuntarily, given that they may result from governmental policies or migrants' individual decisions, rather than their own choice.¹⁶

Another more marginal case concerns personal losses. This is because a broadening of the notion of displacement to encompass in situ loss means that we cannot automatically exclude personal losses such as bereavement or redundancy where they involve a loss of place and/or home. Even if displacement is not a genuinely universal condition, it is true that frequent events in the normal life-course may prompt it. If we apply the conditions above, however, we can see that personal losses may or may not precipitate displacement. On the one hand, given that people's place and/or home is typically formed by a complex patchwork of activities and

¹⁶ Political theorists should not shy away from this likelihood or reason in reverse from their ethical convictions to conclude that immigration does not cause displacement, for this would create an apparent inconsistency between scholarly recognition that displacement is often caused by gentrifiers and denial that it can be caused by immigrants, even though both cases involve population movements into neighbourhoods (see Lopez-Cantero, 2025).

connections, losing a partner or career may create a negative shift in one's belonging in one's habitual place, but not wholesale loss. It may also be that a person or job had great personal significance for someone, but their sense of place was defined relatively independently of these. Providing one's sense of place is linked to various social connections, and one's belonging has multiple bases, it is possible to remain fundamentally emplaced/homed following bereavement or redundancy. If one can sustain narratives about one's belonging in a place despite a loss, that may be sufficient to avoid overall alienation from one's habitual environment.

On the other hand, if a person's belonging in a place has a single source in a relationship or job, then that creates far greater vulnerability to displacement following their loss. With all their eggs in one basket, so to speak, their narratives about their home may be unsustainable in the absence of a central relationship or role, making alienation inevitable. It may be that a personal loss has an initially displacing effect, but cognitive reappraisal allows the grief to be overcome. In cases where an identification with a partner or job was single-minded or even obsessive, however, the displacement may persist indefinitely despite attempts at such reappraisal.

Two Advantages

While the argument so far has shown that we *can* coherently understand displacement independently of movement, it perhaps falls short in demonstrating equally forcefully that we *should* do so. Clearly, there is no logical compulsion to understand displacement in this way, and the question is not whether there is an objectively correct understanding of the term that we can reach, but whether revising it can be beneficial – whether theoretically, ethically or politically – according to our purposes in a given context. Instead of judging the notion of displacement without movement according to its fidelity to current usage or arguing that it is

the uniquely optimal concept for capturing a loss of place and/or home, I ask instead what might be gained by this revisionary account. In this section, I present two key advantages of recognising displacement without movement.

A Common Condition

The first advantage is both analytical and normative, pointing to how the notion identifies a common condition that unites the situation of those displaced both with and without movement: their shared loss of place and/or home. Analytically, the concept offers a lens that enables us to meaningfully bring together experiences that our ordinary categories would treat as separate, significantly changing our empirical understanding of social reality in this context. Normatively, it allows theorists to identify a widespread, and often unjust, global harm that is entangled with many social, political and economic processes worldwide. Given that, as I argue in the final section, people are entitled to develop and sustain a home due to its importance for our well-being and enjoyment of human rights, it belongs as a proper object of concern in normative debates concerning global justice.

To be plausible, however, this assertion of a common condition will need to accurately reflect the obvious differences, as well as the similarities, between those displaced with and without movement, not least the fact that only the former group moves anywhere. It will also need to be shown that we are dealing with a genuinely common *condition*, rather than a mere *similarity*, *parallel* or perhaps only metaphorical *analogy* between the two groups. However, one indication that this is a genuinely common condition is the fact that those displaced with and without movement typically experience the same cluster of negative affective states listed above, such as disorientation, dislocation and dispossession. I suggested above that such states only translate into a condition of displacement when they arise from a loss of place and/or

home. However, the fact that these states reliably arise among two ostensibly distinct groups strongly suggests that they can be understood as *symptoms* of a common condition arising from a single source. This is not to deny that there are cases where the situations of those displaced with movement *are* sufficiently different from those experiencing place-based changes in situ that using ‘displacement’ to describe both would be unwarranted. Again, if the latter experience place-based shifts rather than losses, then there is a similarity or parallel, not a common condition. Yet, in many other cases, this usage is appropriate.

A Pathway to Solidarity

The second advantage is ethical and political: recognising this common condition may act as a pathway to various forms of solidarity among seemingly divergent groups in a political climate across the global North in which such solidarity is, from the perspective of those concerned to protect the rights of the displaced, both much-needed and in badly short supply. The basic line of thought runs as follows. Following their flight, forced migrants routinely face forms of hostility and othering that are uncontroversially unjust. This treatment stems from a belief held by some citizens in receiving societies that the displaced are not like them and not fit to join their community. In democratic societies where public opinion shapes immigration policy, this hostility is a serious obstacle to policies that protect the rights of the displaced. Given that much forced migration occurs in the global South (UNHCR, 2025), the standard view of displacement arguably reinforces popular belief throughout the global North in the otherness of the displaced.

In contrast, the notion of displacement without movement can potentially challenge this process of othering, by highlighting commonalities between forced migrants and citizens in receiving states facing place-based losses linked to processes including environmental change,

gentrification and deindustrialisation. Unlike mainstream presentations of mobile displacement as a rare, dramatic event, emphasising these commonalities may ‘deexceptionalise’ displacement (Cabot and Ramsay, 2022) and demonstrate its ubiquity (Ramsay and Askland, 2022: 602). Recognising displacement ‘as a more common than exclusive condition...could form a point of connection’ (Pfoser and de Jong, 2017), supporting the development of solidarity among forced migrants and established residents.

However, solidarity comes in various forms, and the notion of displacement without movement will likely be able to foster some of these forms, but not others. Although solidarity involves an ‘affirmation of togetherness’ (Woods, 2020: 510), such unity may manifest in different ways. As Sally Scholz (2008) has argued, *social* solidarity (among a community defined by shared characteristics) differs from *civic* solidarity (which pertains to the obligations of civil society to protect its citizens arising from their interdependence and shared vulnerability), which in turn differs from *political* solidarity (where people commit to a shared project that challenges injustice). Could the notion of displacement without movement foster these forms of solidarity?

Given that, as I have argued, those displaced both with and without movement have a shared characteristic, this could form the basis of social solidarity among them. In many cases, however, such solidarity will be lacking, for individuals in these two groups are often geographically dispersed, unaware of each other, or lack other shared characteristics that could also generate it. In this way, the shared characteristic in question – the fact of having lost one’s place and/or home – may seem rather thin, especially when compared to paradigmatic cases of social solidarity among close-knit communities. However, the overcoming of such barriers could allow social solidarity to result, perhaps most readily among those living in the same communities, but even if the displaced remained dispersed (as in cases of social solidarity across nation-states). Recognising this characteristic may therefore develop into what Ashley

Taylor (2015: 128) has dubbed ‘robust solidarity’, whereby ‘individuals act with a group as a result of obligations incurred because of membership in that group’. This may be facilitated by the discovery of other affinities (of religion, political affiliation, or even a collective history of forced migration) among those displaced with and without movement (see Hobbs and Souter, 2020).

Civic solidarity, contrastingly, has seemingly limited relevance to the kinds of cases envisaged here, although it may develop when IDPs flee to areas where they retain entitlements to public services alongside those displaced without movement, or if the displaced and non-displaced came to recognise their interdependence through participation within ‘regional or global civic institutions’ (Sandelind and Ulaş, 2020: 567). Political solidarity, however, has greater pertinence here, for recognising a common condition of displacement could motivate a shared commitment to alleviating its unjust harms. Insofar as displacement both with and without movement is driven by common political and economic structures, such solidarity could involve recognition that clamouring for one group’s rights can further those of the other. Scholz (2008: 39) has observed that political solidarity may give rise to social solidarity, and this could occur in this context through the development of relevant institutions that constituted the displaced as a ‘global community of interests’ (Cole, 2022: 230), in turn fostering transnational solidarities (see Gould, 2007).

Importantly, political solidarity here can encompass the non-displaced, who may also commit to alleviate the harms of displacement. This may enable what Taylor (2015: 128) has described as ‘expressional solidarity’, whereby individuals ‘express empathy or support for a group in which they have never actually participated, and whom they could not possibly be considered to be acting with’. As this form of solidarity is not grounded in a common condition, any looser parallels, similarities or analogies between displaced and non-displaced people’s experiences of loss or change could all be grist to the solidaristic mill. The development of

genuine political solidarity here would involve rejecting the frequent interpellation of the non-displaced as saviours and the displaced as victims, instead striving for a relation of equality among them (Woods, 2020: 521). This, in turn, would involve navigating marked power imbalances between displaced and non-displaced persons, often requiring deference by the latter to the former's lived experience (see Woods and Hobbs, 2024).

There is also another way in which recognition of displacement without movement may generate political solidarity more broadly. The notion helps us to 'link the patterned character of the contemporary global context of displacement to a history of prior displacements' (Owen, 2024: 276), such as slavery and colonialism. Although both of these injustices involved large-scale forced movement, this wider lens also brings into focus a range of losses experienced by the colonised in their habitual locations, including various forms of alienation (Lu, 2023). Recognition of these losses, particularly where they persist into the present, can help to ground wider calls for reparation which, if accepted by citizens of former colonial powers, may in turn ground political and expressional solidarity towards formerly colonised groups.

However, there are at least two objections that can be raised against the idea that the notion of displacement without movement may act as a pathway to solidarity. First, it might be objected here that this argument overestimates the power of concepts such as displacement to instigate political change (see Buxton, 2024: 176). However, the argument is simply that a broader view of displacement has solidaristic *potential*, not that this will always be realised. While some theoretical work on solidarity with the displaced rests partly on untested empirical claims (e.g. Hobbs and Souter, 2020), social-scientific research would be needed to establish under what conditions the notion could realise this potential. Moreover, the suggestion is not that presenting this theoretical argument would somehow immediately induce solidarity, but rather that ongoing civil society efforts to promote the idea could gradually develop it. To be

effective, this would have to go well beyond abstract theorising to include testimonies, storytelling, arts-based interventions and political rhetoric.¹⁷

Second, this argument might be thought to overlook how the notion of displacement without movement would likely function in the current context of anti-immigration politics in Western states. The concern here is that nativist, populist politicians could *mobilise* the notion to argue that locals are suffering displacement by immigrants to justify the latter's exclusion. This has historical precedent, for in his notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968, the British politician, Enoch Powell, warned of white Britons becoming 'strangers' in their 'own country' (Solomos, 2019: 203). While the social-scientific literature cited above implicitly presents the notion as a progressive means to diagnose injustice, in this context the notion may *legitimise* it in practice, fuelling division over solidarity.

While this is a general danger, it can be countered in solidaristic ways. The notion has more potential for solidarity than division overall, for whenever anti-immigrant politicians appealed to it, they would be inadvertently planting the seeds of solidarity, by implicitly asserting a commonality with the people they wish to exclude, handing their opponents an opportunity to highlight this. Recognising that mobile displacement may at times lead to the secondary displacement of residents provides potential grounds for both displaced immigrants and established residents to recognise a common condition and to develop a form of emplacement, based on social and political solidarity, together.

It is also quite possible to recognise this secondary displacement while nevertheless pursuing a globally solidaristic, progressive immigration politics. Where someone experiences xenophobic displacement, we can recognise their displacement while arguing that the proper response is their own cognitive reappraisal of the changes occurring around them (however

¹⁷ For analysis of storytelling as a potential practice of solidarity with refugees, see Woods (2020).

unlikely this may be to occur). If dispersal policies unfairly concentrate immigrants in deprived areas lacking the public services to adapt successfully, it can be argued that the best response is greater investment in those services and the fairer distribution of immigrants across communities (Lopez-Cantero, 2025: 20). Moreover, displacement by immigration could, depending on the balance of moral considerations, conceivably justify some border control policies, particularly where that regulated the arrival of privileged migrants who have similar impacts to gentrifiers. Such policies would, however, fall far short of the sweeping kinds of exclusion supported by nativist political forces in the current climate.

The Normative Status of Displacement

So far, I have argued that the notion of displacement without movement is not only conceptually coherent, but advantageous in various ways. Importantly, however, this broadening of the idea of displacement has significant implications for its normative status; that is, its ability to ground ethical and political claims and to diagnose injustice. Political theorists have often, implicitly or explicitly, ascribed a strong normative status to displacement. For instance, Jamie Draper (2023: 315) argues that ‘IDPs bear a distinctive normative status that implies a set of rights...and correlate duties’, while Cole (2022: 17) contends that ‘all forced displacements are political, and all call for a political response’. Some even claim that displacement *is* injustice: Elliott-Cooper et al. (2020: 503) characterise gentrification-induced displacement as ‘an invidious form of socio-spatial injustice’.

However, introducing the notion of displacement without movement into such theorising appears to dilute this overall normative status. As we have seen, the term may apply to seemingly apolitical and morally neutral personal losses such as bereavements and redundancies, and not all cases of displacement require rectification of its external sources, as

indicated by cases of xenophobic displacement. Once we recognise the existence of displacement without movement, it is not possible to designate all instances of displacement as unjust and as generating claims for redress. Should we regard this as a theoretical and practical problem for the account advanced here?

One general reason why we should not is that the idea that the concept of displacement intrinsically implies rights and duties is problematic. This approach seems modelled on relevant legal and policy categories: the point of definitions in the 1951 Refugee Convention or the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* is to create a set of entitlements enjoyed by those falling within the relevant category. However, political theorists need not follow suit, for this risks putting the cart before the horse: we need to know who a category of people *are* before we can meaningfully decide what they are owed.¹⁸ If we do not, then there is a risk that particular normative, political or practical priorities distort our understanding, creating categories that fail to track social reality. We may find that, once the relevant category is accurately outlined, we find that some within it have certain moral entitlements, while others do not. While ringfencing categories is important in law and policy to maintain a focus on populations of greatest concern, political theorists can afford to adopt a more expansive approach. If theorists can distinguish between narrow legal definitions and broader theoretical accounts of the refugee (e.g. Owen, 2019), recognising that some accounts are theoretically sound but practically risky (Ferracioli, 2014), they can also do so concerning displacement.

We should also reject the idea that displacement automatically entails injustice. We can see why by considering what general entitlements people have to develop and sustain a place and/or home. An account of these entitlements can begin by positing a general right to the basic conditions of our well-being, and showing that place and home promotes many of these (see

¹⁸ This parallels the claim that an account of refugeehood should be ‘prior to a theory and policy of entitlements’ (Shacknove, 1985: 277).

Nine, 2018). These include safety, individuation, privacy and preservation, which Young (2005: 151-153) described as four ‘normative values of home’. Although there is no recognised human right to emplacement or a home per se, basic human rights provide many of the capacities necessary to develop and sustain one (understood as including, but not limited to, shelter), such as rights to adequate housing and standard of living, family life, and to free association with others to form the relationships which may constitute a home and fulfil our ‘fundamental social needs’ within it (Jenkins and Brownlee, 2022: 443). This is not to claim that place and/or home *guarantees* the protection of these human rights – as, again, the existence of oppressive homes demonstrates – but that it is one important element of respect for basic rights. Beyond the physical home, we can posit a general democratic entitlement for people to shape the character of their habitual places. If change is imposed on communities by external or profit-led interests without consultation or compensation, unjust displacement is far more likely than if it occurs through their equal democratic input as stakeholders.

Given these general entitlements, there should be an initial *presumption* that displacement is unjust and wrongful, and generates claims for redress. Displacement is, after all, often one element of larger, ongoing injustices. Nevertheless, this presumption can be defeated by considerations such as the rights of others or an overriding collective interest. Individually, displacement may be necessary to escape an oppressive home with which one nevertheless identifies. Collectively, displacing privileged individuals from positions of power around which they have built their homes is often necessary to create a more just society.

Overall, the harms of displacement are wrongful when they are imposed without any justification that could not reasonably be rejected by the displaced. Displacement, however, typically generates at least *some* moral or political claims for redress or remedy, even if it is not unjust. Unjust displacement clearly creates claims for redress, and these may include cases of bereavement or redundancy (where they occur given social systems that leave some more

vulnerable to premature death or poverty than others). Morally neutral or problematic cases, contrastingly, may generate a claim for a remedy, although this will not generally be a claim for intervention in the material or social situation that prompted the displacement, either because it *cannot*, or *should not*, be changed. Obviously, a loved-one's death cannot be reversed and, in cases of xenophobic displacement, the response should not involve the exclusion of the immigrants who are the focus of it. Nevertheless, those displaced by such factors are, at least, entitled as a matter of civic solidarity to psychological and/or material support where needed, to assist their adjustment to unavoidable and/or legitimate change.

The idea that the concept of displacement without movement dilutes displacement's overall normative status also partly depends on exaggerating the normative status of mobile displacement, for it depends on the idea that mobile displacement has a strong normative status which is then weakened once displacement without movement is also recognised. Yet, on closer inspection, we can see that mobile and in situ forms of displacement are more alike in this regard than we might originally think. Just as some instances of displacement without movement are not unjust, there are tragic cases in which mobile displacement may be justifiable (Souter, 2022: ch. 5), such as through necessary and proportionate forcible intervention to halt atrocities or development projects that are vital for a population's basic needs. Recognising that the harms of displacement without movement are not necessarily unjust is not, therefore, such a radical departure after all.

Conclusion

In this article, I have challenged the orthodoxy in international policy and normative political theory that displacement entails forced movement. I have developed an account that defines displacement fundamentally as a loss of place and/or home, whether or not that involves

movement, and argued that there are two key advantages to this approach: it demonstrates a common condition, and offers a potential pathway to solidarity among the displaced and non-displaced alike. We have seen that the notion of displacement without movement appears to dilute displacement's normative status. I have argued that this implication is not problematic for my account and we should recognise that not all cases of displacement involve injustice. Overall, this article has highlighted an overlooked global harm that deserves far greater attention within normative political theory.

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