

I was sad when I heard that the bulldozers had demolished the Eritrean church right in the heart of the so called Calais Jungle

When I visited the refugee village in October I remember standing in that church – a makeshift structure of salvaged wood and tarpaulin – and it felt like one of the most peaceful and beautiful sacred spaces I had been to in my life – it had such integrity – built by the bare hands of refugees and volunteers in the chaos of uncertainty and suffering – it seemed like living proof that faith is not a luxury – that the human being needs to seek out God or the precious experience of being known and being part of an immense whole

Of course on another level it needed to be demolished – people fleeing war should not have to live in a shanty town on rough ground with minimal sanitation

There were kitchens everywhere – reflecting so many cuisines – Syrian, Afghanistan, Sudanese and as we walked down the streets of mud there were lovely and exotic smells that I am sure for many refugees were infused with a sense of home

A few days ago when one refugee was being pressured by police to move from his tent to a heated container with no cooking facilities was being interviewed by a journalist – he said he just wanted to be allowed to cook his own food and eat with friends – the words of the poem about the kitchen table came into my mind – that people across the world have a basic human right to sit around their kitchen table or their equivalent - in peace and create community.

Many of the refugees have had to flee violence and brutality in their own country and are in search of the most fundamental and basic resources a human can need – a sense of home – peace, safety, shelter, community

In Jesus' parable the Wise and Foolish Builders from the gospel of Matthew he warns against building our life on sand and uncertainty – it is the wise man who builds his house and builds his faith on rock. I am struck that all those refugees in Calais and Dunkirk who appear to have extraordinary strength of will and sense of hope in a better life despite living on sand - just waste ground or a no man's land where politicians are denying them the right to put down foundations or roots

Across Europe a humanitarian crisis is building daily, with a thousand refugees arriving in Greece everyday yet our European leaders cannot seem to come together around their kitchen table and agree on a compassionate, responsible solution

What struck me in the Calais Jungle was the determined and honest and basic need for a place to call home that many of the refugees are searching for – a secure and healthy environment to bring up a family - yet in increasingly in the UK and possibly across Europe and the US we seem to be allowing a skewed and problematic way of valuing the institution of home. In the UK council houses have been forcefully sold off by Governments and now even housing associations are going to be forced to sell off their flats to private landlords – the slow privatisation of property – homes have been turned from a place where human beings have a right to be and find security to units of investment and commerce. The statistics are alarming – the average price of a house in London is now over half a million pounds and across England nearly £200,000 while homelessness is on the increase – Crisis, the homeless charity, estimates that on any one night in England there are around 3,500 rough sleepers and during 2014-15 there were around 7,500 people in London who slept rough at some point in the year – a shocking 1 in 10 people have been homeless at some point in their lives. So while we look at a growing humanitarian disaster – around 700,000 migrants now in Europe some Western societies seem to be creating their own huge social problems in the way we value and manage our housing

In the UK – I don't know if it's the same in France – we seem to have a growing obsession with ownership of property – home as a commodity – are we collectively acting like the rich fool in another parable from Jesus in the gospel of Luke who stored all his wealth in silos and then died before he could find joy? Do we really truly own any piece of land?

The Moment by Margaret Atwood

The moment when, after many years
of hard work and a long voyage
you stand in the centre of your room,
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,
knowing at last how you got there,
and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose
their soft arms from around you,
the birds take back their language,
the cliffs fissure and collapse,
the air moves back from you like a wave
and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing.
You were a visitor, time after time
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.
We never belonged to you.
You never found us.
It was always the other way round.

The American poet Wendell Berry says something similar when he says 'wild creatures belong to a place by nature but us humans can only belong by understanding and by virtue'

I wonder also in the Western world despite all our relative affluence and riches we are not so good at making a home in ourselves – feeling at home in our own skin

There's a scene in Winnie the Pooh by AA Milne when Pooh goes to visit Rabbit:

Well, he was humming this hum to himself, walking along gaily, wondering what everybody else was doing, and what it felt like, being somebody else, when suddenly he came to a sandy bank, and in the bank was a large hole.

So he bent down, put his head into the hole, and called out:

"Is anybody at home?"

There was a sudden scuffling noise from inside the hole, and then silence.

"What I said was, 'Is anybody at home?'" called out Pooh very loudly.

"No!" said a voice; and then added, "You needn't shout so loud. I heard you quite well the first time."

"Bother!" said Pooh. "Isn't there anybody here at all?"

"Nobody."

Winnie-the-Pooh took his head out of the hole, and thought for a little, and he thought to himself, "There must be somebody there, because somebody must have said 'Nobody.'" So he put his head back in the hole, and said: "Hallo, Rabbit, isn't that you?"

"No," said Rabbit, in a different sort of voice this time.

"But isn't that Rabbit's voice?"

"I don't think so," said Rabbit. "It isn't meant to be."

"Oh!" said Pooh.

He took his head out of the hole, and had another think, and then he put it back, and said:

"Well, could you very kindly tell me where Rabbit is?"

"He has gone to see his friend Pooh Bear, who is a great friend of his."

"But this is Me!" said Bear, very much surprised.

"What sort of Me?"

"Pooh Bear."

"Are you sure?" said Rabbit, still more surprised.

"Quite, quite sure," said Pooh.

"Oh, well, then, come in."

This is fun and charming and I wonder if it playfully explores the way many of us are not at home in ourselves when we think we are. Perhaps a lot of distress and mental illness is caught up in the struggle many of us can experience in simply being and living in our own bodies

Mindfulness appears to be huge in the UK at the moment – I applaud this – the simple yet sometimes frustratingly difficult process of being here now in this unique moment

One of the central teachings from Buddhism is the daily practice of sitting with yourself fully – being here not somewhere else

Yet it seems to me that half of the messages we get from advertising are hooking us in to this idea that to be happy or indeed to find a sense of home we need to get somewhere else – to escape from here

Dan Fox wrote an article in the Guardian recently called ‘Who are you calling pretentious?’ says:

Marketing lures consumers – particularly urban, middle-class ones – with games of linguistic pretence. The “home-made”, the “natural”, the “organic”, and the “farm-raised” play on fantasies of our own ecological responsibility in the food we buy, or nostalgia for meals just like your mum probably never made.

Think of the exotic and romantic evocations named by perfumes and aftershaves – Oriental Lace, Euphoria, La Nuit de l’Homme, Midnight Poison, Possession

Car names provide deliciously absurd examples. Ford Aspire, Citroën Picasso, Lincoln Navigator, Honda Element, Austin Allegro, Oldsmobile Starfire, Toyota Highlander, Jeep Renegade, Buick Wildcat, Ferrari Testarossa, Porsche Cayenne, VW Scirocco, Dodge Charger, Chevrolet Cavalier, Plymouth Fury Golden Commando, Vauxhall Tigra, Kia Picanto, Renault Captor, Mitsubishi Shogun. The names are patently ridiculous. Will you become a feudal Japanese general as you do the school run behind the wheel of a Shogun? That’s for you and your grip on reality to decide, but these pretences speak of the powerful lure of lifestyle, of chasing proximity to happiness or prestige (though not in the case of the workaday Shogun).

Aspiration is the sense of dislocation between our present state and what we hope will make life easier, more tolerable.

Maybe it is increasingly challenging to find a sense of home in ourselves when we are daily bombarded by seductive and subtle images and strap lines that strengthen our fantasy to be somewhere else – that if we try hard enough we will find the Eldorado of home beyond the horizon, rather than right here, now

So isn’t this life of ours full of ironies. A basic human need – to be at home around the kitchen table – yet millions in war torn regions have their home lives shattered and for all our freedom and luxury in more stable parts of the

world I think we are more challenged spiritually and psychologically to find home.

I'll leave you with Benjamin Zephaniah's poem called We Refugees. It is a challenging poem – I don't think he is trying to claim we are all refugees but he is saying we are all human beings and we have all had experiences of standing up for something we believe in or something or someone we value hugely being threatened or the feeling of being in a state of flux....

We Refugees

I come from a musical place
Where they shoot me for my song
And my brother has been tortured
By my brother in my land.

I come from a beautiful place
Where they hate my shade of skin
They don't like the way I pray
And they ban free poetry.

I come from a beautiful place
Where girls cannot go to school
There you are told what to believe
And even young boys must grow beards.

I come from a great old forest
I think it is now a field
And the people I once knew
Are not there now.

We can all be refugees
Nobody is safe,
All it takes is a mad leader
Or no rain to bring forth food,
We can all be refugees
We can all be told to go,
We can be hated by someone
For being someone.

I come from a beautiful place

Where the valley floods each year
And each year the hurricane tells us
That we must keep moving on.

I come from an ancient place
All my family were born there
And I would like to go there
But I really want to live.

I come from a sunny, sandy place
Where tourists go to darken skin
And dealers like to sell guns there
I just can't tell you what's the price.

I am told I have no country now
I am told I am a lie
I am told that modern history books
May forget my name.

We can all be refugees
Sometimes it only takes a day,
Sometimes it only takes a handshake
Or a paper that is signed.
We all came from refugees
Nobody simply just appeared,
Nobody's here without a struggle,
And why should we live in fear
Of the weather or the troubles?
We all came here from somewhere.

[Benjamin Zephaniah](#)