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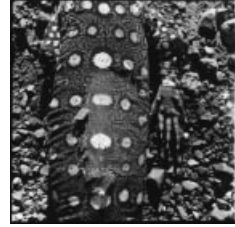
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Home and away

Narratives of migration and estrangement

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ABSTRACT ● This article examines the relationship between migration and identity by complicating our notion of what 'home' means, both for the narrative of 'being at home' and for the narrative of 'leaving home'. It offers, not a migrant ontology, but a consideration of the historical determination of patterns of estrangement in which the living and yet mediated relation between being, home and world is partially reconfigured from the perspective of those who have left home. This reconfiguration does not take place through the heroic act of an individual (the migrant), but through the forming of communities that create multiple identifications through collective acts of remembering in the absence of a shared knowledge or a familiar terrain. The article interweaves a variety of different texts: short stories by Asian women in Britain, autobiographical reflection, theoretical constructions of migrancy and literature from two very different nomadic or migrant communities, the Global Nomads International and the Asian Women's Writing Collective. The article provides a critique of recent theories of migrancy – and nomadism – as inherently transgressive, or as an ontological condition (where what we have in common is the loss of a home). The author argues that it is through an uncommon estrangement that the possibility of migrant communities comes to be lived. That is, it is the uncommon estrangement of migration that allows migrant subjects to remake what it is they might yet have in common. ●

KEYWORDS ● bodies ● communities ● estrangement ● globality ● home ● identity ● memory ● migration ● nomads ● transgression

> I strolled around in the Invalides for quite some time after my father's depar-
> ture. There was always something comforting, familiar about airports and air
> terminals. They give me a sense of purpose and security. I was there with a
> definite destination – usually home, somewhere. In London, I came 'home' at
> the end of the day. During the holidays, I came 'home' to Paris and family.
> And once every two years, we went 'home' to India on 'Home leave'. India
> was 'real' home, and yet, paradoxically, it was the one place we didn't have
> a home of our own any more. We always stayed as guests. Of course we'd
> had a home once, but, when India was divided, it was all lost – the house, the
> city, everything. I couldn't remember anything. (Dhingra, 1993: 99)

What does it mean to be at home? How does it affect home and being-
at-home when one leaves home? In Dhingra's story, the familiar place, the
place that is comfortable and comforting, is the in-between space, the inter-
val, of the airport. Such a space is comforting, not because one has arrived,
but because one has the security of a destination, a destination which quite
literally becomes the somewhere of home. Home is here, not a particular
place that one simply inhabits, but more than one place: there are too many
homes to allow place to secure the roots or routes of one's destination. It is
not simply that the subject does not belong anywhere. The journey between
homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but
a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of
the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival.

Interestingly, it is the 'real' home, the very space from which one imag-
ines oneself to have originated, and in which one projects the self as both
homely and original, that is the most unfamiliar: it is here that one is a guest,
relying on the hospitality of others. It is this home which, in the end,
becomes Home through the very *failure* of memory: 'I couldn't remember
anything.' The very failure of individual memory is compensated for by col-
lective memory, and the writing of the history of a nation, in which the
subject can allow herself to fit in by being assigned a place in a forgotten
past: 'Of course we'd had a home once, but, when India was divided, it was
all lost – the house, the city, everything.' It is in the discussion of what 'was
all lost' that the subject moves from an 'I' to a 'we': when the subject returns
to the real Home, the 'we' becomes writeable as a story of a shared past
which is already lost. It is through the very loss of a past (the sharing of the
loss, rather than the past as sharing) that the 'we' comes to be written as
Home. It is hence the act of forgetting that allows the subject to identify
with a history, to find out, to discover, what one has already lost: here, what
is already lost is the phantastic 'we' of a nation, city and house.

In some sense, the narrative of leaving home produces too many homes
and hence no Home, too many places in which memories attach themselves
through the carving out of inhabitable space, and hence no place in which
memory can allow the past to reach the present (in which the 'I' could

declare itself as having come home). The movement between homes hence allows Home to become a fetish, to become separated from the particular worldly space of living *here*, through the possibility of some memories and the impossibility of others. In such a narrative journey, then, the space which is most like home, which is most comfortable and familiar, is not the space of inhabitance – I am here – but the very space in which one finds the self as almost, but not quite, at home. In such a space, the subject has a desti-nation, an itinerary, indeed a future, but in having such a destination, has not yet arrived: 'There was always something comforting, familiar, about airports and air terminals. They give me a sense of purpose and security. I was there with a definite destination – usually home, somewhere.' Here, home is indeed elsewhere, but it is also where the self is going: home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place.

It is such transnational journeys of subjects and others that invite us to consider what it means to be at home, to inhabit a particular place, and might call us to question the relationship between identity, belonging and home. In this paper, I want to examine the effect of such transnational jour-neys on homely subjects. While the argument will be developed through con-sidering the perspective of the subject who has left home on the relationship between the subject and the place which the subject inhabits, I will not assume that perspective *as* the migrant's perspective. Instead, the article will complicate our notion of what 'home' means, both for the narrative of 'being at home' and for the narrative of 'leaving home'. This article offers, not a migrant ontology, but a consideration of the historical determination of patterns of estrangement in which the living and yet mediated relation between being, home and world is partially reconfigured from the perspec-tive of those who have left home. This reconfiguration does not involve the heroic act of an individual, but takes place through the forming of com-munities that create multiple identifications through collective acts of remembering in the absence of a shared knowledge or a familiar terrain. The article will read a variety of different texts: autobiography, theories of migrancy and literature from two very different nomadic or migrant com-munities, the Global Nomads International and the Asian Women's Writing Collective.

Theorizing migrancy

Migration has been employed as a metaphor within contemporary critical theory for movement and dislocation, and the crossing of borders and boundaries. Such a generalization of the meaning of migration allows it to become celebrated as a transgressive and liberating departure from

living-as-usual in which identity (the subject as and at home) is rendered impossible. Certainly, in Iain Chambers's (1994) *Migrancy, Culture and Identity*, migration becomes a way of interrogating, not only the different social relations produced by the histories of the displacements of peoples, but the very nature of identity itself. Migration is one journey amongst a number of journeys which involve the crossing of borders: the migrant, like the exile and the nomad, crosses borders and breaks barriers of thought and experience (Chambers, 1994: 2).

In Chambers's work, migration, exile and nomadism do not simply refer to actual experiences of being dislocated from home, but become ways of thinking *without* home:

> For the nomadic experience of language wandering without a fixed home, dwelling at the crossroads of the world, bearing on a sense of being and difference, is no longer the expression of a unique tradition or history, even if it pretends to carry a single name. Thought wanders. It migrates, requires translation. (Chambers, 1994: 4)

In this sense, migration is generalized, such that it comes to represent the very nature of thinking itself, in which to think is to move, and to move away, from any fixed home or origin. While I will come back to how such a narrative itself constitutes home as a site or place of fixity, it is important to note here how migration becomes a mechanism for theorizing how identity itself is predicated on movement or loss. What is at stake in such a narrative?

In the first instance, one can consider how different kinds of journeys become conflated through the theorization of identity as migrancy. The shift in Chambers's work between the figures of the migrant, the nomad and the exile serves to erase the real and substantive differences between the conditions in which particular movements across spatial borders take place. For example, what different effect does it have on identity when one is forced to move? Does one ever move freely? What movements are possible and, moreover, what movements are impossible? Who has a passport and can move *there*? Who does not have a passport, and yet moves? These provocative questions echo Avtar Brah's when she asks: 'The question is not simply about who travels, but when, how, and under what circumstances?' (Brah, 1996: 182).

However, what is problematic about Chambers's narrative is not simply the fact that the differences between histories of movement are erased under the sign of migrancy, but also the slippage between literal migration and metaphoric migration. Literal migration suggests the physical movement of bodies within and across spaces. Indeed, there is no clear and obvious referent here: to talk about migration literally is to open oneself to the complex and contingent histories of the movements of people across borders. Chambers's narrative refuses to take migration literally. Instead, migration

becomes a metaphor for the very process of dislocation: this act of metaphorizing migration in some sense repeats the very process of migration, which involves a dislocation from place. In this sense, to use migration as metaphor, is to migrate from migration, such that it becomes an impossible metaphor that no longer refers to the dislocation from place, but dislocation as such (thought already dislocates). In this sense, the migrant becomes a figure: the act of granting the migrant the status *as* a figure (of speech) erases and conceals the historical determination of experiences of migration, even though those experiences cannot be reduced to a referent. As Narayan puts it: 'Postcolonial global reality is a history of multiple migrations, rooted in a number of different historical processes' (1997: 187). To talk literally about such migrations is to complicate rather than reduce the meaning of migration: it is to introduce questions of contexts (postcoloniality/globality), historicity, temporality and space.

In her discussion of the literature on exile, Anita Haya Goldman also discusses the problem of metaphorization: 'In current literary discussion, there has been a rather misleading tendency to use the term metaphorically, so that the experience of exile has come to mean, more broadly, the experience of difference and estrangement in society, and most broadly, an aspect of what is human in all of us' (Goldman, 1995: 180). Here, Goldman demonstrates how the gesture of taking exile as a metaphor works to generalize exile, such that it becomes an element in the very staging of 'the human'. We can see this in Chambers's treatment of migrancy: in essence, the metaphoric treatment leads to a thesis that 'we' are all migrants, that what 'we' have in common, is the experience of dislocation from home, as such. Indeed, what 'we' have in common is precisely the lack of being implicated in migrancy. In this sense, the figuring of the migrant as the impossibility of the human as homely ironically confirms the violence of humanism.

Furthermore, in such a metaphoric treatment of migration there is an implicit narrative at stake in which migration is equated with a movement that already destabilizes and transgresses all forms of boundary making:

> Migrancy . . . involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the process of home-coming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility. (Chambers, 1994: 4)

Here, migration is defined against identity; it is that which already threatens the closures of identity thinking. However, the conflation of migration with the transgression of boundaries in the impossibility of arriving at an identity is problematic. It assumes that migration has an inherent meaning: it constructs an essence of migration in order then to theorize that migration as a refusal of essence.

The implications of this gesture of essentializing migrancy as beyond essence are clear in a later passage. Here, Chambers discusses how an 'authentically migrant perspective' would be based on 'an intuition that the opposition between here and there is itself a cultural construction, a consequence of thinking in terms of fixed entities and defining them oppositionally' (Chambers, 1994: 42). Such an assumption of an authentic migrant perspective immediately constructs an inauthentic migrant: the inauthentic migrant would be the one who believes in fixed entities and who refuses to transgress. The production of authentic and inauthentic migrant perspectives clearly relies on assumptions of both what migration already is, as well as what it *should be*. Such an evaluative narrative, which creates a hierarchy of perspectives on migrancy, as it does on migrant perspectives, assumes not only that migrancy can be detached from the social relations in which it is lived, but that there are better and worse ways of 'being a migrant'. The violence of this gesture is clear: the experiences of migration, which can involve trauma and violence, become exoticized and idealized as the basis of an ethics of transgression, an ethics which assumes that it is possible to be liberated from identity as such, at the same time as it 'belongs' to an authentically migrant subject.

The designation of an authentically migrant perspective also involves the privileging of a certain kind of theoretical work: Chambers's work which at one level is on 'migrancy' (as its object of study), comes to name itself as an example of authentically migrant theorizing, a theorizing which refuses to think in terms of fixed entities. The claim to a migrant theory, or a theory which is multiple and transgressive given its dislocation from any secure origin or place, is also clearly evident in Rosi Braidotti's work, although here the privileged figure is 'the nomad'.[1] Braidotti considers that,

> though the image of 'nomadic subjects' is inspired by the experience of peoples or cultures that are literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour. . . . It is the subversion of conventions that define the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling. (Braidotti, 1994: 5)

Again, the relation between the literal and metaphoric is important. By separating her understanding of nomadism from those that are literally nomadic, Braidotti translates the literal into the metaphoric, such that the nomads come to perform a particular kind of theoretical work, to represent something other than themselves. The specificity and difference of particular nomadic peoples is hence alluded to (as an inspiration), and then erased (such that it is 'not the literal act of travelling'). The erasure of cultural difference through the figuring of the nomad as a general way of thinking turns into a kind of *critical self-consciousness*: in the end, what the nomad

comes to figure is the kind of subversion of conventions that the book constructs itself as doing.

The naming of theory as nomadic can here be understood in terms of the violence of translation, a form of translation which allows the theory to name itself as a subversion of conventions – the erasure of others allows 'the self' as 'critical consciousness' to appropriate all that is threatening under the sign of the nomadic. Indeed, quite noticeably, what is at stake here is a certain kind of western subject, the subject of and in theory, as a subject who is free to move. For Braidotti later states that the question of a critical nomadism is about choice: 'Homelessness as a chosen condition, also expresses the *choice* of a situated form of heterogeneity' (Braidotti, 1994: 17; emphasis mine). Here, what is at stake is a very liberal narrative of a subject who has autonomy and is free to choose, even if what is chosen is a refusal of the kind of subjectivity we might recognize as classically liberal. But the subject who has chosen to be homeless, rather than is homeless due to the contingency of 'external' circumstances, is certainly a subject who is privileged, and someone for whom having or not having a home does not affect their ability to occupy a given space. Is the subject who chooses homelessness and a nomadic lifestyle, or a nomadic way of thinking, one that can do so, *because the world is already constituted as their home*? Is this an example of movement as a form of privilege rather than transgression, a movement that is itself predicated on the translation of the collective and forced movements of others into an act of individual and free choice?[2] And, returning to Chambers, is the authentic migrant, who can 'give up' home in an ethics of transgression, also the one who is already constituted as at home in the world as such?

We can hence offer a very cautious reading of Braidotti's later return to the 'real nomads'. Here, she writes, 'just like real nomads – who are endangered species today, threatened with extinction – nomadic thinking is a minority position' (Braidotti, 1994: 29). First, we might note the use of analogy: the narrative claims that the real nomads and nomadic thought are like each other. They are presented as alike because both are on the margins, and by implication, both are endangered. What is at stake here is not only the loose nature of analogies which serve to flatten out real and substantive forms of difference into a form of in-difference (we are alike), but also how those analogies serve to construct what is nomadic thinking. It is the abstraction of thinking that we need to problematize: the representation of nomadism in terms of thought implies that it can be separated from the material social relations in which 'thought' itself is idealized as the rational capacity of well-educated subjects. To make an analogy between nomadic peoples and nomadic thought hence does not simply flatten out differences, but serves to elevate such thought to the level of being (by thinking as the nomad, I am endangered like the nomad). As such, it is the privilege of some beings over others (in the very detachment of thought from being) that is concealed in the analogy.

So, for Braidotti, the nomad is 'a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity', and a nomadic consciousness is, 'an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries' and 'the desire to go on trespassing, transgressing' (Braidotti, 1994: 36). We might consider how the very theoretical approach which privileges 'transgression' and 'subversion' and a lack of fixity, does not necessarily define itself simply against the law, convention and boundaries, but may actually serve to reconstitute the law, conventions and boundaries. We can ask: how can migratory subjects (the subjects written by such theories of migrancy) reclaim space and identity in their refusal to inhabit a particular space, in their very transgression of the law of home? My own consideration of how migrant ontology works as a form of humanism – we are all migrants – might suggest a way in which migratory subjects can claim space in their refusal of it.

In order to consider how movements of migratory subjects can involve a form of privilege, and can allow the creation of new forms of identity thinking, rather than their necessary dissolution, I want to consider the narratives offered by Global Nomads International (GNI). GNI is a volunteer organization that promotes the welfare of current and former 'internationally mobile' families and individuals through literature, conferences and education. Internationally mobile families is a term that refers largely to families who have spent significant times overseas as members of the diplomatic corps, the missionary movement or the military. In order to examine the organization, I will discuss contributions to the book, *Strangers at Home*, written by two of its past presidents.

Paul Asbury Seaman's contribution, 'Rediscovering a Sense of Place', begins with the grief of 'feeling like a refugee in my own country' (Seaman, 1996: 37), of not being at home in one's home. The feeling of displacement becomes a question of memory: 'Instinctively, I understood that to connect more fully in the present – to feel at home – I had to reconnect with my past' (Seaman, 1996: 38). Significantly, the desire to make connections given the sense of alienation from home – or the 'feeling of being at home in several countries, or cultures but not completely at home in any of them' (Seaman, 1996: 53) – leads to the discovery of a new community: 'Our community of strangers – our experience of family with our global nomads – is one of the large and often recognised paradoxes of this heritage' (Seaman, 1996: 53). Here, then, the sense of not being fully at home in a given place does not lead to a refusal of the very desire for home, and for a community and common heritage. Rather, the very experience of leaving home and 'becoming a stranger' leads to the creation of a new 'community of strangers', a common bond with those others who have 'shared' the experience of living overseas. We need to recognize the link between the suspension of a sense of having a home with the formation of new communities. The forming of a new community provides a sense of fixity through the language of heritage – a sense of inheriting a collective past *by*

sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home. In this sense, the movement of global nomads allows the fixing rather than unfixing of the boundaries implicated in community and identity formation. As Norma McCaig, the founding member of GNI, argues, 'That global nomads share a common heritage is clear when they meet . . . there is a sudden recognition of kinship' (McCaig, 1996: 115).

Indeed, in McCaig's contribution, 'Understanding Global Nomads', she discusses the *benefits* of a global nomad upbringing, a narrative which certainly uses the language of capital to illustrate how much individuals and families can gain from living overseas given the historical fact of globalization: 'In an era when global vision is an imperative, when skills in intercultural communication, linguistic ability, mediation, diplomacy, and the management of diversity are critical, global nomads are better equipped' (McCaig, 1996: 100). Here McCaig discusses global nomads as a highly skilled workforce whose ability to move across places, and between languages and culture, makes them better equipped and hence more useful to a globalized economy of difference. The ability to travel clearly gives global nomads access to a set of privileges, a set of equipment, which makes them highly commodifiable as skilled workers on a global landscape of difference and cultural exchange.

The skills of the global nomads are also associated with their ability to move beyond the boundaries of a given culture, to question those boundaries, and perhaps even to recognize their cultural constructedness (to allude here to Chambers's notion of an authentically migrant perspective). McCaig suggests that, 'The ease with which global nomads cruise global corridors often gives rise to an expanded world view, the capacity to extend their vision beyond national boundaries' (McCaig, 1996: 101). We can see here that the questioning of boundaries, and the movement across borders, leads to an expansion of vision, *an ability to see more*. Such a narrative clearly demonstrates how some movement across spaces becomes a mechanism for the reproduction of social privileges, the granting to some subjects the ability to see and to move beyond the confined spaces of a given 'home'. Indeed, McCaig quotes Margaret Push, who talks of the global nomad's ability 'to view the world'. The expansion of the meaning of 'home' is clearly evident here: by refusing to belong to a particular place, the world becomes the global nomad's home, granting to this nomadic subject the ability to inhabit the world as a familiar and knowable terrain.

Indeed, we can consider how the expansion of the meaning of home involves the creation of a new imagined home and community, that of the globe itself. Globality becomes a phantastic space: for example, the notion of 'global corridors' imagines a space in which globalization literally can take its shape, and through which global nomads can easily move. McCaig ends her article by quoting Lev, 'It's as if we [global nomads] have replaced the physical "home" [of] non-nomads . . . with an internal home' (McCaig,

1996: 120). Here, the challenge to the very physical confinement of home leads to a home that travels with the subject that travels: a home that, in some sense, is internalized as part of the nomadic consciousness which refuses to belong in a particular place, and belongs instead to the globe as such. The quote ends: 'I perfer [sic] to think of us looking out at the new world from a place inside ourselves that we share with other nomads' (McCaig, 1996: 120). Here, not only does the 'home' become internalized as the world the nomad can take on the journey, but it is this interior space which is detached or unattached to place that allows for the new identity and community of nomadism itself. The very detachment from a particular home grants the nomadic subject the ability to see the world: an ability that becomes the basis for a new global identity and community. In such a narrative, identity becomes fetishized: it becomes detached from the particularity of places which allow for its formation as such.

What I am arguing here is not that all such nomadic subjects are implicated in such relations of privilege, and in the creation of a new globalized identity in which the world becomes home, but that there is no necessary link between forms of travel, migration and movement and the transgression and destabilization of identity. An investigation of migration journeys has to examine, not only how migration challenges identity, but how migration can allow identity to become a fetish under the sign of globality. The assumption that to leave home, to migrate or to travel, is to suspend the boundaries in which identity comes to be liveable as such, conceals the complex and contingent social relationships of antagonism which grant some subjects the ability to move freely at the expense of others. As I argue in the next section, problematizing such a narrative which equates migration with the transgression of identity thinking requires that we begin to ask the question of what it means to be at home in the first place.

Home

What does it mean to be-at-home? Certainly, definitions of home shift across a number of registers: home can mean where one usually lives, or it can mean where one's family lives, or it can mean one's native country. You might say I have multiple homes, each one a different kind of home: home is England, where I was born and now live, home is Australia, where I grew up, and home is Pakistan, where the rest of my family lives. Does being-at-home involve the coexistence of these three registers? Can we understand 'leaving home' as the breaking apart of this coexistence, such that where one usually lives is no longer where one's family lives, or in one's native country? This rather obvious approach begs more questions than it can answer.

In the first instance, we can return to the narratives of migrancy examined in the previous section. To some extent, Chambers's and Braidotti's

visions of migrancy and nomadism seem self-contradictory. On the one hand, migration and nomadism become *symptomatic* of what it means 'to be' in the world: migration and nomadism make clear that being cannot be secured by any fixed notion of home or origin. But on the other hand, migration and nomadism are inscribed as *exceptional* and *extraordinary* in the very event of being defined against home: that is, an implicit opposition is set up between those who are authentically migrant (Chambers) or those who have a nomadic critical consciousness (Braidotti), and those who simply stay put. But both narratives, which seem in contradiction – migration as symptom and migration as exception – share a common foundation: they rely on the designation of home as that which must be overcome, either by recognizing that being as such is not homely (migration as symptom) or by refusing to stay at home (migration as exception).

What is at stake in such a narrative of 'the home' as that which must be overcome? In both Chambers's and Braidotti's work, home is not given any positive definition: it is constructed only through reference to what it is not, that is, through reference to the homelessness of migration and exile. By being defined negatively in this way, home henceforth becomes associated with stasis, boundaries, identity and fixity. Home is implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience, indeed, where the subject is so at ease that she or he does not think. Such a construction of home as too familiar, safe and comfortable to allow for critical thought has clear resonance in some postcolonial literature. Nalina Persram, for example, defines 'home' as rest and respite, where there is 'being but no longing' (Persram, 1996: 213). Here, home is associated with a being that rests, that is full and present to itself, and that does not overreach itself through the desire for something other. To be at home is the absence of desire, and the absence of an engagement with others through which desire engenders movement across boundaries.

In such a narrative, home and away are divided, not only as different spaces, but as different modes of being in the world. Home is constructed as a way of being by the very reduction of home to being, as if being could be without desire for something other. Such a narrative of home assumes the possibility of a space which is pure, which is uncontaminated by movement, desire or difference, in order to call for a politics in which movement *is always and already a movement away from home*. What I want to suggest is that the narrative requires a definition of home that is itself impossible: it stabilizes the home as a place with boundaries that are fixed, such that homes become pure, safe and comfortable. However, encounters with otherness which, in Persram's terms, would engender desire, cannot be designated in terms of the space beyond home: it is the very opposition between 'home' and 'away' that we must call more radically into question.

For example, according to the model which assumes that the opposition

between home and away is fully secure, home would be the familiar space, while 'away' would be 'a strange land' (Chambers, 1994: 18). When one was at home, one would be a member of the family, a neighbour, a friend, and when one left home one would become the stranger. The problem with such a model of home as familiarity is that it projects strangerness beyond the walls of the home. Instead, we can ask: how does being-at-home already encounter strangerness? How does being at home already engender desire? If we were to expand our definition of home to think of the nation as a home, then we could recognize that there are always encounters with others already recognized as strangers within, rather than just between, nation spaces. To argue otherwise, would be to imagine the nation as a purified space, and to deny the differences within that space: it would be to assume that you would only encounter strangers at the border.

Given this, there is always an encounter with strangerness at stake, even within the home: the home does not secure identity by expelling strangers, but requires those strangers to establish relations of proximity and distance within the home, and not just between home and away. The association of home with familiarity which allows strangeness to be associated with migra- tion (that is, to be located as beyond the walls of the home) is problematic. There is already strangeness and movement within the home itself. It is not simply a question then of those who stay at home, and those who leave, *as if these two different trajectories simply lead people to different places.* Rather, 'homes' always involve encounters between those who stay, those who arrive and those who leave. We can use Avtar Brah's notion of diasporic space here: there is always an intimate encounter at stake between natives and strangers (Brah, 1996: 181). Given the inevitability of such encounters, homes do not stay the same as the space which is simply the familiar. There is movement and dislocation within the very forming of homes as complex and contingent spaces of inhabitance.

However, to argue for the non-opposition between home and away, is not to then claim that it makes no difference if one leaves a place in which one has felt at home (this would turn migration into a symptom: we have all left home, as you can never simply 'be' at home). We need to think about ways of understanding this difference without identifying home with the stasis of being. We can begin by returning to my earlier attempt to define the home across three registers: home is where one usually lives, home is where one's family lives or home is one's 'native country'. Already this seems vastly inad- equate – for example, it is possible that one's native country might not be *felt* as a home. Indeed, for me, while I was born in England, it never really felt like a home. England was what I read about in school textbooks; it was where it snowed at Christmas; or it was where I got birthday cards from, and the occasional funny five pound notes. The lack of a sense of England being my home was precisely because of a failure to remember what it was like to inhabit the place (I tried to remember – I was 4 when we left for

Australia – but I could never get past the blue window frames). So, England didn't really feel like home, despite the astonishing ability of my mother to keep her accent. The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging – where do I originate from – but that it is *sentimentalized* as a space of belonging ('home is where the heart is'). The question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home is here a matter of *how one feels or how one might fail to feel*.

In Avtar Brah's consideration of diasporic space, she begins to rethink the difference between home as where one lives and home as where one 'comes from' in terms of affect:

> Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells. (Brah, 1996: 192)

Here, home as 'where one usually lives' becomes theorized as *the lived experience of locality*. The immersion of a self in a locality is hence not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one can simply depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other*. To some extent we can think of the lived experience of being at home in terms of inhabiting a second skin, a skin which does not simply contain the homely subject, but which allows the subject to be touched and touch the world that is neither simply in the home or away from the home. The home as skin suggests the boundary between self and home is permeable, but also that the boundary between home and away is permeable as well. Here, movement away is also movement within the constitution of home as such. That is, movement away is always affective: it affects how 'homely' one might feel and fail to feel.

Migration and estrangement

We can hence reconsider what is at stake if one leaves a space in which one has already been enveloped, inhabited by (rather than a space which one simply inhabits). In other words, we can consider the difference that migration might make to the constitution of selves and others in relation to home. The journeys of migration involve a splitting of home as place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience. What migration

narratives involve, then, is a spatial reconfiguration of an embodied self: a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied. Hence the experience of moving often to a new home is most felt through the surprises in sensation: different smells, different sounds as night, more or less dust. When we came to Australia, what I first remember (or at least what I remember remembering) is all the dust, and how it made me sneeze and my eyes itch. When I returned to England, I felt the cold pinching my skin. The intrusion of an unexpected space into the body suggests that the experience of a new home involves a partial shedding of the skin, a process which is uncomfortable and well described as the irritation of an itch. So while Parminder Bhucha's question about migration is 'how is cultural baggage relocated?' (Bhucha, 1996: 284), mine would be, 'how do bodies reinhabit space?'

Migration is not only felt at the level of lived embodiment. Migration is also a matter of generational acts of story-telling about prior histories of movement and dislocation. I remember being told about my family's migration to the newly created Pakistan in 1947: a long hard train journey; my father just a child; then the arrival at the house in Modeltown, Lahore, where I lived when I was a baby (my grandmother and aunt looked after me when my mother was ill, or so I am told). My father used to have some old volumes of Shakespeare. He'd found them in the new house in Lahore. I used to finger those books, little brown objects, remainders of a lost inhabited space, of a space I might have inhabited. Now, it seems fitting that this is what we have left from that old house, volumes of Shakespeare, reminders of the impossibility of us inhabiting Pakistan without the discomfort of an English heritage (a heritage that is lived out through and in the 'constitution' of bodies). And then there was the story of my father coming to England. This was a more comfortable journey. It was a journey that was as much about colonialism (the young upper middle-class Pakistani man coming to do his postgraduate medical training back at the centre), as it was about class privilege and gender. And then, when he had met my mother, we migrated as a family to Australia: again a story about class privilege (he was to take up a consultant position), as it was about racism (he couldn't get a consultancy in England), as it was about gender (my mother followed him).

So many stories, so many journeys: each one, fantastic in its particularity (how did it feel, what happened here and there?) and yet mediated and touched by broader relationships of social antagonism (the history of the British empire, class relations and the politics of gender). Here, migrations involve complex and contradictory relationships to social privilege and marginality (they are not necessarily about one or the other) and they involve complex acts of narration through which families imagine a mythic past. As Keya Ganguly argues, 'The past requires a more marked salience with subjects for whom categories of the present have been made unusually unstable or unpredictable, as a consequence of the displacement enforced by

post-colonial and migrant circumstances' (Ganguly, 1992: 29–30). The stories of dislocation help to relocate: they give a shape, a contour, a skin to the past itself. The past becomes presentable through a history of lost homes (unhousings), as a history which hesitates between the particular and the general, and between the local and the transnational. The telling of stories is bound up with – touched by – the forming of new communities. Memory is a collective act which produces its object (the 'we'), rather than reflects on it.

Indeed, if we think of home as an outer skin, then we can also consider how migration involves not only a spatial dislocation, but also a temporal dislocation: 'the past' becomes associated with a home that it is impossible to inhabit, and be inhabited by, in the present. The question then of being at home or leaving home is always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present: 'For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occurs against the memory of things in the other environment' (Said, 1990: 366). Indeed, Poult suggests that the process of leaving home and coming home is *like* memory:

> . . . it is the already lived that save the living. If the familiar places are sometimes able to come back to us, they are also able to come back to our notice, and to our great comfort to retake their original place. Thus one can see that places behave exactly like past memories, like memories. They go away, they return. (Cited in Buijs, 1993: 3)

The analogy between places and memories is suggestive, though we may want to make such an analogy on different grounds: it is the impossibility of return that binds them together. That is, it is impossible to return to a place that was lived as home, precisely because the home is not exterior to a self, but implicated in it. The movements of selves between places that come to be inhabited as home involve the discontinuities of personal biographies and wrinkles in the skin. The experience of leaving home in migration is hence always about the *failure of memory to fully make sense of the place one comes to inhabit*, a failure which is experienced in the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body, a body which feels out of place, which feels uncomfortable in this place. The process of returning home is likewise about the failures of memory, of not being inhabited in the same way by that which appears as familiar.

Acts of remembering hence are felt on and in migrant bodies in the form of a discomfort, the failure to fully inhabit the present or present space. Migration can hence be considered as a process of estrangement, a process of becoming estranged from that which was inhabited as home. The word estrangement has the same roots as the word 'strange'. And yet, it suggests something quite different. It indicates a process of transition, a movement from one register to another. To become estranged from each other, for example, is to move from being friends to strangers, from familiarity to

strangeness. The term is suggestive precisely because it names the process of moving from one to the other, rather than referring to different states of being. Hence the process of moving away involves a reliving of the home itself: the process of moving is a movement in the very way in which the migrant subject inhabits the space of home.

In the work of Michael Dillon, 'estrangement' is what we have in common, rather than being what divides us:

> . . . estrangement – not the foreignness that is particular to the stranger but *the estrangement of human beings that is integral to their condition of being here as the beings they are* . . . makes the inauguration of political space itself a possibility. (Dillon, 1999: 136, emphasis added)

In contrast, my approach to estrangement provides an attempt to establish how histories of the movements of peoples across borders make a difference to the spatiality and temporality of estrangement. Estrangement is always an estrangement from a particular place and time: to universalize estrangement as that which brings us together is to conceal how estrangement marks out particular selves and communities. Estrangement needs to be theorized as beyond that which we simply have in common.

For example, in Pnina Werbner's work on Asian migrants in Britain, she emphasizes how migrants are strangers to each other, and how they make positive acts of identification in the very process of becoming friends:

> I start from the assumption of a void – from strangerhood, nonrelationship. So when I find that these strangers . . . create, generate, make multiple identifications with one another, then this is a process (not a pre-given static situation) which I find quite interesting. (Werbner, 1996: 69)

Here, there is no shared terrain of knowledge which is presupposed by the gesture of identification. What is at stake is not, as in the case of the narratives of the Global Nomads, a 'sudden recognition of kinship' (McCaig, 1996: 115), through which an automatic 'community of strangers' can be established (a common estrangement or commonality through estrangement). Rather, there is void or an absence: indeed, other migrants are already known as not known; they are already assigned a place as strangers before the identifications can take place. In other words, it is through an *uncommon estrangement* that the possibility of such a migrant community comes to be lived. The gap between memory and place in the very dislocation of migration allows communities to be formed: that gap becomes reworked as a site of bodily transformation, the potential to remake one's relation to that which appears as unfamiliar, to reinhabit spaces and places. This rehabitation of the migrant body is enabled through gestures of friendship with others who are already known as not known (strangers). It is the role of community in the recreation of migrant selves that is so important. The community comes to life through the collective act of remembering in the absence of a common terrain.

In order to examine the relationship between the reinhabiting of bodies that are already out of place, community and estrangement we can consider the edited collection, *Flaming Spirit*, which was produced by the Asian Women's Writing Collective in the UK in 1994. The book is itself a journey in migration: migration is not its object (not all the stories are *about* migration), but is that which allows the very gestures of identification through which the book becomes readable as a collection. That is, the book is made possible through the forming of a migrant community of writers brought together under the problematic, if not impossible, signs of 'Asian', 'women' and 'writers'. Hence, the editors reflect on how the forming of the collective did not presuppose a shared identity (either as Asians, women or writers), but made apparent that the criteria for who should belong to the community are always to be contested.

This question of forming a community through the shared experience of not being fully at home – of having inhabited another space – hence presupposes an absence of a shared terrain: the forming of communities makes apparent the lack of a common identity which would allow its form to take one form. But this lack becomes reinscribed as the precondition of an act of *making*: how can we make a space which is supportive? How can we become friends? What can we build from the very fact of our coming together – being thrown together – in this place, having come from other places? How can we write (as) a collective given the absence of a collective past or a familiar terrain? Hence, the editors reflect on the differences of class, sexuality and religion between the women in the collective, as they also reflect more profoundly on the politics of the category 'Asian' and the uncertainty about which women are to be included within the category (Ahmad and Gupta, 1994: xii). The forming of this community of migrant women writers hence makes clear that there is always a boundary line to be drawn. But this lack of clarity makes a definition and redefinition of the community possible; it allows the group to emerge through the constant need to, 'redefine our identity as a group' (Ahmad and Gupta, 1994: xii).

Here, the process of estrangement is the condition for allowing the emergence of a contested community, a community which 'makes a place' in the act of reaching out to the 'out of place-ness' of other migrant bodies. The work of such community formation is hence always 'out reach work' (Ahmad and Gupta, 1994: xiii): in this case, it is about reaching out to different women who might share, not a common background, but the very desire to make a community, a community of Asian women who write. The community is hence reached through reaching across different spaces, through the very bodily gestures of reaching towards other bodies, who are already recognized only insofar as they seem out of place, as uncomfortable, or not quite comfortable, in this place. Migrant bodies hence cannot be understood as simply on one side of identity or the other, or on one side of the community or the other: rather, it is the uncommon estrangement of

migration itself that allows migrant subjects to remake what it is *they might yet have in common.*

Notes

1 Although I offer here a strong critique of Braidotti's use of 'the nomad' as a figure, I am otherwise very sympathetic to her theoretical and political commitment to explore the difficulties and contradictions of subjectivity and community.
2 To define free choice against force is certainly to beg a lot of important questions about the social conditions which make some movements possible and others impossible. On the one hand, you can consider the refugee as the one who is forced to move due to situations of extreme persecution. However, to conclude from this that migrants make free choices is to assume that force only operates in this way. The constraints to choice do not just impose on the body from the outside, but are constitutive of subjects in the first place. The whole notion of 'choosing' requires a more proper dismantling in its very presupposition of an autonomous subject who can be detached from the social relations in which it is embedded. At the same time, we still need to be able to theorise differences in the way in which force operates, and between degrees of force (in this sense, force is both a general logic and an economy).

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