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European Journal of Cultural Studies 2001; 4; 405

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'Coming home'

Queer migrations and multiple evocations of home

Anne-Marie Fortier

ABSTRACT This article proposes an examination of recent interventions in queer studies that project queer culture and politics within a diasporic framework. Drawing on written narratives of what may be termed 'queer migrations', I seek to map the intersections of queer memories and diasporic spaces as they are uttered in terms of 'home'. By following the movement of queer subjects between homes, I examine how 'home', migration and belonging relate to each other in multiple ways. First, I discuss narratives of queer migration as homecoming, where 'home' is a destination rather than an origin. I explore the connection between exile, displacement and migration-as-homecoming found in some discussions on queer diaspora. How do the 'homes' people move towards relate to those that are 'left behind'? How does the movement toward some 'homes' operate through the fixing of others? Second, I consider the movement *back* home, how home is reimagined or reconstituted through memories that challenge the assumed idea of home-as-familiarity. Drawing on autobiographical renditions of queer migrations and remembrances of home, I discuss Elspeth Probyn's argument about movement, desire and childhood as 'suspended beginnings'. If one can never return 'home', as Probyn argues, what are the effects of coming home again and again on definitions of home? Third, I wonder how memories of home can relocate queerness within the home without reinstating home as originary moment. Is it possible to conceive of being 'at home' in a way that already encounters/engenders queerness, but without deploying an originary narrative of 'home'? Running through this discussion is a reflection about identity narratives that seek to reconfigure spaces of belonging shaped through *both* movement and attachment. Can we consider differential movements of subjects as not simply about thinking about home as mobile – not simply about the undoing of home as stasis – but as the re-forming of the very bounded spatiality of homes?

KEYWORDS *belonging, diaspora, home, identity, mobility, queer, sexualities*

This article is part of an ongoing reflection of recent interventions in queer studies that project queer culture and politics within a diasporic

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framework. Drawing on written narratives of what may be termed 'queer migrations', I seek to map the intersections of queer memories and diasporic spaces as they are uttered in terms of 'home'.

Within cultural theory, 'queer' and 'diaspora' have attended to the complexities of postmodern and postcolonial forms of belonging through their interventions on issues of time, space, identity and embodiment. Notions of 'queer' and 'diaspora' are used to host a decisive change of orientation away from the primordial identities established alternatively by either nature or culture. By embracing queer or diaspora, theories of identity turn instead toward transgression, contingency, indeterminacy, power and conflict.

Within postcolonial studies, diaspora has become an emblem of multilocality, 'post-nationality' and non-linearity of *both* movement and time. Deployed from a transnational and intercultural perspective in opposition to ethnically absolute approaches to migration, the term converses with other terms such as border, transculturation, travel, creolization, *mestizaje*, hybridity (Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993, 1994). Diaspora thus constitutes a rich heuristic device to think about questions of home, belonging, continuity and community in the context of dispersal and transnational networks of connection. In sum, diaspora now signifies a site where 'new geographies of identity' (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996) are negotiated across multiple terrains of belonging, producing what Avtar Brah (1996) calls a 'diaspora space', located between 'the global' and 'the local'.

'Queer theory', for its part, acquired wide currency in the 1990s as a term to designate anti-normative politics, cultures and identity formations. Located at the crux of poststructuralist theory and the 'politics of difference', 'queer' challenged the sexual homogeneity connoted in the earlier 'lesbian and gay' nomenclature, by disrupting the binary opposition between homosexuality/heterosexuality and emphasizing the multiplicity and fluidity of sexualities. More broadly, 'queer' speaks of diversity within unity, and constitutes an all-inclusive category of subversive and anti-normative cultural and political practices of identity (Beemyn and Eliason, 1996; Warner, 1993). Queer theory is decidedly located within the postmodern anti-essentialist critique of identity, where '[s]exuality is not only not essence, not timeless, it is also not fixed in place; *sexuality is on the move*' (Sánchez-Eppler and Patton, 2000: 2; my emphasis). 'Sexuality is indeed on the move,' writes Michael Warner, 'not just because people are more on the move now than ever, but because non-normative sexualities so generally seem out of place and are so often enabled by the displacement of culture' (in Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, 2000: back cover).

It is this claim about sexuality as movement and about queer as 'movement out of place', that interests me here. 'Coming home' inserts itself within a wider critique of the acceptance of movement as the basis



of new forms of identity formations, in what some have called 'mobile sociologies' (Urry, 2000). As Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson write, '[p]art and parcel of this conceptual shift [in definitions of identity] is a recognition that not only can one be at home in movement, but that movement can be one's very own home' (1998: 27). In contrast, following Sara Ahmed's (2000) insightful critique of what she calls 'migrant ontologies' written into theories of migrancy, I want to think about movement as a means by which boundaries are enforced, rather than simply as a means by which they are undone. Can we consider differential movements of subjects as not simply about thinking about home as mobile – not simply about the undoing of home as stasis – but as the re-forming (or indeed enforcement) of the very bounded spatiality of homes? To paraphrase Ahmed (2000: 84), how can migratory subjects reclaim sites of attachment in their refusal to inhabit a particular place? How can 'home' be reclaimed differently?

By way of thinking through these questions, I examine different evocations of 'home' in narratives of queer migrations deployed within what I call *diasporic horizons*, that is, the projection of (queer) belongings and culture within a spatio-temporal horizon defined in terms of multilocality, cultural diversity, dispersal, and conflict. Indeed, the notion of 'queer diaspora' is used by some authors in reference to the transnational and multicultural network of connections of queer 'communities' dispersed worldwide (Gopinath, 1996; Mort, 1994; Puar, 1998; Schimmel, 1997; Sinfield, 2000; Walker, 1995; Watney, 1995).¹ I have explored elsewhere the implication of 'diasporizing the queer' on accepted definitions of diaspora and community (Fortier, forthcoming).

Another significant feature of diasporic horizons is their relationship to 'home'. Indeed, much of the writing on 'queer diaspora' finds it useful to rethink the problematic of 'home' (Eng, 1997). As I show here, 'home' is a recurring theme in queer narratives of migration, thus testifying to the appeal and power of the model of 'home-as-familiarity'. Yet what remains undertheorized is the model of 'home-as-familiarity' itself, even when it is accepted as a 'myth' (Chambers, 1990). Rather than accepting 'home' as a given, I question how it is differently represented and evoked within narratives of queer migrations, starting with those that establish a commonality between queer and diaspora on the basis of their shared experience of estrangement from 'home'. Hence this article furthers my exploration into the implications of projecting queer sexualities within a diasporic framework, the general aim of which is to think about what happens to the concepts of 'queer' and 'diaspora' when they are brought together (Fortier, forthcoming).

More specifically, by following the movement of queer subjects between homes, I examine how 'home', migration and belonging relate to each other in multiple ways. First, I discuss narratives of queer migration as homecoming, where 'home' is a destination rather than an



origin. I explore the connection between exile, displacement and migration-as-homecoming found in some discussions on queer diaspora. What does it mean to speak of 'home' or 'origins' when there is no 'homeland' that can validate a group identity (Cant, 1997a)? How do the 'homes' people move towards relate to those that are 'left behind'? How does the movement towards some 'homes' operate through the fixing, or subsuming, of others? Second, I consider the movement *back* home, how home is reimagined or reconstituted through memories that challenge the ideal of home-as-familiarity. Drawing on autobiographical renditions of queer migrations and remembrances of home, I discuss Elspeth Probyn's argument about movement, desire and childhood as 'suspended beginnings'. If one can never return 'home', as Probyn argues, what are the effects of coming home again and again on definitions of home? In my attempt to understand 'homing desires' as constituted through *both* movement and attachment – rather than simply as the movement of desire – I examine the relationship between memory and spatiality in stories of leaving and returning home. What is the work of memory on definitions of spaces of belonging such as 'home'? Third, I wonder how memories of home can relocate queerness within the home without reinstating home as originary moment. Is it possible to conceive of being at home in a way that already encounters/engenders queerness? Is it possible to relocate queerness at home without binding it to naturalized and homogeneous conceptions of gender? How can we relocate queerness in the home without rendering 'home' as a site of justification, but rather as a site of possibilities and constraints?

Queers on the move: exile and migration-as-homecoming

Several queer theorists, in their considerations of the fruitfulness of 'queer diaspora', dissociate 'origins' from the idea of a single, unitary cultural-geographical space. Although some, like Michael Warner, dismiss the idea of a queer diaspora precisely because there is 'no locale from which to wander' (1993: p. xvii) – thus sustaining the foundational status of the homeland – others establish a connection between queer, diaspora and exile, secured through the shared experience of forced movement away from an original 'home' that does not occupy the same definitional status. For some, 'queer diaspora' rests on claims about the condition of exile and estrangement experienced by queer subjects, which locates them outside of the confines of 'home': the heterosexual family, the nation, the homeland. In this section, I explore the connection between moving out and coming out within the narrative of migration-as-emancipation that characterizes much of the discourse on queer migrations.

408 Described as a 'traumatic displacement from the lost heterosexual



“origin” by David Eng (1997: 32), queer migrations are conceived by others as a movement towards another site to be called ‘home’. Thus Alan Sinfield writes:

Indeed, while ethnicity is transmitted usually through family and lineage, most of us are born and/or socialized into (presumably) heterosexual families. We have to move away from them, at least to some degree; and *into*, if we are lucky, the culture of a minority community. ‘Home is the place you get to, not the place you came from’, it says at the end of Paul Monette’s novel, *Half-way Home*. In fact, for lesbians and gay men the diasporic sense of separation and loss, so far from affording a principle of coherence for our subcultures, may actually attach to aspects of the (heterosexual) culture of our childhood, where we are no longer ‘at home’. Instead of dispersing, we assemble. (2000: 103; italics original)

The heterosexual family is posited as the originary site of trauma. This is evocatively expressed by Sinfield, who draws attention to how the ‘diasporic sense of separation and loss’ experienced by lesbians and gay men results from being cut off from the heterosexual culture of their childhood, which becomes the site of impossible return, the site of impossible memories. ‘Everybody else had a childhood’, writes Paul Monette about the imposed silence on young lesbians and gay men’s growing-up stories (in Cant, 1997a: 6). But the interesting twist to the narrative of the exile is that queers constitute a different diaspora because the originary site of trauma is not the basis of coherence. In a noteworthy reversal, ‘home’, here, is not an origin, but rather a destination; there is no return, only arrival. And it is an arrival that is always deferred. The queer diasporic journey is one of ‘envisioning ourselves beyond the framework of normative heterosexism’. But gay men and lesbians are ‘stuck at the moment of emergence. For coming out is not once-and-for-all’ (Sinfield, 2000: 103). Sinfield’s suggestion of home as always in the making, endlessly deferred, hints at a radical discomfiture of ‘home’ as a space of coherence and continuity also found in utopian visions of diaspora as radically antinationalist (Gilroy, 2000).

To be sure, both queer and diaspora compel us to rethink the problematic of home: ‘diaspora’ by making ‘the spatialization of identity problematic and interrupt[ing] the ontologization of place’ (Gilroy, 2000: 122), and ‘queer’ by problematizing heteronormative discourses and denaturalizing gendered nationalisms. ‘[S]uspended between an “in” and an “out” . . . – between origin and destination, and between private and public – queer [and diasporic] entitlements to home and a nation-state remain doubtful’ (Eng, 1997: 32).

Which is not to say that queer or diaspora could be simply read as emphatic refusals of home(land). Queer and diasporic narratives of belonging often deploy ‘homing desires’ (Brah, 1996: 180): the desire to *feel at home* achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting



spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration. As David Eng states, 'despite frequent and trenchant queer dismissals of home and its discontents, it would be a mistake to underestimate enduring queer affiliations to this concept' (1997: 32). For example, the widespread narrative of migration as homecoming, within queer culture, establishes an equation between leaving and becoming, and creates a distinctively queer migrant subject: one who is forced to get out in order to come out. Books such as Paul Monette's *Half-Way Home*, where 'home' is a destination, or John Preston's *Hometowns: Gay Men Write about Where they Belong*, where home is 'where we come from' and conjures up stories of 'exile, abandonment, redemption, salvation, reconciliation' (1991: 14), reproduce a model of home as familiarity, where strangeness is cancelled out. In their refusal of home, queer migrant subjects reclaim a space to be called 'home'.

The very pervasiveness of the trope of home in narratives of queer migrations should alert us to the ways in which it is reinscribed as a desired site of familiarity, comfort and belonging. In Sinfield's narrative, the movement towards the promise of homeliness offered by lesbian or gay subcultures inserts itself within the logic of pathological ideas of diaspora according to which it will only be 'treated' by a movement toward 'home'. In doing so, he transforms diaspora/queer yearning and ambivalence 'into a simple and unambiguous exile *once the possibility of easy reconciliation with either place of sojourn or the place of origin exists*' (Gilroy, 2000: 124; emphasis added). Sinfield is uncomfortable with the indeterminacy of lesbian and gay 'home'; his reversed narrative maintains a linear trajectory that posits homecoming as a desirable destination. For Sinfield, people move away from 'home' and '*into, if we are lucky*' (second emphasis added), a gay or lesbian subculture. This is highly reminiscent of the prototypical immigration narrative, where immigrants are perceived to move *from* one culture *into* another, thus assuming 'cultures' to be neatly bounded and separately located within distinct territories. Sinfield's 'subculture' constitutes a timespace that is distinct and separate from the '(heterosexual) culture of our childhood', and puts an end to the sense of loss; it brings an end to migration. 'Home' is the antidote to dispersal.

Yet not all queer migrants leave home in order to come out, nor do they all entertain the desire to move (in)to what Lawrence Schimel (1997) labels queer 'cultural homelands' within US lesbian and gay culture (such as San Francisco's Castro, New York City's Greenwich Village, Key West, or Northampton). Drawing on the distinctly antinationalist inclinations of diaspora as it has been used by anti-Zionists (Marienstras, 1975, 1989) and postcolonial critics (Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993, 2000; Hall, 1990), Schimel likens queer 'cultural homelands' to 'mini Zions' by virtue of their quasi-mythical status: 'our visits feel like a return home, even if we've never set foot there before'



(1997: 167). His use of the Jewish imagery is meant as a caution against nationalist projects that seek to negate diaspora. A self-identified post-Zionist Jew, Schimel is critical of the Zionist project whereby the nation state appears as the institutional means to terminate diaspora dispersal (1997: 172): much like Sinfield's subculture, the 'return to the homeland', brings diaspora to a halt. Schimel's political project, in contrast, aims at rehabilitating diaspora by defining it as a fruitful and original mode of existence that thrives through dispersal. He thus views with a glimpse of hope the emergence of a queer diaspora where it has become possible to connect with queer culture without having to live *within* queer 'mini-Zions'.

Guys are beginning to embrace our diaspora as well, choosing to stay home and come out wherever we are rather than moving to our mini-Zions of gay culture. And many of us in these Zions are choosing to leave, to form smaller enclaves outside of these arenas, to live queer lives in suburbia or rural sectors . . . now it is possible not to be the only openly-gay man in Small Town USA, and it is more and more possible to interact with gay culture through mass media – magazines, films, the internet – from anywhere in the world. (1997: 172)

Embracing diaspora, for Schimel, means being able to be out and to stay 'at home', wherever that may be. For him, the project of queer diaspora will be fully achieved when gays and lesbians no longer have to get out in order to be out. Schimel's intervention is interesting for it raises important issues with regards to the ways in which queer theory has tended to constitute queer subjects and queer spaces. He proposes a redefinition of the sexual geography of queer theory, whose urban–rural binary has only recently been brought to light (Halberstam, 2000). Conceived as a space that nurtures a variety of sexual cultures, the 'urban' is accepted as the location par excellence for queer subjects to inhabit. In contrast, small towns and rural areas are conceived as sexually homogeneous, where 'dissident sexuality is rarer and more closely monitored' (Rubin, 1993: 23). Consequently, queer subjects are constructed as urban subjects, thus making the rural queer an outsider, one whose choice of residence – which is sometimes also the choice to 'stay put' – seems somewhat out of place within queer studies.

Schimel not only questions the assumption that queers live in urban areas, but that they should. 'Sure, it's fun to visit these cities', he writes, 'but they're no longer as essential to being gay as they once were' (1997: 172). Schimel sees in the proliferation of what I call 'sites of connection', the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a queer diaspora whose subjects can belong to several 'homes' at once. More pointedly, he speaks of the possibility of moving between multiple points of *attachment*, sites of belonging that are not necessarily coterminous with sites of residence, but which nonetheless act as 'points of suture', in Stuart Hall's phrase



(1990: 226). Schimel's projections evoke a multilocal mapping of 'homes' that break the simple explanatory sequence between location of belonging, and location of residence or location of origin.

These 'sites of connection' – be they 'subcultures', 'cultural homelands' or cybercafés – are undoubtedly 'sites of emergence' for many lesbians and gay men, as they constitute desirable destinations of safety and comfort against a variety of threatening forces. In addition, going to the gay bar, or moving within a lesbian subculture, solves, even if momentarily, the ontological problem about belonging to the 'lesbian and gay' culture in a heterosexist, homophobic world. Similarly, the gay and lesbian 'subculture', for Sinfield, offers the ontological security of being 'at home' in a cultural, social or physical space, thus not having to defer 'being out'. In this respect, evocations of home are embedded in the struggles to create and maintain spaces of belonging and comfort in the face of adversity without (or within) the 'lesbian and gay community'.²

But my immediate concern is not to *explain* the enduring appeal of 'home', but to explore *how* it is deployed in migration narratives. While narratives of migration-as-homecoming instigate a noteworthy reversal of the status of 'home' in migration, 'home' remains widely sentimentalized as a space of comfort and seamless belonging, indeed *fetishized through the movements between homes*. In other words, the movement away from home-as-origins becomes the vector for reinstating the ideal of 'home' as a site of familiarity and comfort, and for producing or entrenching 'queerness' as *away* from 'home'.

Going back home: home as situated event

If the movement towards 'home' (re)produces the ideal of home – thus continuously deferring being 'at home' – what happens when migratory subjects return home? Elspeth Probyn writes that 'you can never go home. Or rather, once returned, you realize the cliché that home is never what it was' (1996: 114). If 'home' is not what it was, what would it look like if it were deployed as such, that is, if it were to be turned into a question of 'it ain't what it's cut out to be'; into a question of 'so what' or 'whatever', as Probyn suggests (1996: 97)? What happens to 'home' once it loses its mythical status?

Probyn eloquently argues against a foundationalist account of childhood as origin, by looking at childhood as 'event' (see below). Rather than taking 'home' as some point towards which, or away from which, we might unhesitatingly move, I take from Probyn's insights on childhood memories, the challenge to experiment with memories of 'home' within an 'empty dimension', as 'suspended beginnings', that is, 'beginnings that are constantly wiped out, forcing me to begin again and again' (1996: 101). Following on from this, I propose to investigate how the movement back 'home' reworks 'home' in different ways. This means



that I not only consider 'home' as a site of intersecting lines of movements – one bending towards the past and back into the present, and the other contracting the past into the future to 'encourage forms of becoming' (Probyn, 1996: 121) – but that I also contemplate home as site of attachment: a site where one attaches herself, even momentarily, by way of grounding who she is, or was, in her process of becoming. This, then, has implications on the space of place in remembrances of home.

Probyn is informed by Bergson's notion of memory, characterized by intersecting fluxes and movements. For Bergson, memory is an act of duration where different states and moments have no beginning nor ending, but rather extend into one another (1939/1993: 31). But as I argue elsewhere, Bergson's conception of memory refuses to think of time in spatial terms, thus refuses to accept that memory may include discrete 'moments' that combine forces of movement and attachment at once (Fortier, 2000: 173–4). As Andrew Quick (2001) suggests, if lived experience can be seen as filmic, memory can be seen as photographic: it 'stills' moments, reprocesses them in different sequences. Hence memories of home conjure up images of places, people, houses, events, all of which attach 'home' to physical locations, things and bodies. Home as attachment, then, is also a site which is attached, fixed into place, in acts of remembering 'what it was like', so that I can move on, into another place, another becoming. For if returns home lead to the realization that it is not what it used to be, it is also a space that must stay in place, even momentarily, if one is to return again and again.

In his introduction to *Invented Identities? Lesbians and Gays Talk about Migration*, Bob Cant suggests that migration brings opportunities for individuals to 'reassess their childhoods' (1997a: 6). More broadly, Cant uses diaspora to capture the 'complex set of loyalties' and multiple attachments that many gays and lesbians feel (1997a: 14). In a manner akin to Paul Gilroy's (1993) borrowing of W.E. Dubois's notion of double consciousness, Cant writes of the 'two-mindedness' of lesbians and gay men, which differs radically from the 'double life' of many lesbians and gays of earlier times. For Cant, two-mindedness is about the everyday work of translation, and the opportunities of greater insight into the seemingly opposed worlds lesbian and gay migrants inhabit. It signals an openness, however fraught, about the multiple belongings that one negotiates in one's life, rather than the concealment of one against the privileging of another in the 'double life' model. Such refusals to deny sexuality and origins pave the way, for Cant, to the possibility of new forms of belonging that are not predicated on single, unitary identities.

Within this conceptual context, Cant's childhood is not lost. It is not bounded with memories that only 'everybody else' has.

It was only when I had been in London for some years as an openly gay man that I was able to re-examine my childhood and youth in a farming



community in the East of Scotland. On some level I had behaved for years as if the gay man I became in London was a totally new invention with no past. It took some time before I could acknowledge the enforced isolation of my youth and the impact which it had upon my whole personal development. Eventually I was able to look at the culture of normality which affirmed that 'everyone' lived in families and 'everyone' subscribed to values of the Church of Scotland. It was a culture which made me feel like an outsider; it was only after I left that area that I realized I was not the only outsider. (1997a: 7)

Moving against a linear conception of migration, Cant's reassessment reveals that childhood, and the idea of 'home' that it is enmeshed with,⁵ 'cannot simply be something that proceeds chronologically' (Agamben in Probyn, 1996: 101), but, rather, that it is continually reprocessed, redeployed in narratives of beginnings. 'Home', here, becomes a remembered 'spatial context where identities are worked on' (James, 1998: 144) in an ongoing process of becoming. Cant reassesses his childhood through the double process of recognition and reconnaissance (Probyn, 1996: 110): surveying his childhood locale for other instances of estrangement, sighting moments of recognition with other 'outsiders'. His memories at once displace and relocate his 'child' as an outsider, but one which brings into play his lonely 'I' with a collective 'we' in the creation of new terrains of belonging where multiple 'strangers' coexisted. The act of reconnoitring reconciles Cant with his 'home', indeed relocates him as queer-outsider *within* the 'home', rather than without.

In *Invented Identities*,² story after story tells of multiple movement between homes – of flights, detours, returns – and of multiple encounters with estrangement and familiarity experienced in different locales. Within these narratives, 'home' oscillates between different modes of articulation: 'as originary, as nostalgic, as quintessential, as anecdotal, as fiction, as fact' (Probyn, 1996: 96). For some, 'home' and family are deeply enmeshed into one another, and become a site left behind, or a site that one regularly returns to, as for Chris Corrin, for whom the Isle of Man she left when a student will remain a place called home as long as her mother is there. 'Home' is attached to place and to a particular body. But when her mother dies, Corrin writes, she could 'be faced with the need to find a "real" home', a space where she can feel at home, such as the 'family of lesbians and one or two gay men who live mostly on these islands but also in some other further-flung places' (1997: 114). A 'home' that is not necessarily place-based but that is grounded in the 'sense of community' provided by her dispersed friends. The Isle of Man is 'home' by way of familial ties, and it becomes unhomey under the spectre of death, which in turn triggers the desire for a home, the movement forward, *into* the quest for home.

414 For others, home is a place one returns to after multiple migrations,



and rekindles with the sense of safety and comfort 'home' provides. Jean Clitheroe: 'I'm kind of resting now. I'm not sure who I am but it's quiet and I feel safe' (1997: 27). Others, like Tom Shakespeare (1997) or Spike Pittsberg (1997), move from home to home, as if between sites of momentary dwelling dotted along a network of connections. Overall, the multiple homes, here, do not acquire any definitional, foundational status, nor are they idealized as sites of comfort and familiarity. Or rather, emerging from this collection of narratives, is a vacillation between the *ideal* of home – as Corrin's search for a 'real home' – and the comprehension *not* to 'expect to feel at home anywhere' (Pittsberg, 1997: 72). 'I don't care about feeling "at home"', writes Spike Pittsberg, 'I care about having a decent life, about learning the ways that life can be lived, about changing the range of opportunities for everyone, about making mates for life, no matter where we find ourselves' (1997: 73–4). Detaching home from location is, for Pittsberg, a liberation from the search for the idealized home. At the same time, she and others tell us of experiences of both comfort and discomfort, fear and ease, threat and support they found in different locations, and how this is part and parcel of what 'making a home' involves.

Surfacing from these narratives is a succession of stories of (re)settlement, encounters, emotional ties, work, love, sweat and tears (to use a worn-out cliché): what Avtar Brah's calls 'the lived experience of locality' (1996: 192). Rather than seamless sites of belongings, 'homes' are locations criss-crossed by a variety of forces the authors had to negotiate again and again. Remembrances of home at once empty it of any definitional and absolute status, while it continuously *attaches* it to places that acquire meaning in the process. In other words, rather than simply narratives of homecoming in the sense deployed above, or simply narratives of origins – looking for signs that will 'explain' my queerness, returning to the past to justify or explain the present, to answer the question 'Why am I a lesbian?' – these texts tell stories of *movement between homes*, ruminate on the relationship between geographical location and life's events, thus giving 'place' a special significance as a result of its association with events in their life course (Espin, 1996: 82). Hence while memory becomes a primary ground of identity formation in the context of migration, it is also tied to the creation of the identity of places. Re-mem-bering places is about defining and naming 'places': calling them 'home' or other such spaces of inhabitation. As I argue elsewhere, 're-mem-bering' places is about 'the processes through which spaces of belonging – imagined and physical – are inhabited, in the literal sense of dwelling, in the sense of populating or "mem-bering" spaces with ghosts from the past, and in the sense of manufacturing . . . subjects' (2000: 158).



Finding my (way) home: relocating queerness

Probyn's project is to refuse a chronological ground, to refuse the 'privileges of a personal past' (1996: 122), to refuse the appropriation of the past by way of explaining the present. With this in mind, I now turn to a narrative of origin to explore how personal memoirs can effect home differently. *Is it possible to conceive of 'being at home' in a way that already encounters/engenders queerness? Can one find her way home without rehearsing the familiar narratives of justification deeply embedded in accepted definitions of naturalized and irreducible gender differences?*

In her remarkable memoirs, *Night Bloom*, Italian/US-American lesbian author Mary Cappello (1998) writes poignantly of her and her immigrant family's 'lived experience of locality' (Brah, 1996: 192) by firmly locating her story in working class South Philadelphia, and relating their struggle to 'integrate' against the violent Catholic and class-based discursive formations. From the outset, she traces her immigrant working class background through her grandfather's diary, which is riddled with fears. Not 'merely' existential fears, but fears enforced by a combination of economic hardship and legal forces.

February 7, 1942. It is Saturday, and it is raining furiously. I have to give my full pay to the gas and electric company if I want to keep it in my home. Yesterday, one of their agents again called on us and tyrannically threatened to shut it off. He didn't go out till my sick wife promised him that she would send me on the next day to pay for it. (John Petracca's diary in Cappello, 1998: 35)

Her memoirs are a moving and powerful account of the legacies of the psychological 'disjunction' produced by failing to 'fit in'. Legacies of the marks that immigration and assimilation have left on herself and her family: legacies of suffering, of cold shivering bodies in badly heated apartments, of deaths, of worrying about the legal authorities, of fears of the striking hand, or longings for the caressing one. It is about how she and her forebears found in the arts of gardening and of writing, lessons of desire, creativity and loss: how the delights of a blossoming orange tree are surrounded by 'empty pockets' and the struggle to sustain a family (1998: 37).

Cappello writes about the longing to belong, and of the painful difficulties that emerge when this longing is caught up with and defined against the norms of the nation state. This longing to belong is not so much about the connection with a country (Italy the 'homeland' or USA the 'hostland') as it is about the creation of a sense of place – in both its material as well as symbolic incarnations – which is often uttered in terms of 'home'. She writes:

416 Now I try to understand the pathological sense of loss (in the form of



depression) and fear (in the form of phobia) that characterizes my ethnic heritage . . . I can locate the source of disjunction in the immigrant status, the initial anomie of being out of place; but that sense of separation may have only expanded in proportion to my grandfather's un-macho ways and my mother's unladylike tendency to tell it like it is. (1998: 73)

Elsewhere, she says more about the ways in which differential ethnic categorizations operate through gendered norms of 'integration':

What I could never fail to notice about the men and women in my Italian/American family . . . was [how] the men failed miserably and with varying degrees of unhappiness in conforming to the mask of white, middle-class masculinity, and the women wielded word, story, their own bodies, in ways that could never pass for demure. By Anglo-American standards, to put it crudely, the male members of my family were soft and the females were hard. Mightn't the fraternal demolition parties that Hollywood cinema has invented for Italian/American subjectivity be indicative of precisely the fear that those dark, curly-haired, music-loving, flower-tending Italian/Americans are queer? (1996: 96)

Indeed, aren't the anxieties over a possible queer consequence that may be produced by flower-tending men or 'strong' women be constantly deflected by the repeated instantiation of Italian 'macho men' and Madonna-like mothers? Exploring the intersections of immigration, ethnicity and sexuality, Cappello interrogates the very construction of Italian patriarchal culture, epitomized and celebrated in *The Godfather* sequels. She thus reveals the intricate web of connections between ethnicity and homophobia, and suggests that queer is an American construct that serves to keep the Italian immigrant at a distance, 'out of place', by exhorting prescriptions of gendered and sexual norms. The irreducibility of gender differences and uncompromising heterosexuality serve to circumscribe the confines of Italianness. In other words, gender and sexuality are the modalities in which ethnicity is represented, lived and negotiated.

Cappello refuses fixed definitions of ethnicity and sexuality and finds in the broader sense of 'queer' an appropriate description of the Italian/American contexts within which she grew up.

However well I try to place it, 'my lesbianism' insists on returning to the unarticulated space between my maternal and paternal legacies. Rather than having emerged, in true Oedipal fashion, out of an identification with one parent and disavowal of the other, my willingness to inhabit a space of transgressive pleasure found its impetus in the unresolved area of desire/lack that was the space between Anglo ideals and Italian realities. In 'becoming queer', I was becoming what my Italian/American forebears denied about themselves even as they provided the example. In becoming queer I see myself as having made something wonderful out of an Italian/American



fabric, the Italian/American weavers of which were too ready and willing to discard. (1998: 181)

In her own version of reassessing her childhood, Cappello finds queerness *within* the very space of 'betweenness' typically attributed to the 'diasporic space' located between 'here' and 'there' (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994). Drawing on 'queer' as a conceptual tool that disrupts binary oppositions, Cappello expands the 'betweenness' of diaspora to produce a wedge between fixed gender roles and identifications. It may be tempting to read Cappello as suggesting that the diasporic home is already queer because it is always somehow located in a space of betweenness: that it is a site of struggle with multiple injunctions of being and 'fitting in', which are configured in gendered terms of conformity to cultures 'here' or 'there'. In this respect, *'home' is intensely queer, and queer, utterly familiar*. More importantly, Cappello presents a complex fabric of queerness that exceeds sexuality, and of *Italianità* that exceeds ethnicity; a portrait where ethnicity and sexuality are difficult to discern.

. . . 'sexuality' and 'ethnicity' are neither stable terms nor sites whose contours can be apparently traced. 'Sexuality' and 'ethnicity' can have both everything and nothing to do with one another, just as they might only be truly mutually articulated through other discursive conditions like religious practice and class. (1996: 91).

Significantly, Capello chooses to speak her lesbian Italianness through the typically Catholic mode of 'self-revelation', the confessional, precisely because ethnicity and sexuality are not representable in a 'once and for all' fashion. Cappello deliberately reinstates this particular narrative as a specifically *Catholic* one, through which particular forms of gendered ethnicity may be articulated.

In fact, to retrieve or celebrate some myth of an essentialized Italian/American ethnicity might require the effacement of gay desire, and perhaps this is why I have made the choice to filter this set of reflections through a rhetorical mode – the confessional – rather than through some picture-perfect memory of a discernible Italian/American content as explanation of sexual choice. (1996: 91)

The reference to the confessional is also a gesture towards Judith Butler's statement about sexuality as calling forth the mode of disclosure (Cappello, 1996: 91). Indeed, sexuality, and more specifically homosexuality, requires an act of revelation for it to be 'shown' and, consequently, 'known'. Yet the precepts of confession are complex, especially when it comes to their political ramifications. Cappello, following Butler, wants to resist the fixing of a lesbian identity that may



a lesbian . . . sometimes functions as a politically efficacious phantasm' (Butler in Cappello, 1996: 91). Hence in her confession, Cappello maintains the ambivalence about what being a lesbian Italian/US-American means, and opens up the question about the privileging of certain signifiers over others, in definitions of sexual and ethnic identities.

Cappello's memories take her back to the materiality of the familial home and neighbourhood, to her body, to her grandfather's garden, to her mother's withdrawals into the dark pains of migraines. She locates the movement between familiarity and estrangement firmly *within* the home, and home is firmly placed 'there', in suburban Philadelphia. This stands in stark contrast to *Sinfield's* subcultures and Schimel's 'cultural homelands'. While they resignify 'home', they also fetishize it by concealing the labour that determines its production. They obscure the material conditions involved in the transformation of urban areas into queer 'cultural homelands', turning them into figures with a life and a will of their own. Rather than being determined by material labour and material conditions of consumption, the 'subcultures' seem to determine the existence of gay/lesbian culture: the cultural homelands *draw* us there because they make us feel at 'home'. At the same time, the fantasy of 'home' and belonging is projected onto these 'imaginary homelands' (Rushdie, 1991). In this respect, 'home' becomes a fetish by virtue of this double process of concealment and projection.⁴ In contrast, in Cappello's account, home is not sentimentalized nor fetishized: it is a place of disjunction, of un-belonging, of struggles for assimilation/integration, thus a space that *already* harbours desires for homeliness. By finding her queerness within that 'unresolved area of desire/lack', Cappello speaks of a 'home-as-fantasy' that she not only desires, but *already inhabits*. Home is already fantasized, even when we are 'in it'. It is a space that is always in construction, not only in the imagination, but in the embodied material and affective labour of women and men: the hard work (and despair) of daily maintenance of the family and the home, the emotional work of mediating between quarrelling kin, and so on.

To be sure, this 'home' is a product of her own memories, and as such, is part of fitting her childhood within her present adult self. But if *Night Bloom* may be read as a narrative of origin, one where Cappello revisits the past to situate her present queerness, she nonetheless resists ownership of her family home, and other moralizing tendencies of origin narratives, by the constant reminder of the material and historical conditions that produced her Italian/US-American family as 'queer'. In questioning the very ideas of Italianness and queerness, she conjures up a 'home' woven through her own reading of the diasporic memories that came her way through her forebears' written or spoken words, or in their silent art of gardening.



Concluding remarks: on the motions of memory

The construction of queer migration as homecoming suggestively unhinges ideas of an originary home(land), while the coupling of queer and diaspora potentially denaturalizes 'any claims on the nation-state and home as inevitable functions of the heterosexual' (Eng, 1997: 35). Yet the movement towards home also serves to reinstate the boundaries of 'home' as an incontestably desirable site, reinforcing the idea of home as familiarity, comfort and seamless belonging. The movement back home, for its part, produces a messier picture. Remembrances of home at once empty it of any definitional and absolute status; it is a space of belonging that proceeds from remembrances of beginnings that *attach* 'home' to places (the hometown in Scotland; the house, garden and neighbourhood in Philadelphia), faces and bodies (the mother in the Isle of Man; the other outsiders in a Scottish town), and emotions (feeling at home in a network of dispersed friends; feeling the loneliness and fear of the immigrant). And Mary Cappello reminds us that home is not simply a *sense* of place, but that it is also a material space, a lived space, inhabited by people who work to keep the roof over their heads, or to keep their family warm, safe and sane. In that sense, homing desires do not occur in the movement *towards* an endlessly deferred space, but they also emerge *within* the very spaces of inhabitation called home.

Re-membling home is lived in motions: the motions of journeying between homes, the motions of hailing ghosts from the past, the motions of leaving or staying put, of 'moving on' or 'going back', the motions of cutting or adding, the motions of continual reprocessing of what home is/was/may be. But the motions are also 'stilled' within the discrete 'moments' of memory. In this sense, memories of home combine forces of movement and attachment at once. In a manner akin to 'stills' from a movie, the images conjured up by remembrances of home are 'stilled' but also 'un-stilled', animated with moving memories, people, emotions. The acts of re-membling *places* disturbs fixed notions of spatiality and territory, while it allows for considerations of memories as constituted by stationary 'moments', or intervals. In other words, the motions of memory challenge commonly held assumptions about the fluidity of time and the stillness of space.

It is easy to read memories of homes as the recovery of what *was* and no longer *is*, and the longing for home – the movement towards home – as a result of this loss. Yet if motioning of memory denies itself under the veil of permanence, the urgency of its enactment confirms its temporality. In queer narratives of migration, desires, memories and geographies are entangled in the creation of 'soils of significance' (Hoffman, 1989: 278) that might provide, however fleetingly, a ground to rest upon.



Notes

A draft version of this article was presented in the 'Queer Theory' seminar series of the Institute for Women's Studies, Lancaster University (October 2000), as well as at the 'Space, Culture, Power' conference at the University of Aberdeen (April 2001). I am grateful for the useful comments and discussion that followed my presentations. I would also like to thank the following colleagues from the Faculty of Social Sciences Women's Writing Group (Lancaster University) for their comments on an even earlier draft of this article: Sara Ahmed, Anne Cronin, Vicky Singleton, Mimi Sheller, Imogen Tyler. Claudia Castañeda helped me realize what I really wanted to say in this article. Finally, thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

1. Others use 'queer diaspora' to speak of the creation of queer spaces within ethnically defined diasporas (Eng and Hom, 1998; Gopinath, 1996; Leong, 1996; Manalansan, 1993, 1995; Mason-John and Khambatta, 1993; Puar, 1998; Ratti, 1993; Takagi, 1996; Tamburri, 1996). In the narrowest sense, 'queering the diaspora' forces a reconsideration of the heterosexist norms supporting definitions of ethnic diasporas. In the broadest sense, it argues for a critical methodology for evaluating ethnic-diasporic formations across multiple axes of difference and in their numerous local and global manifestation (Eng, 1997: 39). The term queer is expanded, in the latter case, to define itself 'against the normal rather than [merely] the heterosexual' (Warner in Eng, 1997: 50 n. 35).
2. For further considerations on the relationship between sexuality, space, safety, and home, see the website of the Violence, Sexuality and Space Research Project, Manchester University; <http://les1.man.ac.uk/sociology/vssrp/home.htm> (accessed 31 January 2001).
3. As Allison James points out, ideas of home, family and childhood 'have come, historically, to intermesh . . . so as to construct a set of intertwined metaphors of dependency within contemporary British society'. Indeed, 'it is in the family that the child is ideologically understood to be "at home"' (1998: 142, 144). See also Allan and Crow (1989) on the construction of the 'modern domestic ideal'.
4. I am informed, here, by Sara Ahmed's own definition of fetishism, which she draws primarily from Marx but also from Freud. See Ahmed (2000: 182 n. 2).

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