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## Making home: queer migrations and motions of attachment<sup>[i]</sup>

### Anne-Marie Fortier

Within predominantly gay, but also lesbian literatures of the Euro-American world, the 'coming out' story has become an established genre of self-narrative and self-identification (Plummer 1995). A recurring theme in these stories is the association of migration with the fulfilment of the 'true' homosexual self *outside* of the family home of one's childhood: 'coming out' means 'moving out' of the childhood 'home' and relocating oneself elsewhere, in an other 'home' (Brown 2000: 50 *inter alia*). This chapter is about evocations of the 'original' family home in narratives of queer<sup>[ii]</sup> migrations, and how this 'home' is differently figured and refigured in relation to different movements: leaving home, returning home, and homing. I discuss how narratives of queer migrations constitute different versions of what Avtar Brah (1996: 180) calls 'homing desires': desires to feel at home achieved by physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the context of migration (Fortier 2000: 163). For 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)

What interests me here is not why gay and lesbian affiliations to home endure, but how 'home' is deployed in gay and lesbian migration narratives. More specifically, I shall examine how the familial home figures in textual renditions of queer migrations. Rather than seeing the childhood home as simply left behind, displaced, or replaced by something new in the process of migration, I propose to explore how it is produced differently through different movements of the 'queer' outside or inside the homespace. A central aim of this chapter is to



decentre the heterosexual, familial 'home' as the emblematic model of comfort, care and belonging. I thus offer a re-reading of the trope of 'coming out' of the childhood home, on the one hand (in the first section), which I cast against narratives of returning to that home, on the other (second and third sections). Through this review of different ways of negotiating the childhood home, I seek out how 'home' may be more effectively theorised as a space that is not foundational, nor determining, indeed a conception that refuses an ontology of 'home' as a necessary function of heterosexuality. Would it be possible to think of the familial home differently, in ways that open it up to 'queer belongings'?

It seems to me that the assumption that one has to move out in order to come out is largely connected to particular ideas about the *inherent qualities* of 'home', and related ideas of hominess. When I began reading the texts discussed below, I was struck by the widespread assumptions about 'home' as a necessary space of comfort and familiarity. This model of 'home as familiarity' attributes inherent qualities to home which, in turn, becomes the cause of its refusal when one no longer feels 'familiar' in the childhood home. 'Home-as-familiarity' entails stasis – it is a site where things and subjects stand still, and it is there to be left behind or desired. While some authors have sought to unfix home from its static position, and suggested that 'movement can be one's very own home' (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 27; see also Chambers 1990), few have questioned the very attributes projected onto 'home' in narratives of migration (one notable exception is Ahmed 2000). Hence in what follows, I unpack the attributes given to 'home' and question the tendency to oppose queerness and the childhood home, where the latter is a space where queerness does not fit. In short, I argue that queer migrations are not merely *against* the childhood home but, rather, that they *reprocess* the childhood home differently. By viewing home as 'reprocessed', I suggest, following Alison James (1998: 144), that home is a 'spatial context where identities are worked on'. This means that the identities of 'home' as well as those who inhabit it are never fixed, but are continuously re-imagined and redefined. In addition, I seek to unveil how home remains widely conceived as an imagined, isolated space that is rarely connected to wider social contexts.[iii] Moreover, there is something about how home is posited not only an *enclosed* space, but, as Jennie Germann Molz points out, 'as a site of [heterosexualised] *familial* relations ... [that] reproduce home as home'[iv], that is worth pursuing. How is the re-imagining of home also about the re-imagining of the family?

The chapter contains three sections: leaving home/moving home, returning home, and homing. The sections all feed into each other in a kind of 'motion' of thought, insofar as the analysis of each type of narrative leads to questions that I consider in the subsequent part.[v] In the first section, I discuss theoretical narratives of queer migration as homecoming, where 'home' is both origin and destination. Second, I consider the movement back home and how home is re-imagined or re-constituted through memories that challenge the ideal of home-as-familiarity. Drawing on autobiographical renditions of queer migrations and remembrances of home, I examine the effect of returning home on the very conception of the childhood home. Third, against a conception of home as engendering a movement elsewhere, towards (becoming) queer, I ask, paraphrasing Ahmed (2000: 88), how does being at home already encounter movement and queerness? Thus in the third section, I offer a different version of 'returning home' – homing – and wonder how memories of home can relocate queerness resolutely within the home. Finally in the concluding section, and in light of the narratives discussed here, I propose to extend Brah's definition of 'homing desire' to include its embeddedness within what I call 'motions of attachment'.

### Leaving home, moving home: migration-as-homecoming

For some, queer migrations constitute migration as emancipation. Described as a 'traumatic displacement from the lost heterosexual "origin"' by David Eng (1997: 32), queer migration is conceived, by others, as a movement towards another site to be called 'home'. Thus Alan Sinfield writes:

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)

Sinfield's intervention inserts itself within a wider discussion, in queer studies, about the fruitfulness of the term 'diaspora' to think about the transnational and multicultural network of connections of queer cultures and 'communities' dispersed worldwide. For Sinfield, queers and diasporas share similar experiences of exile and forced migration outside of an original home. He 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. This story is about the absence, or loss, in childhood, of 'homoness'. To put it simply, the absence/loss of home, here, is located in the familial home, not as a result of leaving home.

In contrast to diaspora, then, Sinfield argues that lesbians and gays do not disperse from a shared home, but, rather, 'assemble' in the new home. In a noteworthy reversal of the diasporisation narrative, 'home', here, is not an origin, but rather a destination; there is no return, only arrival.[vi] This ties in with the idealisation of migration as necessary to the fulfilment of the true homosexual self. Such narratives establish an equation between leaving and becoming, and create distinctively queer migrant subjects: those who are 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*, conjure up stories of exile, abandonment, and loss of the childhood home where the queer is a stranger that does not fit in. 'I had to leave my family in order to be gay', writes Preston in *A Member of the Family* (1992) (in Brown 2000: 48). The assumption is that one has to leave 'home' in order to realise oneself in an *other* place, outside of the 'original' home. 'Once the journey is complete, the self can be completed.' (Brown 2000: 49)

More broadly, this testifies to the enduring power of the model of home-as-familiarity, a place where one seamlessly fits in, thus leaving little room for feelings of estrangement. When such feelings emerge, the story suggests, one has to leave. Sinfield is implying that the condition of joining the gay and lesbian subculture is determined by the estrangement from the childhood home. By the same token, the 'homey' gay and lesbian subculture is defined by the estrangement from the 'original' home. But this estrangement is not the result of leaving home, of leaving a space that was, or felt like, home – which is how migration is widely conceived – but, rather, leaving the childhood home is triggered by *becoming* a stranger at home; we leave, Sinfield suggests, when 'we are no longer "at home"' in the childhood home (2000: 103). Narratives of queer migration-as-homecoming thus locate estrangement in the original home. The movement, here, is a movement away from being estranged, which has triggered the migration in the first place.

For Sinfield the resolution to estrangement is not a return 'home', or a return to the past, but the movement into a new 'home'. His migration 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*' (2000: 103; second emphasis added), a gay or lesbian subculture.[vii] But can the journey ever be completed? Is there a final arrival? For Sinfield, arrival is always deferred. Lesbians and gay men are 'stuck at the moment of emergence. For coming out is not once-and-for-all' (Sinfield 2000: 103). Within the hegemonic heteronormative worlds we live in, lesbians and gay men are often mis-recognised as straight. Hence insofar as the queer diasporic journey is one of 'envisioning ourselves beyond the framework of normative heterosexism' (Sinfield 2000: 103; my emphasis), the final completion of this movement, the final arrival 'home', is never achieved. As David Eng suggests, 'suspended between an 'in' and an 'out' ... – between origin and destination, and between private and public – queer entitlements to home ... remain doubtful' (Eng 1997: 32). Not only are queers forced to leave, but their entitlement to 'home' is questioned because of the irreconcilability of being queer and being 'home', insofar as 'home' is a function of heterosexuality.

Within such narratives of queer migration as homecoming, the lesbian and gay 'subcultures' – or other spaces people are said to move towards to 'feel at home' – acquire a quasi mythical



status. Lawrence Schimel's comment on queer 'cultural homelands' (for example San Francisco's Castro, or Provincetown and Northampton in Massachusetts) within US lesbian and gay culture is apposite in this respect: 'our visits feel like a return home, even if we've never set foot there before.' (1997: 167) The lesbians and gay 'homes' are conceived as the locations *par excellence* for queer subjects to inhabit. The mythification of these homes infuses them with a life and a will of their own, and with the power to *draw* us there because they offer the promise of hominess.[viii] While the fantasy of 'home' and belonging is projected onto these 'imaginary homelands' (Rushdie 1991), the material conditions that determine their existence are concealed. A striking feature of the discourse of migration-as-homecoming is how 'home' is devoid of individual bodies, or, rather, how it is assumed that *any* (gay and lesbian) body will feel at home in its hub. Likewise, the very materiality of 'making home' is obscured: the economic capital, the laws of consumer capitalism, the daily labour of maintenance and of 'servicing' the clientele, the struggles to create and maintain 'safe' spaces in the face of adversity, and so on. In this respect, 'home' becomes a fetish by virtue of this double process of concealment and projection.[ix] 'Home' remains widely sentimentalised as a space of comfort and seamless belonging, indeed fetishised through the movement away from the familial home toward an imagined other space to be called 'home'.

The movement away from home-as-origins becomes a vector for producing 'queerness' as an original stranger, who is always already not-at-home in the childhood home; becoming a 'stranger' is not a result of leaving home, but, rather, was the cause of leaving home. This conception suggests a double-life model, where being queer and being 'at home with the family' are kept separate. The point I wish to make here is twofold. First, as stated earlier, the queer 'home', defined in terms of community, is idealised as a space of comfort and sameness that is inherently different to, and separate from, the '(heterosexual) culture of our childhood' (Sinfield 2000: 103). Indeed, Sinfield's 'subcultures' and Schimel's 'cultural homelands' are very different from the 'homes' we 'make' for ourselves, in our everyday lives; they are very different to the domestic 'home', which remains associated with the estranged childhood home. Both 'homes' – the 'community' home and the childhood home – remain untouched by one another, isolated in their respective boundaries. The childhood home is isolated in the past – home as not-home – while the queer home is isolated in the future – home as desirable destination.

Second, the familial home, remains unproblematically heterosexualised and defined exclusively in terms of normative 'family values'. By locating the origins of migration, and the subsequent divided life, *within* the heteronormative family, the heterosexual *modus vivendi* is fatalistically inscribing, and inscribed within, the family. The childhood home is fixed as unbearably heterosexual and inherently 'gay unfriendly', if not homophobic. The family becomes the original cause of the displacement, and a site of impossible emancipation. What would it mean to 'reassess' the childhood home? Would it open it up to 'queer belongings'?

### Returning home: migration as re-remembering

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' (1997: 6). More broadly, Cant uses diaspora to capture the 'complex set of loyalties' and multiple attachments that many gays and lesbians feel (1997: 14). In a manner akin to Paul Gilroy's borrowing of W.E. Dubois' notion of double consciousness (Gilroy 1993), Cant writes of the 'two-mindedness' of lesbians and gay men, which differs radically from the 'double life' model. For Cant, two-mindedness is about the everyday work of translation, and the opportunities of greater insight into the seemingly opposed worlds lesbian/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, or kept as distant site of impossible return.

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. (1997: 7)

Although Cant still conjures up a childhood home that forced him out, his return breaks away from a linear conception of migration. His re-assessment opens up the possibility that the childhood home can be lived differently in its re-remembering. Cant's reassessment uncovers how childhood, and the idea of 'home' that it is enmeshed with, 'cannot simply be something that proceeds chronologically' (Agamben in Probyn 1996: 101), but rather that it is continually reprocessed, redeployed in narratives of beginnings. 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'. While his remembrance relocates his 'child' as an outsider, it also displaces him by bringing into play his lonely 'I' with a collective 'we' in the creation of new terrains of belonging where multiple 'strangers' co-existed. The act of reconnoitring reconciles Cant with his 'home' by finding in the wider community the effects of social forces of exclusion that unite him, retrospectively, with other outsiders.

In *Invented Identities?*, 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 to which one regularly returns. For Chris Corrin, for example, 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 or, more pointedly, to a particular *relationship*: the mother-daughter relationship. 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). The death of her mother, she anticipates, will engender a detachment that will force her to re-create home through other attachments, other relationships. A 'home' that is not necessarily place-based but that is grounded in the sense of 'family' and belonging provided by her dispersed friends. The Isle of Man is 'home' by way of familial ties, and it becomes un-homey under the spectre of death, which in turn triggers the desire for a home, the movement forward, *into* the quest for home.

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) Her return comes with new friendships, new workmates. 'Home' is *not* what it used to be; it is not better, nor worse, but different simply because differently inhabited. Significantly, home is not resolving the undecidability of her present self-identity – 'I'm not sure who I am' – and in this sense, Clitheroe has not 'fully arrived' in the terms of the previous narrative of migration-as-homecoming. Nonetheless, she 'feels safe'. Finally, other contributors, like Tom Shakespeare (1997) or Spike Pittsberg (1997), barely mention the childhood home. Instead, their accounts move from home to home, as if between sites of momentary dwelling dotted along a network of connections.

The striking feature of these autobiographical texts of migration is that overall, childhood homes do not acquire any definitional, foundational status. It is not a necessary site of estrangement, nor of comfort, nor of identity affirmation. The childhood homes, here, are not simply left behind, nor are they isolated and detached from present lives, wherever those may be. 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): 'the lived experience of locality' (Brah 1996: 192). Rather than isolated sites of (un)belonging, 'homes' are locations criss-crossed by a variety of forces the authors had to negotiate again and again. Though all



the texts begin with a story about the 'original' home, it soon becomes one among many other places that could be called 'home', even temporarily. Each is inhabited by different people – friends, colleagues, family, lovers – who touched the authors differently – in caring, friendly, or even, but to a lesser extent, antagonistic encounters. In these stories, remembrances of home at once empty it of any definitional and absolute status, whilst they continuously attach the ideal of home to places that acquire meaning in the process. Hence if, as Paul Gilroy argues (1993, 2000), memory becomes a primary ground of identity formation in the context of migration, where 'space' is decentered and exploded into multiple settings, it is nonetheless tied to the creation of the identity of places (Fortier 2000; Khan 1996). The authors in *Invented Identities?* ruminates on their geographical movements through remembering events in their lives, thus giving 'place' a special significance as a result of its association with events in their life course (Espin 1996: 82). Their narratives relate to the living memory of place without, however, reducing identity to that place.

In contrast to the narrative of 'leaving home', which maintains the ideal of the childhood home as necessarily excluding queerness, these texts suggest what might happen when queer migrants *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 no longer what it was, the stories in Cant's anthology suggest what it would 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'; a question of 'so what' or 'whatever', as Probyn suggests (1996: 97).

Probyn argues against a foundationalist account of childhood as origin by looking at childhood as 'event'. 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) This would mean to stop where *Sinfeld* cannot: at the moment of suspension between beginning and his anticipated ending and resolution. It suggests that we accept that 'home' is not a unitary, coherent origin fixed in the distant past, a place that was simply left behind. Furthermore, Probyn's project is to refuse a chronological ground, to refuse the appropriation of the past by way of explaining the present. She proposes to resist looking for signs in my childhood or family that will 'explain' my queerness, and, I would add, that will explain my migration. Following on from this, I consider the childhood home as repeatedly reprocessed through multiple returns to the past – physical or mnemonic. How, then, does returning home re-work 'home' in different ways?

The narratives examined here are autobiographical accounts of migrations and of different returns home. They are forms of remembering home through migrations, where memory plays a significant role in 'returning home'. If memory may be seen, following Bergson (1939/1993: 31), as an act of duration where different states and moments have no beginning nor ending but rather extend into one another, it also includes discrete 'moments' that combine forces of movement and attachment at once (Fortier 2000: 173-174). 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 realisation 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.

Remembering home, then, is more than simply retrieving memories of homes past; it is about defining and naming 'places', and calling them 'home'. In addition, if, as stated earlier, we are to consider 'home' as a space inhabited by people, a 'spatial context where identities are worked on' (James 1998: 144), we also need to ask how home is differently *re-membered*. In the stories collected in *Invented Identities?*, re-membering 'home' is about the processes through which spaces of hominess – imagined or physical – are inhabited, in the literal sense of dwelling, in the sense of 'membering' spaces with ghosts revived from the past or presences envisaged in an imagined future, and in the sense of manufacturing subjects.[x]



Still, while the narratives in *Invented Identities?* offer a good example of how 'home' is continually reprocessed, this reprocessing is conceived by Cant, in his introduction, as only possible through migration. In other words, migration offers the possibility of reassessing, and reconciling with, the childhood home. Leaving home, in this respect, remains the necessary condition for emancipation, for some kind of liberation from the constraints of the childhood home, which will be 'loosened' at a distance, outside the childhood home. Only after this initial distancing can the possibility of return be considered. Within this conception, the fantasy of home, the 'myth' of home (Chambers 1990), acquires a special significance as a result of the movement away from an ordinary home which, in the case that concerns me here, is the 'childhood home'. Homing desires, here, are determined by leaving home. In contrast, is it possible to conceive of homing desires as already engendered at home (Ahmed 2000: 88)? Can the desire to 'feel at home' be engendered and lived at home?

### Homing: home as queer

In her remarkable memoirs, *Night Bloom*, US-Italian 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. She relates her grandparents' and parents' struggle to 'integrate' not in terms of simple adaptation to the culture of the country of immigration (the US), but, rather, in terms of the difficult negotiation of injunctions stemming from both Italy and the United States.

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 unmoor fixed gender roles and identifications. Cappello is 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' that come from 'here' and 'there'. In this respect, *'home' is intensely queer, and queer, utterly familiar.*

But there is more to her account than queering the diasporic home. Cappello presents a complex fabric of queerness that exceeds sexuality, and of Italianità that exceeds ethnicity. Indeed, it is often assumed that 'ethnicity' and homosexuality are incompatible, and that lesbian/gay people from ethnic minorities will necessarily lead a double life. Giovanna (Janet) Capone expresses this division very clearly:

instead of feeling like one integrated person, I often feel torn in half. It feels like I'm Italian in New York, and a lesbian in California . . . I feel constantly divided. I think my dilemma is one faced by many gay and lesbian people, whose unpopular sexual orientation means they end up needing a certain distance from their families. I think this semi-estrangement is especially painful for those of us raised in close knit, ethnic families. (Capone 1996: 36; italics original)

For Capone, the impossibility of reconciling her lesbianism with her Italianness is located in what she identifies as her Italian family ethos. Ethnicity is an obstacle in her queer becoming, and reconciling her homosexuality and ethnic identity is an issue that she does not resolve.[xi] In contrast, Cappello resolves this problem by drawing a family portrait where ethnicity and



sexuality are rather 'mutually articulated through other discursive conditions like religious practice and class' (1996: 91). In other words, Cappello refuses to situate her queer Italianness either inside an essentialised conceptions of sexuality as identity – that's who I am – or within an essentialised US-Italian ethnicity that is relentlessly heterosexual, staunchly patriarchal, and deeply homophobic.

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)

Exploring the intersections of immigration, ethnicity and sexuality, Cappello interrogates the very construction of Italian patriarchal culture, epitomised and celebrated in *The Godfather* sequels. The Anglo-US construction of Italian sex-gender norms, she argues, circumscribe the confines of US-Italian belonging. Cappello thus reveals the intricate web of connections between ethnicity and homophobia, and suggests that queer is a US construct that *keeps the non-conforming Italian immigrant at a distance, 'out of place'*

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).

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 wider social and cultural norms of intelligibility. Within this context, exceeding these norms can only be understood as queer. In contrast to evocations of home where 'home' has inherent qualities, Cappello is relating her family's comfort and discomforts not to home *qua* home, but to the difficulties of 'making home' as part of the wider struggle to fit in. Being at home, then, is not merely conditional upon *finding* 'home' somewhere out there and slipping into its comforting fold, but is already constrained by wider social injunctions and definitions of 'home' and family. In other words, Cappello situates her family's dysfunction within the wider context of US fantasies of the Italian family, which is primarily defined in terms of gender roles – the sacrificial mother, the patriarchal macho father. 'Making home', in this context, is inextricably linked to 'making family'. By finding her queerness within the 'unresolved area of desire/lack' (1998: 181), Cappello speaks of a 'home-as-fantasy' that she and her kin not only desire, but *already inhabit*. Home and family are already fantasised, even when we are 'in it'.

Cappello relocates the movement between familiarity and estrangement firmly *within* the home. This stands in stark contrast to *Sinfeld's* subcultures, Schimmel's 'cultural homelands', or Corrin's 'real' home, all of which are grounded in the model of home-as-familiarity. In *Night Bloom*, home is not sentimentalised: it is a place of disjunction, of un-belonging, of struggles for assimilation/integration, thus a space that already harbours desires for hominess. Nor is 'home' fetishised. The familial-home 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. Rather than concealing the social, material, and emotional conditions that determine the existence of 'home', Cappello never loses sight of them.

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, poverty, 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 forbears found in the arts of gardening and of writing, lessons of desire, creativity, and loss. How the delights of a blossoming orange tree co-exist with 'empty pockets' and the struggle to sustain a family (1998: 37).

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 the moralising tendencies of origin narratives by the constant reminder of the material and historical conditions that produced her Italian-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 forbears' written or spoken words, or in their silent art of gardening.

By emphasising the predicament of the immigrant family, however, Cappello's version of raises questions about the extent to which all childhood homes are potentially 'queerable' in this way. Is there something about the diasporic home itself that makes this possible? To paraphrase Eng and Hom (1998: 1), is there always something curiously queer – something curiously divergent, contradictory, or anomalous – that arises from the experience of migration? I would not want to deny that the experience of migration comes with different experiences of 'home', potentially offering insights that allow us to think of 'home' differently. Such experiences, however, must be acknowledged in their specificity, for the danger is, as Ahmed (2000) has argued, to construct 'migrant ontologies' when migration is elevated as a form of being-in-the-world that is necessarily transgressive, or at least one that is necessarily 'other'. In contrast to Capone, Cappello is careful to identify the very specific living conditions and experiences of her family, which cannot be explained through ethnicity as such, nor through migration as such. At the same time, her questioning opens onto the wider socio-historical and discursive contexts that allows us to consider the ways in which ideas of 'home' are deeply embedded with ideas of family, gender roles, and compulsory heterosexuality, which in turn are defined in terms of ethnic difference.

But another question arises about what counts as queer, here. Is Cappello's Italian diasporic family 'queer' simply on the basis of an inversion of US heteronormativity? Is 'queer' simply a shorthand for 'difference' or 'divergence'? We can read Cappello's move as one from the narrower anti-heteronormative definition of 'queer' to the wider anti-normative one. The term queer is expanded, in this latter case, to define itself 'against the normal rather than [merely] the heterosexual' (Warner in Eng 1997: 50n35). But Cappello is not simply reducing queer to a metaphor for divergence, as she is insisting on her family's pains, struggles and sacrifices to survive against *both* the US and Italian norms of 'family life'. By weaving a fabric of queerness beyond sexuality, Cappello is pointing to the necessary intersections of different forms of power, and the necessary recognition that oppression takes different forms. This bears important theoretical implications. Cappello's analysis of the simultaneous sexualisation of ethnic norms, and ethnicisation of gender norms illuminates the limits of sexuality as an exclusive category of analysis. More to the point with respect to this chapter's immediate concerns, the usefulness of Cappello's account resides in the invocation of a queer and diasporic assumption of the domestic that denaturalises any claim on 'home' as the inevitable function of a universalised, decontextualised notion of the heterosexual (Eng 1997: 35). In doing so, Cappello denaturalises any claims on the loss of home as the necessary consequence of 'coming out' and leaving home. 'Becoming queer', here, is not engendered in the movement away from home. It rather emerges from the very fabric of a queer family home.

### **'Homing desires' and motions of attachment**

The queer narratives of migration discussed here undeniably reveal the enduring affiliations of many queer migrants to 'home', or what Avtar Brah (1996: 180) would call 'homing desires' which, as stated earlier, are desires to feel at home in the context of migration. Connected to homing desires is the work of physically or symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security in the location of residence, which is not the same as the location of 'origin'. Avtar Brah's definition of homing desires is decidedly cast in migration and



defined against the physical return to an originary home(land). Here the homing desire is produced through migration. But homing desire also refers to a longing to belong, and as such, it suggests that 'home' is constituted by the desire for a 'home', rather than surfacing from an already constituted home, 'there' or 'here'. In this sense, home is produced through the movement of desire.

It is easy to read memories of homes as the longing for what was and no longer is, and the longing for home – homing desire as movement toward home – as a result of this loss. When 'leaving home' is the condition of possibility for finding a 'real' home, moving home establishes a clear distinction between the initial site of estrangement – home as not-home – and home as a new site of possibility. The emphasis here is on the future, on creating home as a space of safety and comfort, which is determined by the refusal of the childhood home. It is *through* this refusal that the childhood home acquires a definitional status. Ossified into a particular kind of immovable heterosexuality, the childhood home becomes the origin not of queerness, but of the protracted quest for home, the endless suspension that Sinfield talks about. Homing desire as movement towards a new home also serves to re-instate the boundaries of 'home' and 'fix' it as an unchanging and incontestably desirable space, reinforcing the idea of home as familiarity, comfort, and seamless belonging (Ahmed 2000). In this respect, 'homing desires' are constituted through *both* movement and attachment (Fortier 2000).

But 'homing desire' is not only about leaving the originary home behind, fixing it into a distance past, and seeking hominess elsewhere. It can also be part of returning 'home' to remember it differently. In contrast to the first 'double life' model, where homes are isolated in the past and in the future, the second model of translation (Cant 1997), reassesses and reprocesses childhood life, bridging the gap between 'there' and 'here'. Re-remembering the childhood home at once empties 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).

Leaving home or returning home are about moving *between* homes. In both cases, homing desires are determined by an initial movement away from the childhood home. In contrast, Cappello relocates homing desires firmly within her childhood home. She 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 this 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.

Cappello's memoirs themselves (as those in Cant's anthology) could be seen as homing desires, that is that the very act of writing memoirs of her life might be motivated by a homing desire: a desire to revisit the childhood home and to create a sense of place for herself. In this sense, homing desires are deeply entwined with re-remembering the childhood home. And re-remembering that home combines forces of movement and attachment at once; it is about *motions of attachment*. It 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 re-processing of what home is/was/might have been. But 'home' is also re-remembered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to *make* home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way. Re-remembering home, then, is the physical and emotional work of creating 'home', and about the encounter with homing desires already *within* the home (Ahmed 2000), and not only outside of it. Motions of attachment are constitutive 'affective building blocks' (Hage 1997) of 'home'. Indeed, as Gassan Hage suggests, part and parcel of homey feelings are the aspirations for feelings of security, familiarity, and so on. Motions of attachments are about fostering *intimations* of imagined homey experiences from the past or projected into the future – a taste or smell from 'home



cooking', an image, photograph, a new mug, a new chair – but which are imagined 'from the standpoint of the present' (Hage 1997: 107).

Thus the childhood home is more effectively rethought not by refusing 'home' and leaving it behind – which merely reinstates the authority of the heteronormative model of 'home' – but, rather, by conceiving it as a contingent product of historical circumstances and discursive formations – of class, religion, ethnicity, nation – that individuals negotiate in the process of creating home. In this sense, home is never fully achieved, never fully arrived at, even when we are in it.

To suggest that encountering queerness in the familial 'home' should be the cause of leaving home simply reinstates home as inherently 'not-queer'. In contrast, I am arguing that it is more productive to remove the sentimental and fetishist cloak that wraps the ideal of home and that conceals the wider discursive injunctions and processes through which it is continuously produced. Reassessing the ideal of home-as-familiarity is about excavating the assumptions about 'home' and questioning the actions undertaken in the name of 'homoness' – home is not a necessary space of comfort, and it is not only constituted through relations between subjects who negotiate wider injunctions to 'fit in', but also whose positions within the home are not necessarily equal. At a time when the heterosexualised model of home as familiarity – home as sameness – remains the preferred model for ideals of community and nation (for example in Britain), it is imperative that we rethink the model of home if we are to productively re-assess what it means to be 'at home', and that 'home' is a contingent space of attachment that is not definitional or singular. Not only can home be a space of multiple forms of inhabitation – queer and others – but belonging can also be lived through attachments to multiple 'homes'. To be sure, motions of attachment are embedded within relations of power, within differential movements of subjects who do not share equal entitlements to claim a space as 'home'. The redefinition of home as 'queer', or more broadly of home as a space of differences rather than home-as-sameness might be one step towards engaging with histories of differentiation, suffering, inequality, exclusions and struggles that can constitute collective 'resources for the peaceful acknowledgement of otherness' (Gilroy 2002).

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[ii] Whilst I am fully aware of the debates around the term 'queer' itself, I use 'queer', here, as a shorthand for 'lesbian and gay' and a range of non-heteronormative practices and desires that may be at the basis of the formation of individual identifications with a wider cultural or political platform of collective 'identity'. The writers discussed here use 'queer' or 'lesbian and gay' in these terms, except for Mary Cappello.

[iii] Some social theorists have examined the historical construction of 'home and the 'modern domestic ideal'. See Allen and Crow (1989) and Forty (1986: chapter XXX).

[iv] Personal correspondence (first italics mine).

[v] It is worth noting that the majority of the selected texts share one common feature: they connect queer migrations to 'diaspora'. In an article published elsewhere, I consider how these texts make different claims about the diasporic character of queer migrations, namely with respect to their different evocations of 'home'. See Fortier 2001.

[vi] For a fuller discussion of this notion of 'queer diaspora', see Fortier 2002.

[vii] 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 (Fortier 2000: 19). 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 migration. See Fortier 2001.

[viii] I am not suggesting that queer spaces are not 'sites of emergence' for many lesbians and gay men, as they may constitute safe spaces against a variety of threatening forces. In addition, going to the gay bar, or moving within a lesbian subculture may solve, even if momentarily, the ontological problem about belonging to the 'lesbian and gay' culture in a heterosexist, homophobic world. 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'. 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 31.01.01).

[ix] 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: 182n2.

[x] See Fortier 2000 for a fuller discussion of re-membling.

[xi] For a more detailed discussion of the (dis)connections of homosexuality and ethnicity, see Fortier 1999.