



## Imagined or Real: The Politics Behind Imagining the Homeland

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### Abstract

*Diasporas-acknowledged as communities or a cluster of people- carries along with them the dream and idea of a home land which is entirely different from their host land- has been an area of interest and debate among academicians. The idea of a homeland may be an imaginary one or an existing one. As a result of the porousness nature of the borders, the concept of homeland and a return to it has become an area of contention. This article is an attempt to explore the politics behind the creation and sustenance of such imaginary homelands by the South Asian diasporic communities.*

### KEYWORDS

*Diaspora; South Asian diaspora; imaginary homelands; exile; nostalgia*

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### Introduction

The concept of diaspora provides a critique of the discourses of fixed origins, incorporating both the 'homing desire' as well as 'a desire for a homeland'. Both, being quite not the same thing, advocates a differentiation since not all diasporas dream of a 'return'. The concept of home which acts as a subtext of diaspora, facilitates an analysis of the precarious relationship that the 'indigene' sustains with the 'nativist' discourses. According to Avtar Brah, the concept of home includes those who are considered to be the indigenous to a territory and the manner in which they are discursively constituted and is distinctly irregular and context specific ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 187). The process of colonization resulted in the attachment of a derogatory undertone to the term 'native' and a multitude of cultural, political and structural processes, resulting in the conversion of the native people into the 'native', which indirectly became a code for subordination. Brah points out that even though no obvious elicitation of the term 'native' is happening in the current Western society, it still forms the basis for many a racist assumption of being part of the 'actual' society.

A subaltern position is allotted to the natives and their claims contribute largely to the construction of a hegemonic dominance. Even though this subaltern position does not guarantee any claims of essentialist belonging, what remains at risk is the method in which the indigene subject position is manufactured.

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constituted and deployed with all the contradictions. The answer to all these problematics depends upon, at least partially, the way in which the question of 'origins' is treated, whether in a natural and essential way or as historically produced displacements. Brah further asks the question, "Where is home?" ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 188) and explains that the concept of home can be elucidated in two ways. Firstly, 'home' is a phantasmal place of desire in the diasporic imagination with a no 'return' even though it is possible to visit the geographical territory that which is considered as the place of origin. Secondly, home also signifies the lived experience of a vicinity. The aural, visual and olfactory experiences of a subject is moderated by the historically particular day-to-day of the social associations. In other words, the varying experience of the pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentment, or the highs and humdrum of every day lived culture that marks the modalities of a home. ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 189). "The question of home, therefore is intrinsically linked with the way in which inclusion and exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'" ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 189). Brah summarizes her argument using Paul Gilroy's description of diasporic imaginary home, in his *The Black Atlantic*, as simultaneously about 'roots and routes'. "The concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins" ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 189).

The notions of home and belonging in a diasporic condition is equally concerned about the questions of when, how and in what form they are addressed that which determines the history of a specific diasporic community. Certain South Asian communities does not incise a homing desire and a return to the place of their 'origin', but rather a cultural recognition with the Asian sub-continent that contributes to the major element in the identity determination process. Diasporas doesn't imply unpretentious interim travels or a parable for independent single exile but they transpire out of relocations of collectivities consisting of individuals or households. "Diasporas are places of long term, if not permanent, community formations, even if some households or members move on elsewhere. The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience" ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 190). But they also provide the platform for new developments and potentiality for hope and, according to Brah, they are the frequently competed cultural and political territories where independent as well as combined memories diverse, resuscitate and reorganise.

A location becomes home based on the issues of 'feeling at home' and raising a claim upon a place as one's own. It is easier to feel at home at a place but the confrontation of social prohibitions may obstruct someone to openly announce a place as home. The first generation's experience and attachment to the place of origin is entirely different from that of the latter generations. ... the relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations, mediated as it is by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of description and displacement as one tries to reorient, to form new social networks, and learns to negotiate new economic, political and cultural realities." ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 190).

Gender relations too play a prominent role in the shaping up of the experience of men and women in each generation of diaspora. The combination of these social relations is not the application of the patriarchal values adopted from the land of origin over that has been adopted from the host country, but rather a mixing up of both the elements for a transformation while expressing and through distinct institutions, policies and methods of Indication. "The concept of diaspora signals these processes of multi-locationality across geographical cultural and psychic boundaries" ("Cartographies of Diaspora" 191). But one should keep in mind the fact that the multi-locationality of the concept of 'home' in the imaginary of the diaspora makes them feel not anchored in the place of settlement but rather results in a unique identity formation that confronts the notion of an uninterrupted, persistent, unvarying identity.

Diasporic studies have delved deep into the essence of the diasporic communities and have produced perceptions and awareness about the migrant experiences. The concept of home in diasporic communities has its roots

embedded in the question of identity and belonging. Whether out of choice or requisite, moving out of the homeland has forced the migrants to cling on to their roots by maintaining traces of their homeland while at the same time respecting the host society's culture, feelings and responsibilities. Along with the collective sentimental attachment to the land of origin shared among the diasporic communities, some of them even fantasize an earnest desire to return to their homeland. More or less, a diasporic subject is in a perpetual dilemma and torn between two different homes, resulting in unpredictability and the subject seems to go through multiple yet agitated consciousness, resulting in a feeling of loss and ambivalence.

Homeland is the conception from which diaspora procures its pertinence and hence it is absolutely necessary to define and acquaint oneself with the notion of a home. In the frame of reference of diaspora, home refers to a location to which a fraternity or ethnic crowd belongs to and detains a long history and a profound cultural attachment with. Homeland is something that which provides someone with a national identity because diasporic identity is a notion that emanates with the nostalgic emotion for a home. According to James Clifford, diasporic feature consists of "... a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland..." ("Diasporas" 305). A diasporic individual is always concerned with the question of singularity or plurality of homes. Thus, the notion of home and belonging becomes composite and baroque, demanding a solution to the convoluted precision. Wendy Walters has endeavoured to define this complex issue in the introduction to her work titled *At Home in Diaspora*, "The notion of diaspora can represent multiple, plural, constructed location of home, thus avoiding ideas of fixity, boundedness and nostalgic exclusivity traditionally implied by the word home" (Walters xvi). Tijander Dahlstrom is of the opinion that the 'homeland' is a perception rather than a physical region, realm of myths, observation, memories and dreams which will never adhere to the assumptions of a geographical 'homeland'.

The sentimental nostalgic longing for the land of origin is a dominant feature of diasporic works. Residents of diaspora do tend to look back at their homelands and feel a sense of loss of the past and they always try to reclaim this loss through reminiscence and remembrance. Salman Rushdie reverberates this longing in "Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991" (1991). Rushdie expresses the view that a writer like him who desires but unable to claim his sense of belonging to his country, is poignant to produce fictions like *The Midnight's Children* in an effort to demonstrate some sort of an association or a belonging, and to divulge the desire to retrieve his homeland. The diaspora urges the immigrants to estrange themselves from their roots and force them to live between two worlds: the fictional and the actual, the extinct and the contemporary and the virtual and the material. Rushdie enforces the fact that the nostalgic closeness that one has with his homeland is not

‘imaginary’ and that it remains recommencing itself routinely by rekindling the physical as well as the emotional attachments with the native land. He describes this longing to reclaim one’s own home land, can be resuscitated through plain. “I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality... it is probably not too romantic to say that when my novel *Midnight’s Children* was born; when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past of myself, not in the faded greys of old family-album snap shots, but whole, in cinemascope and glorious Technocolour.” (“Imaginary Homelands” 9)

Stuart Hall has done an effective description of the notion of diaspora home or as he prefers to call it, the ‘New world’. According to him, “... this New world is constituted for us a place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’, to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning” (“Cultural Identity” 235). Hall advocates a plurality of home rather than a singularity and illustrates the example of the Caribbean diasporic identity and his theory reaches out to not one but a multitude of homelands. These multiple homelands facilitate the diasporic subjects to have and oscillate between multiple identities. This state of fluidity and mobility that helps the creation of a particular idea of home which is actively involved in all the ‘presences’ but relevant only in the matters of present ‘presence’.

This opinion of Hall is supported by R. Radhakrishnan, regarding the plurality of homes. He stresses in his essay, titled “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora” (2003) that “... ethnicity is always in a state of flux; far from being static, unchanging and immutable...” (Radhakrishnan 119). He is also of the opinion that the credibility of identity as being a diasporic subject is incomplete and should be considered as a setting, from which it heads off to a fixed mediation of identity. The native homeland consolidates itself with the host homeland and it is through the discretion of identity that the notion of home develops. Thus, identity can be envisioned from a particular global diasporic encounter that depends upon the framework “to rethink the rubrics of nation and nationalism, while refiguring the relations of citizens and nation states” (Brazier 3).

The relationship between diasporas and native place of origin is distinguished by uncertainty and psychological uneasiness, since the diasporic subject is lacerated between two different homes. Added to this, “... scattering leads to a splitting in the sense of home. A fundamental ambivalence is embedded in the term diaspora: a dual ontology in which the diasporic subject is seen to look in two directions towards a historical cultural identity on one hand, and the society of relocation on the other” (Ashcroft 425). Home and abroad are integrated in diaspora in such a way that home can be over seen and vice versa since they are not inevitably secured geographical limits. The steady anxiety begins when confronted with the questions

of ‘where you are from’ and ‘where you are now’ and this result in the creation of a unique diasporic space by the subjects. The feeling of loss of home commences in the search for a locale where the diasporic self could belong, a safe socio-political, cultural and intellectual expanse that the individual can call a home. The various and composite experiences of the diasporic subject endure both inclusion and exclusion. It is intrinsically linked with the way in which process of inclusion or exclusion operates and is subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It relates to the complex political and personal struggles over the social regulation of ‘belonging’. (Tsagarousianou 52)

Diasporic experience is a long-lasting rush between ethnicity, economics, ideology and politics creating a contrastive order. Arjun Appadurai (1990) considers diaspora as a fixed movement of people or ideas through five aspects. These five aspects detail how they ultimately attach to the concept of home. The association between diaspora and home is still substantial as they are impacted through ideological, ethnical, economical, mediational and technological dissemination. The interconnection between diaspora and home is unswerving as all these aspects surround the human element which is crucial to the concept of home. Among them, the notion of ‘Ethnoscape’ consists of the motion of people exceeding the ordinary cultural borders. This replacement of the diasporic subject from their homelands, maintain the idea of home from the native that is lost, but keeps on negotiating with the concept of home that is subsisting in the homeland of their immediate host. The basis for such motion is the inter linkage between politics, capital and technology which produces a demand for labour.

The connection between media and diaspora is not continuous since it reproduces the concept of home and it necessitates the understandings of culture, homeland and identity that ultimately form fake and made-up experience through the deceit of media. Homeland ideologies, when get in touch with the ideologies of the host, will get moulded accordingly influencing the formulation of home. For a native, home denotes security and community and for Spivak (1988), it is a place where ‘we cannot want’. It is a place of relationships, security and a collection of memories that supposes identity and nativity by constructing a longing when disseminated. As far as the historical function of a home is concerned, a home bestows to the creation of communal myths and distinctive memories. Diasporic subjects do tend to romanticise their homeland and are supposed to regenerate and attach their homeland with that of the host land. The history, achievements and physicality create deep engagements upon the collective memory of the migrants and the flexibility of their identity is reassessed through de-territorialisation and contextualisation, that are steadily overhauled through complexity. This makes the concept of home hazy and putrid and thereby questioning the laxity of origins, under- scoring the homing desire rather than the longing for a homeland which is not one and the same. Hence, “homeland had

become a homing desire and soon home itself become trans-muted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical space” (Cohen 3).

According to Robin Cohen, home as “place of origin, or the place of settlement, or a local, national or transnational place, or an imagined virtual community as a matrix or known experiences and intimate relations...” (3) challenges the subjectivity nature of the idea of home. So, homeland, as structured by globalised discourses, explain the weakening between a homeland and the diasporic subjects as it turns out to be an enormously diverse, multicultural and a hybrid world. While applying the romantic concept on the homeland, there is the necessity for a nationalist rhetoric that fastens the diasporic subjects to the land and culture. The yearning to return to homeland can never be considered as the universal archetypal diasporic experience. According to Clifford, the Jewish diaspora is not developed in a real homeland but as a home expanded through “cultural forms, kinship relations, business circuits, and travel trajectories as well as through loyalty to the religious centres of 147 the diaspora” (“Further Inflections” 305). Besides, Jewish diaspora is not distinguished by a longing for a homeland but more of a regaining of the idea of home, from that which is lost.

Explicating diaspora, through an inescapable bond to homeland, omits certain weaknesses like the essentialist recognition of an ideal homeland—host land classification that further neglects to distinguish the escalating and flexible nature of diasporas and the floating transnational centres in which they transpire and receive quintessence. These nostalgic homeland affixes, sometimes, and will move beyond the due importance, to the repetitive stereotypical significance of the ideal kind of clarity and the return to the homeland. Trapped within modernisation, diasporas are impacted by the globalization in which the home coming is acutely encroached upon and ends up in a round - about route and no returning to the homeland. Diasporic experiences consist of transnational spaces of experiences and they mix up the outlines of the homeland and the host land. The adherence to a homeland is based upon certain ambivalent experiences and such “ambivalence in processes of diasporic identification is often due to the contrasting exigencies of a usually ‘monophobic’ official discourse and politics on the one hand, and a diasporic vernacular or plebeian culture often more polyphonic and complex on the other” (Tsagarousianou 58).

The uncritical attitude on the association between homeland and diaspora also points towards the essentialization of the deduction and illustration of the native socio -cultural elements. Accordingly, the dynamics of diasporas and the various innovative probabilities from local and transnational surroundings, undergo damage and disconnection. It is equally important, within the diasporic prospective, to compose and understand identities to attain ethnic identity. Cohen (1997), in his endeavour to represent this agreement between the home land and ethnic identity, advocates a dedication and participation in politics in-order to convey

the plurality of the components that would actually donate to the cultures which conceives the consistency through action. The differentiation between ethnic and diasporic identity is not dispersed because of a collective and familiar beginning but the tendency to use themselves lively and steadily with the creation of transnational imagination and correlations consisting of the “‘threshold’ from ethnic to diasporic identification” (Tsagarousianou 59). It is not only identifying the parleying of ethnic and diasporic recognition but also in making sure the difficulty of the processes of consultation that exceeds the controls of ethnicity.

The estrangement of a community in diaspora, its separation from the ‘natural’ setting of the homeland, often leads to a particularly intense search for and negotiation of identity gone are many traditional anchor points of culture; conventional hierarchies of authority can fragment. In short, the condition of diaspora is one in which the multiplicity of identity and community is a key dynamic. (Mandaville 172) The resurgence of diasporic cultural politics provides new possibilities for novel locations of hope and the diasporic subjects do not have to depend upon the nostalgic endeavour to shapen up their identity but rather to formulate their self -identity and a notion of home, using a progressively advanced attitude. According to Vijay Mishra in his *The Diasporic Imaginary and the Indian Diaspora* (2005), diasporas have a radical as well as a rightist vein in them. Both these elements concentrate upon the notion of “one’s ‘homeland’ as genuine spaces from which a particular kind of reclamation is plausible. Homeland is the ‘desh’ (in Hindi) against which all the other lands are foreign or *videsh*” (Mishra, “The Disaporic Imaginary and the Indian” 2). According to him, homeland prevails as an absence that needs an excess which is meant by the aspect of diaspora. He asserts that the analysis of homeland must be along with yet another facet of diaspora which claims that diasporas do not return to their homelands.

According to Hamid Naficy in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), the accented films demonstrate the dialectics of displacement and emplacement through particular space time arrangements. Place refers to those locations which people attach distinctive meaning and value and whether it’s a country or house or a corner in a house, the significance applies not only to its physical presence but also ones association to it and one’s social relation within it. Only while facing the menace of a displacement, do we understand the real significance and merit of that particular entity called place. Hence, displacement forms the opposite of emplacement and similarly the concept of home is secured to horizon and homeland to exile. Furthermore, since place has got a historical significance too, displacement and emplacement attain a temporal aspect also by connecting it with either to the dates of a grand home-coming or homelessness. Most of the exilic people never go to a place of exile right after leaving the place of origin behind. “Many, particularly refugees and asylees, are forced to stay in intermediary places during their

circuitous home-seeking journeys. These transnational places are also a part of the idea of place that forms their identities and their chronotopical figuration in accented films” (Naficy 152).

Chronotope, literally signifying time-space, was first proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin as a ‘unit of analysis’ for analysing literary works in their presentation of structural and temporal arrangements as well as an ‘optic’ for examining the power that constructs such arrangements. According to Naficy, cinematic chronotope includes some specific/ particular temporal and special situation in which the stories uncover. “Accented film encode, embody, and imagine the home, exile, and transnational sites in certain privileged chronotopes that link the inherited space-time of the homeland to the constructed space-time of the exile and diaspora” (152).

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