

# Belongings

## *Place, space and identity in a mediated world*

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**ABSTRACT** This article is concerned with transformations in ideas of home, place, belonging and identity in the context of the transnational patterns of communication and mobility which increasingly characterize our contemporary, destabilized (or, according to some, deterritorialized) world. The article examines the cultural significance of the transgression of borders of various sorts which arises from these forces, and investigates how these transgressions are regulated in different circumstances. These issues are explored at both micro and macro levels, in relation to the household, the nation and the local or transnational community as 'spaces of belonging'. The article argues for a 'materialist' version of cultural studies which is sensitive to both the symbolic and the material geographies within which people's identities are formed.

**KEYWORDS** *alterity, belonging, borders, community, home, identity, mobility*

## Introduction

This article addresses the question of how we are to understand the transformations of the idea of 'home' brought about by widespread changes in patterns of communication and physical mobility in our contemporary 'destabilized' (or even 'deterritorialized') world. When I speak of home I mean both the physical place – the domestic household – and symbolic ideas of *Heimat* – the 'spaces of belonging' (and identity) at different geographical scales – the local, national or transnational communities in which people think of themselves as being 'at home'. This is to speak of home not simply as a physical place but also as a virtual or rhetorical space: the place where, in the words of Vincent Descombes, a person is 'at ease with the rhetoric of those with whom they share a life' (quoted in Auge, 1995: 108). This is an idea – or perhaps, better, a fantasy – of that ultimately *heimlich* place where, to put it more prosaically, in the words of the old *Cheers* theme tune – 'everybody knows your name'.



In approaching these issues I try to make a number of connections between micro and macro perspectives, following Foucault's strictures on the need to develop approaches which can link our analysis of 'the little tactics of the habitat' to that of the 'grand strategies of geopolitics' (Foucault, 1980: 149). Thus my argument moves between different geographical scales and social locations, from that of the domestic household to that of the nation or transnational community. In pursuing this analysis I also attempt to develop what I will call a 'materialist' version of media and cultural studies, by bringing back into their ambit questions of physical movement (and patterns of settlement) which have been long annexed to geography – or even to transport studies. The object of study of such a materialist perspective would then be, to quote Yves de la Haye 'the movement of messages, people, goods and information' (1980).<sup>1</sup>

I have been involved in the process of what I once called 'reconceptualising the media audience' (Morley, 1974) for a long time now, and my work has gradually shifted its focus, expanding my initial concerns with the question of how texts are interpreted to include the analysis of the domestic context in which much media consumption still occurs. Clearly the media are not exclusively consumed and used in this context – not only is a whole range of media now consumed outside the home, but even those such as television, initially developed for domestic use, are now becoming 'ambient', as McCarthy (2001) well demonstrates. Nonetheless, we will not understand the significance of those media that are still consumed within the home without a better understanding of the home itself, not simply as a backdrop to media consumption but as a context which is constitutive of the meaning of many media-related practices. In this latest stage of my work my concern is to ground more firmly the analysis of media consumption by moving beyond the analysis of the domestic household itself (cf. Morley, 1986; Morley and Silverstone, 1990) to place the issue of people's various audience memberships in the broader geographical context of their patterns of living – both patterns of mobility and patterns of settlement. In this my aim is better to connect patterns of media consumption to the material geographies in which audiences live out their lives.

To put it another way, following a formulation of Scott Lash and Johnathan Friedman's, this is to argue for an approach which can deal with two simultaneous modes of circulation – one which focuses on how the 'symbolic goods, such as television broadcasts, records, videos and magazines – circulate among the viewers' and another which focuses on the physical environment 'in which the viewers circulate among the symbolic goods' (Lash and Friedman, 1992: 20). From this perspective, as Lauren Berlant (1996) has put it, the construction of a sense of the 'national symbolic' is an effect both of the virtual circulation of the images of the 'sacred' landscapes and monuments of the community in



mediated form, and of the physical circulation of the population around these various sites.

In Arjun Appadurai's terms this is to try to relate 'the forms of circulation' to the 'circulation of the forms' (2001: 15). In developing this perspective I also take a lead from Appadurai's insistence on the need to study the conjunction (or disjunction) of communication flows and patterns of residence or mobility. His own principal focus is on the significance of the potential disjunctions of transnational electronic 'mediascapes' with the 'ethnoscapes' of mass migration – where, in some cases, both audiences and messages are in simultaneous circulation. Appadurai's main stress is thus on mobility in its various forms – with how we are to understand cultural processes in a world where 'moving messages meet deterritorialised viewers in a mutual contextualising of motion and mediation' (Appadurai, 1996: 5) – a process of flux which destabilizes traditional forms of place-based identity. However, I want to inflect this argument in a different direction, so as to point not only to the destabilizing effects of globalization, but also to the simultaneous process of 'reterritorialization' which we see around us, whereby borders and boundaries of various sorts are becoming more, rather than less, strongly marked. I thus also want to consider the converse case to the one on which Appadurai principally focuses – where, for some people, their patterns of residence and modes of media consumption work together to consolidate and fix in place their senses of identity, in what can be problematic and at times deeply regressive ways.

To that extent my argument also has a polemical edge, in so far as it expresses scepticism about the ways in which, within some areas of cultural studies, the critique of various forms of supposed essentialism has, on occasion, led to a rather uncritical celebration of all notions of mobility, fluidity and hybridity, as themselves intrinsically progressive. In that celebratory writing the focus is usually on people's ability to remake and refashion their identities in empowering ways. However, to my mind, insufficient attention is often paid both to the processes through which the forms of cultural capital with which people can refashion their identities are unequally distributed, and to the extent to which many people are still forced to live through the identities ascribed to them by others, rather than through the identities they might choose for themselves. To that extent the perspective offered here is a deliberately downbeat one – but, as Ulf Hannerz (1996b) put it, in another context, there are times when some 'unexciting caution' is a necessary thing.

## **Postmodern anxieties**

In contemporary social theory, images abound of exile, diaspora, time-space compression, migrancy and 'nomadology'. However, the



concept of home – the obverse of all this hyper-mobility – often remains uninterrogated. Certainly, traditional ideas of home, homeland and nation have been unsettled, and the electronic landscapes in which we now dwell are haunted by all manner of cultural anxieties which arise from this destabilizing flux. In this changing context, I want to argue, we need to develop a new understanding of the idea of home.

Historically, cultures have been thought of as being rooted in space, in stable patterns of interaction of people doing the same things in the same places. The correlation of place and culture was, of course, the basis of traditional concepts of ethnicity and, in that vision of things, cultures were seen as embodying genealogies of ‘blood, property and frontiers’ (Carter, 1992: 8). Nowadays, of course, the world can no longer be so easily divided up into such clearly demarcated and spatially bounded cultural worlds, because, as Rapport and Dawson put it (1998: 8) ‘the migration of information, myths, languages, and people brings even the most isolated areas into a cosmopolitan global framework of interaction’ – what Ulf Hannerz (1996a: ch. 4) has called the ‘global ecumene’. However, even if increasing numbers of people are now included in this network of connections, the key question concerns the terms on which different groups get to participate in this framework – whether as the ‘interactive’ or the ‘interacted’, in Manuel Castells’s terminology (1996: 371).

In today’s world the distribution of the familiar and the strange is certainly a complex one, where difference is often encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood and the familiar sometimes turns up at the end of the earth (Clifford, 1997). Ashley Bickerton writes of ‘encountering Terminator stickers on river boats in Borneo, Batman T-shirts in the highland villages of Irian Jaya and a certain bad New Jersey haircut almost every place that I have been’ (quoted in Rogoff, 2000: 60).<sup>2</sup>

At a micro level, the modern home itself can be said to be a ‘phantasmagoric’ place, to the extent that electronic media of various kinds allow the intrusion of distant events into the space of domesticity. In Zygmunt Bauman’s (1997) terms, this represents the problematic invasion of the ‘realm of the far’ (that which is strange and potentially troubling) into the ‘realm of the near’ (the traditional arena of ontological security). Thus, the ‘far away’ is now irredeemably mixed in with the space of the near, as processes of migration and of media representation bring actual and virtual forms of alterity into jealously guarded ‘home territories’ of various sorts.

As Gilane Tawadros puts it, in this context, it would seem that, from a Eurocentric point of view, the choice for the newly destabilized West appears to be twofold – either to ‘step back into a rose-tinted mythical past, where modernity and migration have yet to be imagined’ or, alternatively, to step forward into ‘a contemporary Tower of Babel’ – a chaotic nightmare replete with ‘strangers’ of one sort or another



(Tawadros, 1994: 107). However, we might pause here. If we take mobility to be one defining characteristic of the contemporary world, we must simultaneously pose the question of why (and with what degrees of freedom) other people stay at home and ask, with James Clifford (1997: 84), how, in a world of flux, forms of collective dwelling are sustained and reinvented.

While it is often claimed that the paradigmatic experience of postmodernity is that of rapid mobility over long distances, it is important to note that this paradigm still actually applies only to 1.6 percent of the world's population. To take a local (to me) example, within the UK rates of geographical mobility have in fact been declining in recent years. The majority of people in the UK still live within one hour's journey time of their relatives and within 5 miles of where they were born. Indeed, 72 percent of British grandparents claim to see their grandchildren at least once a week, which also seems to indicate a fairly low level of intergenerational mobility (Dickens, 1988; Gray, 1997). Moreover, even if Hollywood's impact on the global imagination has made people who have never been there quite familiar with images of the streets of the 'global cities' of our times, the majority of them still have an effective 'horizon of action' which is very local – and often ranges no further than the end of their own street or neighbourhood (cf. Warburton, 1998). Among other things, this may perhaps account for the relative lack of interest which many citizens of our supposedly globalized world show in any forms of TV news other than the local. As Ken Worpole (1992) has put it, still, for most people, the town or city they are born in is the one that will shape their lives and become the stage set of their hopes and aspirations.

Class, of course, is one major differentiating factor in respect to mobility. Terry Hall, the ex-singer of the British 'Two-Tone' group The Specials, put it this way, when describing his childhood: 'I'm not very good on class', he said, 'but I guess we were pretty much working class. I mean . . . we never went anywhere' (quoted in Bracewell, 1997). In a similar spirit, where immobility is increasingly seen as one of the forms of impoverishment, Phil Cohen, in his analysis of the forms of what he calls 'homely racism', has argued that, if the 'Home Boy' is, par excellence, the 'nationalist of the neighbourhood', his macho aggressiveness in relation to the micro-territory of his 'hood' has to be understood precisely in the context of the poverty of his options in relation to wider horizons (Cohen, 1993: 21). Here we might also recall the episode of *The Simpsons* where Homer was awarded the 'all-time-left-behind loser's' prize for having moved, in his whole adult life, a shorter distance than any of his classmates from the school he attended as a child.<sup>3</sup>

Given these complications, it would clearly be pointless, as Clifford rightly observes, to simply replace the traditional anthropological figure



of the 'sedentary native' with that of the 'intercultural traveller' – as the conceptual pivot of some generalized 'postmodern nomadology' which claims that 'we' are now all equally mobile (Clifford, 1997: 24 and 36). What is needed here is an analysis of what Doreen Massey (1994: 3–4) has termed the 'power geometry' of postmodern spatiality, in terms of who has control over their mobility. This, she argues, would involve not just distinguishing those who are mobile from those who remain sedentary, because many people are forced into mobility for economic or political reasons. We must also distinguish between those who Ulf Hannerz (1996a: ch. 9) calls the 'voluntary' and the 'involuntary' cosmopolitans of our era – and between those who Zygmunt Bauman (1998) calls the 'tourists' of postmodernity, whose credit rating makes them welcome wherever they wish to shop, and the 'vagabonds', whose lack of economic power – or the relevant visas – makes it hard for them to settle anywhere.

For Massey, the key question is how much control different groups can exercise over how the process of globalization affects their lives. One of the most telling examples she gives comes from her study of a group of highly successful male scientists at Cambridge University (Massey, 1995: 190–1). These men are able to counterbalance the intense, virtual and actual forms of mobility of their professional lives (in which they daily communicate with colleagues internationally and regularly travel to conferences abroad) with the quieter delights of their secluded domestic lifestyles, in their houses in the Cambridgeshire countryside – which are, of course, maintained for them, in their absence, by their wives. Certainly, one of the other dimensions of difference involved here involves the way in which the burden of *Heimat* is often carried by the female 'home-maker', in so far as relations to mobility and sedentarism are commonly gendered in one way or another (Rose, 1993; Wolf, 1985).

However, before I go further, a word of caution about the inevitably value-laden nature of the terminology in which we discuss patterns of residence and mobility. Conventional approaches would shoehorn us into the positive language of 'home truths', of the virtues of the 'home-made' – and of the idea of 'settling down' as itself an index of maturity. This is a terminology in which to be (too?) mobile is implicitly a moral failing. Conversely, as I indicated earlier, today we see a widespread discourse which valorizes – or perhaps, better, romanticizes – all forms of mobility as themselves intrinsically progressive. This is the discourse of what John Durham Peters (1999) has called the postmodern beatification of the nomad. My argument is that this latter discourse will serve us no better than the former, for the question is not whether mobility or sedentarism are good or bad things in themselves, but rather of the relative power which different people have over the conditions of their lives. Voluntary forms of physical mobility and virtual 'connexity' (to borrow a term from Mulgan, 1997) are perhaps best seen as social 'goods', the unequal



distribution of which is a key dimension of contemporary forms of inequality. Moreover, our celebration, in a political context, of the positive potential of transborder 'Third spaces' should not blind us to the very real difficulties experienced by those who have their mobility – or their sedentarism – forced upon them (cf. Malkki, 1996).

Borders mean very different things, depending which side of them you stand and how easily you can cross them. Much also depends on how close you are to the border – at a micro level, studies of urban gang graffiti show that it will tend to become more aggressive the nearer it is to the edge of the gang's territory, where control, being less secure, is all the more hysterically claimed (Ley, quoted in Rose, 1995: 99). To shift geographical scales, if we consider the increasingly contentious question of the policing of the border of Europe, we find that again difference is most hysterically articulated at the outposts of that territory. For example, Brigitta Busch's research in Carinthia, the regional *Heimat* of the Austrian governmental party of Jorg Haider, shows that, for the majority of those on the Austrian side, the border with Slovenia is a matter of great importance, marking not just the border of the nation, but of Europe itself. Conversely, those on the Slovenian side downplay the significance of that border, wishing instead to emphasize all that they have in common, culturally, with the Austrians. For them, the border that counts is that which separates them from the realm of their more significant Others, to the south, in the Balkans.<sup>4</sup>

While the border of Europe may be seen to fall in different places, when seen from different perspectives, the one thing it is definitely not doing – despite any talk of an increasingly 'borderless' world (cf. Ohmae, 1996) – is disappearing. This is perhaps most dramatically witnessed by the erection of the very expensive and imposing fence – sometimes referred to as the 'new Berlin Wall' – that the European Union has had built at Cuerta on the North African coast, to try to block the flow of illegal immigration into Spain (Tremlett, 1998; Webster, 1998).

## **Home, community and nation**

It might be argued that one of the principal effects of the widely perceived loss of certainty, security and safety in the destabilized 'risk societies' in which we now live, has been a widespread retreat into regressive forms of closure – whether at a national or local level. This is the perspective advanced by Bauman (2001) in his analysis of the process through which, in an increasingly insecure world, people search for safety in ideas of community. Let us turn now to consider the significance of the defensive responses which commonly arise among those who find their lives disrupted by the forces of globalization – responses which Etienne Balibar (quoted in Nairn, 1993) has called 'identity panics': such as that mobilized in Australia, not so long ago, by Pauline Hanson –

which often portray whites as the displaced new victims of the forces of cosmopolitanism (cf. Ang, 2000).

One of my concerns, in exploring these issues here, is to make some links between debates in urban studies about patterns of residence, and debates within communications studies about patterns of media consumption. I also want to link these questions to anthropological perspectives on practices of boundary maintenance. In doing this, my primary focus will be on anxiety-driven 'rituals of exclusion' of alterity (cf. Sibley, 1995). I am aware that this is only one side of an ambivalent story, in so far as alterity can also be a focus of desire. Alterity is by no means always excluded, but on occasion, rather 'domesticated' (cf. Hage, 1993) – or consumed as 'exotic' in various commoditized forms (cf. Hutnyk, 1996; May, 1996a, 1996b). But that, as they say, is another story, for another day.<sup>5</sup>

If various contemporary forms of communication and mobility routinely transgress the boundaries of the sacred spaces of the home or *Heimat*, the issue is then how those transgressions are characteristically regulated. Inevitably, these regulatory processes generate conflict, in their attempt to expel alterity beyond the boundaries of the ethnically or culturally purified enclave – whether at the level of the home, the residential neighbourhood or that of the nation. Here the issue is who is to define who 'belongs' or what is to be excluded as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966). That 'matter' may be represented by 'impure' materials which are deemed to profane the home; by 'strangers' of one sort or another who are felt to profane the neighbourhood, or by 'foreign' cultural objects which are seen to defile the symbolic space of the nation.

If hyper-mobility is one of the key figures of our postmodern condition, then its correlative is surely the gated community (Davis, 1990). There is a growing tendency towards residential segregation throughout the affluent societies of the West, as those who can afford to do so increasingly remove themselves from the fractious world of the decaying public sphere. Even if gated communities (like suburbs – cf. Tufte, 1998) take different forms and mean different things in different contexts, they are by no means now only a North American or western phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> Here we confront the politics of withdrawal and separation, both within the city, and in the flight of privileged groups to the suburbs, or to the countryside, as a way to escape from the burgeoning multiculturalism of city life. I want to propose that we might usefully consider these processes of 'suburbanization' in the light of the comments by Roger Silverstone (1997) and Andy Medhurst (1997) on television as itself a 'suburbanizing' medium – which, through its repetitive and reassuring patterns, consolidates the sense of security of those within the communities it serves. In the conjunction of these processes, I want to suggest, what we sometimes see emerging, rather than the much-advertised fluid and hybrid forms of postmodern





subjectivity, are new forms of consolidation of old patterns of social and cultural segregation.

In this context, it is worth noting that three-quarters of potential house-buyers in the UK say that ideally, they would prefer to live in a leafy, village-style cul-de-sac, away from all traffic and passing strangers. As Worpole has noted in his commentary on these findings, it seems that the urge to leave 'Albert Square' or 'Coronation Street' to live in 'Ambridge' remains a pervasive ingredient of the English dream (Worpole, 1995).<sup>7</sup> However, this dream is by no means exclusively English: thus Michael Ignatieff (1994: 213) interviews a German couple who have retreated to live in the countryside outside Frankfurt precisely because the increasingly multicultural city itself now seems 'foreign' to them.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar vein, Susan Marling has argued that the popularity of reinvented forms of 'new urbanist' traditional architecture in the USA indicates a desire 'to live in the neighbourly world of . . . *Peyton Place*, to return to Fifties America, when houses had porches and picket fences and all the folks were cheery' (Marling, 1999). Perhaps, one might be tempted to add, in so far as the traditional form of the architecture seems also to symbolize a racialized form of memory, this is also a nostalgia for a time when all the 'folk' were white – a theme to which I will return later. As Andrew Ross (2000) rightly notes in his ethnographic study of the Disney-built town of Celebration in Florida, what these newly popular forms of 'reinvented' architecture are selling is a 'story about going home again . . . to a place . . . behind the fast curve of modernity'. This is a place which, in the words of the publicity brochure for Celebration, offers to take you back to a 'time of innocence', a place with the 'special magic of an American home town', where 'neighbours greeted neighbours in quiet of summer twilight' (Ross, 2000: 18–19). It is also, in effect, a predominantly white ghetto, quarantined off from all the social and economic problems of the area surrounding it – which is a large part of its appeal. Thus McKee (2001) interviews a British couple, who sold up their home in England to move their family there, who enthuse that 'when you come home of an evening . . . to . . . Celebration, it makes you feel very secure' (quoted in McKee, 2001).<sup>9</sup>

If the home, the neighbourhood and the nation are all potential spaces of belonging, this is no simple matter of disconnected, parallel processes. Each of these spaces conditions the others and the question is to understand how, as Sibley puts it (1995: 90), 'the nation and the locality invade the home' – because these spaces are simultaneously tied together by media messages, by the workings of the real estate market, and by macro factors such as the immigration policies of the state and the impact of the global economy. It is these interconnections with which, ultimately, we need to be concerned.



## **From the household to the nation**

Let me now turn directly to questions of media consumption, and also turn to the micro level of analysis, by taking an example from the research project which Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch, Sonia Livingstone and I conducted on 'The Household Uses of Information and Communications Technologies'.<sup>10</sup> In that project, one of our principal interests was in how households of different types regulated the capacity of the new technologies to transgress their boundaries. In the case of the particular family to which I will refer, we see again, this time at a micro level, a fearful attempt to regulate boundaries which are under pressure from external forces. In this case, the husband had suffered what he understood to be a technologically driven form of unemployment and he felt very much a victim of circumstances beyond his control. He was extremely worried about his capacity to provide economically for his family in the future, and he and his wife compensated for this by exercising a heightened degree of control over the communications boundaries of the household itself. Thus, for example, they carefully regulated their children's use of the telephone, with precise rules governing the time they were allowed to spend on both outgoing and incoming calls (so this was not simply a question of the financial cost of the calls). Moreover, they were very concerned about their children's consumption of television programmes on the sets installed in their bedrooms. Their particular concern was with the danger of the family's moral boundaries being transgressed, if the children were to watch 'foreign' programmes of an 'unsuitable' nature. Were we to conduct this research today, clearly, the parallel anxiety would no doubt be that which many parents now have about the capacity of the internet to transgress the moral boundaries of their household, by bringing their children into contact with similarly unwanted materials.

However, this concern with the policing of micro boundaries can readily be seen to have parallels at other geographical scales. In recent years, various national governments have attempted to control the consumption of foreign media on their national territories by outlawing satellite dishes and, more recently, by attempting to monitor and control their populations' access to the internet. Not so long ago, in an uncannily exact mirror image of each other's policies, while the Iranian government was attempting to ban satellite dishes, on the grounds that the foreign programmes they picked up were part of a western 'cultural offensive' against Islam, the mayor of Courcouronnes (a poor, mainly North African immigrant district south of Paris) also banned satellite dishes from the high-rise blocks in which many of his constituents lived – ostensibly on the basis that they represented a health hazard, as they might blow off in high winds, and fall on people below (Dejevsky, 1995).

434 However, the ban was in fact made at the instigation of the French



National Front, in whose eyes the dishes represented the threat of a migrant population that lives on the geographical territory of France but which inhabits, via satellite, a world of 'Virtual Islam'. These immigrants' virtual involvement in this transnational cultural space was then presented, in effect, as a form of 'cultural treason' against the French nation. The same issue has arisen in Germany, where evidence of Turkish migrants' supposed 'withdrawal' to the virtual space of transnational broadcasting from the Middle East has been argued to constitute evidence that they do not really deserve to be granted German citizenship, as they are refusing to participate fully in German cultural life.

In actuality, of course, the picture here is much more complex than it might at first seem, as demonstrated by Aksoy and Robins's (2000) work on the extremely fluid forms of simultaneous identification with different aspects of both Turkish and German culture made by Turkish families living in Germany. One should also note Hargreaves and Mahdjoub's (1997) findings on intergenerational differences of cultural orientation among migrant communities in France, which complicate the picture in important ways, in so far as second- or third-generation children of migrant families by no means necessarily share their parents' cultural orientation to their society of origin (cf. also Tsagarousianou, 2001).

Just as Foucault argued that 'discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space' (1977: 141), the historian Fernand Braudel once remarked that 'The question of boundaries is the first to be encountered; from it, all others flow' (quoted in Lofgren, 1996: 13). Taking this lead, I want now to propose an analogy, in which we can see that there are strong parallels between the geographical question of the distribution of types of persons in the physical space of the nation (or the city) and the question of representation – the question of which types of persons are permitted to inhabit which genres – or virtual spaces – in the media. To take one example: if by day, the financial centre of the City of London is mainly populated by highly paid white male stockbrokers, at 4 a.m. it is populated by an army of low-paid women cleaners, many from ethnic minorities. The analogy I want to make is that the timetable of physical visibility of different groups in social space is analogous to their visibility – or otherwise – in the virtual space of the broadcast schedule – and the social relations of these two dimensions, the virtual and the physical, work to reinforce each other in important ways.

To return to the French case, we see that just as, physically, migrant populations there tend to be confined to locations such as the *banlieues* – the poor, outlying suburbs of the city (cf. Maspero, 1994) so, on the whole, they are confined to representation within particular media genres – principally appearing as 'problems' of one sort or another in the genres of news and current affairs. Because they tend to be excluded from what Alec Hargreaves calls the 'genres of conviviality', such as soap



operas and game shows, migrant populations 'are simply not represented as part of everyday life' – and the broadcasters thus 'reinforce popular perceptions whereby these groups are seen as fundamentally alien rather than as ordinary people' (Hargreaves, 1993: 260). This is a key dimension of what we might call the politics not simply of representation, but also of social recognition, by means of which the issue of who (properly) 'belongs' where is determined.

However, as we shall see, if France offers a particularly clear picture of this kind of (racialized) boundary-drawing process, at both the geographical and representational levels, this is also a problem of much more general application.

### **Nations/imagined communities**

In relation to the question of the nation my particular interest is in how the nation comes to be presented as a symbolic home – or *Heimat* – for its citizens – and in the corresponding question of who does or does not come to feel 'at home' within it.

In the UK Paddy Scannell (1996) and in Sweden Orvar Lofgren (1995) have developed important analyses of the role of broadcasting in the construction of a sense of national unity. Their central concern is with what Lofgren calls the 'educative' role of broadcast media in the 'cultural thickening' of the nation state. He calls this the 'micro-physics' of learning to belong to the 'nation-as-home', and he argues that broadcasting's national rhetoric often takes ritual forms, whereby national symbols come to be inscribed in domestic practices (Lofgren, 1995: 12–14). Thus he notes, in Sweden, even the weather was 'nationalised' and its national limits clearly demarcated, so that 'in the daily shipping forecast, the names of the coastal observation posts of Sweden were read like a magic chant, as outposts encircling the nation' (Lofgren, 1995: 20).

Similarly, in his commentary on the symbolic significance of *The Shipping Forecast* (broadcast on BBC radio four times a day since 1926), David Chandler notes that, while information on weather conditions at sea is plainly of practical use only to seafarers, the size of the listenership of the broadcast and the affection in which it is held by many who never go to sea indicates that 'its mesmeric voice and timeless rhythms are buried deep in the public consciousness' – so that 'for those of us safely ashore, its warnings from a potentially dangerous peripheral world of extremes and uncertainty are deeply reassuring' – as they reinforce, by contrast, ideas of home and nation as places of safety and order. Indeed, it has been suggested that the best place to listen to *The Shipping Forecast* (with its ritualized listing of the seas and coastal areas surrounding the UK – 'Dogger, Fisher, German Bight, Humber . . .') is in bed – 'with the



of a gale at sea is as comforting as the rattle of the rain on the windows, for those who are safe at home' (Chandler, 1996: p. ii).

The forms of unity generated by such symbolic processes are not, of course, necessarily national. In some contexts, the weather forecast can also serve to bring together those who are separated by national borders. Thus, to go back to my earlier comments on the demarcation of the European/Austrian border, Brigitta Busch's research there shows that many members of the Slovenian-speaking minority living in Austria make a point of listening to the weather forecast on Slovenian radio – because, as one of her interviewees puts it, he feels that 'we' (i.e. Slovenian speakers living on both sides of the border) 'belong together – at least so far as the weather is concerned' (Busch, 1999: 232).

National broadcasting can sometimes create a sense of unity, as it links the peripheries to the centre and brings the symbols of the nation into the homes of its citizens. But this process is by no means always smooth, nor without moments of tension. One Swedish listener in Lofgren's historical study recalls feeling that 'when the radio was on, the room wasn't really ours – the sonorous voices with their (metropolitan) accents pushed our thick regional voices into a corner, where we commented in whispers on the cocksure statements from the radio' (Lofgren, 1995: 27).

Likewise, in Britain, only some types of people feel that *The Shipping Forecast* symbolizes the boundaries of a nation with which they identify very much. If the public sphere has long felt like a *heimlich* place for metropolitan middle class white men, it has not necessarily seemed so to people who are outside that category, whether by virtue of region, class, gender or ethnicity. This is the central difficulty with Scannell's (1996) celebration of national forms of broadcasting as a 'public good', providing a 'culture in common' which must be defended against the fragmenting forces of deregulation. Such an account simply fails to recognize that, in the case of the UK, for example, the predominant culture of British broadcasting's public sphere is by no means neutral. In effect, British broadcasting principally issues an invitation to participate not simply in an abstract form of 'sociality' but in a particular type of white, middle class, English ethnic culture – an invitation which, by definition, excludes a great many. Once we recognize this, we see that not everyone can feel at home in this public sphere – as opposed to feeling particularized and (at best) tolerated, as 'others' within it.

### **'Going places' – what is 'foreign' to whom?**

Long ago Rolf Arnheim (1933) foresaw that the coming of television would be related to that of the motor car – as a 'means of transport for the mind' – and Raymond Williams (1989: 171) spoke of the media as enabling what he called forms of 'mobile privatisation' – an experience of simultaneously staying home while imaginatively 'going places'.



However, Sean Moores notes that if 'broadcasting is able to "transport" viewers . . . to previously unknown sites . . . then we need to specify the kinds of "journeys" that are made. Who choses to go where . . . and why? Who stays "at home"? Who feels the need to escape its confines?' (Moores, 1993: 336 and 365). This is to return to my earlier theme of the need to develop a differentiated 'nomadology' for our times.

Moores's particular concern, developed in his later ethnographic study of satellite broadcasting (1996) is with why, for many members of working class and ethnic minority communities in the UK, satellite television has come to symbolize (despite its economic costs) a desirable form of 'freedom' of viewing – as opposed to that offered by institutions such as the BBC, which they now see as rather staid and 'out of touch' with them. The issue is why, for some citizens of the nation, forms of broadcasting which transcend the boundaries of narrowly British culture are felt to be more desirable – and why, for example as Dick Hebdige's historical research has shown, British working class consumers have often found imported forms of American culture to be less foreign to them than the traditional, class-bound forms of their own national culture (Hebdige, 1988). The question of what is foreign to whom is perhaps best posed experientially and empirically – and 'foreignness' is by no means always a matter of nationality.

## Boundaries and identities

Let us return to the question of boundaries and identities, and to the issue of how those within a bounded sphere can come to feel threatened by the presence of that which they deem to be foreign. The anxieties which drive this process are well captured in Juan Goytisolo's novel *Landscapes after the Battle*, whose anti-hero is disturbed by the gradual penetration of the 'disastrous, disintegrating action of the foreign elements' which represent to him the 'de-Europeanisation' of the French city in which he lives – 'the emergence, in the perfectly ordered Cartesian perspectives of [Paris] of bits and pieces of Tlemcen and Dakar, Cairo and Karachi, Bamako and Calcutta' (Goytisolo, 1987: 1–5).

The question is why the presence of alterity should so often be felt to be threatening. In this connection Azouz Begag writes that an 'immigrant' is best understood as 'a person designated as such by someone living in a particular place who sees the presence of the Other as a threat to their own sense of security within that territory' (1989: 9). Iain Chambers, drawing on the work of Levinas, speaks of the difficulty created by the 'Question of the Other' – the 'outsider' who comes from elsewhere and who threatens the stability of the domestic scene. The presence of the 'stranger', for Levinas, will tend to disrupt the sense of 'being at home with oneself' (Levinas, 1969, quoted in Chambers, 1998: 35). Similarly, Marc Auge notes that 'perhaps the reason why immigrants



worry settled people so much is because they expose the relative nature of certainties inscribed in the soil' (1995: 119). Elsewhere Auge remarks that now the Other 'of postcards and tourist trips' (the Other, as Auge puts it, 'dear to Msr Le Pen') is on the move and 'can no longer be assigned to a specific place' it seems perhaps that in the eyes of those who cling to the idea of having 'their' land and 'their' village, the example of successful immigration is perhaps more terrifying than that of illegal immigration, in so far as 'what's frightening in the immigrant is the fact that he (sic) is also an emigrant' (Auge, 1998: 108–9). In this same vein, Nora Rathzel's (1994) research in Germany shows that the very presence of *Auslander* is felt by some people to deprive them of the assumed naturalness of their taken for granted identities. Likewise, in a further analysis of the dynamics of forms of 'homely racism' in the UK, Phil Cohen (1996: 75) argues that what we see there is a fearful response to the destabilization, through new patterns of migration, of the privileged link between habit and habitat – the basis on which the racialized myth of indigenous origins rests.

However, to go back to my earlier remarks about how the realms of the far and the near are now increasingly mixed up, it is important to note that encounters with alterity can take place not only in physical but also in virtual space. Here we return again to the role of the media. In some cases, it seems that television can serve to bring unwanted 'strangers' into the home. Thus, in her historical account of viewers' letters written to the producers of *Julia*, the black North American situation comedy of the 1960s, Anna Bodrogkhozzy discovers one from a white viewer – claiming to speak for many of his 'fellow Americans' – who says that, pleased as he is with his continuing success in keeping black people out of the physical neighbourhood in which he lives, he is outraged at their symbolic invasion of his living room, via their representation on television (Bodrogkhozzy, 1992: 156). Unfortunately, in the UK at least, these issues remain pertinent today, at least for an intransigent minority of the British audience. In a disturbing echo of Bodrogkhozzy's viewer's comments, a black British viewer in Anabelle Sreberny and Kristin Ross's study claims that 'there are still white people who switch the TV off if a black person or programme comes on – it's their last bit of power' (Sreberny and Ross, 1995: 30).

For those troubled by what Kobena Mercer (1994) once called the difficulties of 'living with difference' in the contemporary multicultural city, the television set can also sometimes offer the solace of symbolic immersion in a 'lost world' of settled homogeneity. In this respect, the late Australian TV producer Bruce Gyngell once claimed that one of the reasons why Australian soap operas such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* appeal to some among the British audience is because they are, in effect, 'racial' programmes, depicting an all-white society for which some Britons still nostalgically pine (Gyngell, quoted in Culf, 1993).

However, if such regressive modes of nostalgia are always expressed in nationally specific forms, they are by no means exclusive to the UK. Thus, in a recent interview, which echoes Marling's comments quoted on white American nostalgia for the lost world of *Peyton Place*, Alice Walker commented that she still felt that, in the USA, 'wealthy white people would like to have a country that resembles the Fifties, when all the minorities were tucked away in ghettos' (quoted in Campbell, 2001). As I argued earlier, it is crucial, in this respect, that we attend to the relationship between the physical and virtual forms of social and cultural exclusion, through which both geographical and, in Anderson's (1983) terms, 'imagined' communities are constructed. Given the disparity between black and white viewing patterns in the USA (where there are very few shows which are equally popular with both black and white audiences), and the ways in which these disparities work to reinforce established patterns of residential segregation, in that particular geographical context, John Patterson has claimed, it is now 'hard to distinguish segmentation of the audience from segregation of the audience' (1999).<sup>11</sup>

To return to the British case, as Sallie Westwood and John Williams argue, it is certainly true that the UK's soap operas are suffused with notions of Englishness which exclude many of the diverse peoples of the nation – who are then unable to feel at home within the national symbolic space of British broadcasting (Westwood and Williams, 1997). After all, it was only in 1998, 38 years into its run, that the best established British soap opera, *Coronation Street*, got its first Asian family, when the 'Desais' took over the Street's corner shop, and the latest survey of this issue (Cumberbatch et al., 2001) shows that ethnic minorities are still barely represented in some of the most popular programmes on British television. As Gurbux Singh, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality put it, commenting on this survey,

Britain's most popular television programmes ... still fall short of representing the full range of people that live here ... for some programme makers there is a very long way to go before they can call their output truly representative of the British audience. (Quoted in Wells, 2001)

## Conclusion

For me it is the ways in which virtual and material 'geographies of exclusion' operate in conjunction which is the central issue. To move from the national to the continental level, the current hardening of the legal boundaries of 'Fortress Europe' must be seen in conjunction with the European Union's attempts to refurbish a version of 'Euro-culture' which, in harking back to its Graeco-Roman and specifically Christian roots, is not designed to feel like home for many of those who currently





reside within its borders. As a young man of Turkish parents, living in Germany, put it in a recent interview:

My parents came here in the 60s and I've been here all my life. But here, if you're born to immigrant parents you will die an immigrant – it doesn't matter if you've read Goethe, wear *Lederhosen* and do a Bavarian dance, they'll still treat you like an immigrant. (Quoted in Younge, 1998)

The destabilizations of the postmodern period have given rise to a variety of born-again nationalisms, and to xenophobia directed at newcomers, foreigners or outsiders. In the face of these developments, it has come to seem that any search for a sense of place-based identity must necessarily be reactionary. However, we can usefully follow Doreen Massey (1995: ch. 6) by rejecting the notion that a sense of home (or place) must necessarily be constructed out of an introverted, inward-looking history. Rather than delving into the past in search of indigenous origins, she argues that we might better look to an 'extroverted' sense of place, where it is the sum of its linkages to elsewhere which constitutes a place's identity.

Although the desire for 'roots' or belonging is often associated with politically regressive forms of reactionary nostalgia, Wendy Wheeler rightly argues that, rather than attempting to wish it away, we need to develop a better political response to this nostalgia. This, as Fiona Allon (2000: 284) argues, also often involves both an implicit critique of the forces which have produced this sense of loss and 'the potential to be reclaimed as a positive site . . . [for] negotiating the future ahead'. To do this would involve articulating a 'politics capable of constituting a "we" which is not essentialist, fixed, separatist, defensive or exclusive' (Wheeler, 1994: 95).

What is needed here is the rejection of any conception of 'imagined community' which depends on the extrusion of alterity, in order to bask in the warm glow of self-confirming homogeneity. This would be to move towards a conception of 'community-in-difference', which recognizes the importance of dialogue about our ineradicable differences (cf. Donald, 2000, drawing on Nancy, 1991) and focuses on the mundane pragmatics of neighbourliness, and on the need for the construction of more open and porous forms of 'publicness' as the basis for 'living together with strangers in the present' (cf. Donald, 2000: ch. 6; on this cf. also Ang, 2000).

However, even while we decry the exclusionary strategies of powerful institutions such as the European Union (or of culturally dominant groups at more local scales), in other contexts, we will also need to accommodate the forms of 'strategic essentialism' to which disempowered groups will continue to have recourse, to defend their own fragile boundaries. Sometimes this involves the defence of domestic space as a realm of cultural autonomy. Thus the black British journalist

Gary Younge (1999a; cf. also 1999b) recalls being brought up in the suburbs of greater London with a Barbadian flag behind the front door of his house – signifying that, whatever happened in the wider world, the territory within, rather like a diplomatic mission or consulate, was to be inhabited by Barbadian rules. Sometimes, as in the case of the Senegalese migrants who Bruno Riccio (2001) studied in Italy, it is the symbolic space of a religious identity which migrants defend, in order to protect themselves from what they see as the corruption of the materialist cultures of the societies to which they have been forced to migrate, in order to try to make a living.

We will also need to recognize the importance of the power relations within which differentially hybrid identities are constructed – as each form of ‘cultural mixing’ or hybridity, as Massey (1995) observes, will be inscribed in its own specific geography of power. The issue here is how to grasp both dimensions of the identity politics at stake in these contexts. As Gerd Baumann (1996) has so well demonstrated in his study of intercultural relations in Southall, at some moments, members of disempowered groups will deliberately reify and ‘essentialize’ their identities, in order to mobilize for political action and compete for resources that are distributed on an ‘ethnicized’ basis, despite the fact that at other times, and in other contexts they will readily and routinely undercut such fixed claims on their identity by recourse to more ‘demotic’ and fluid discourses.<sup>12</sup> In such situations, rather than always being necessarily imprisoned within an ethnic identity, as Marie Gillespie (1995) has shown, a British Asian teenager in Southall is perfectly capable of identifying – as a teenager – with a programme such as *Neighbours*, despite Gyngell’s quoted comments on the programme’s untrammelled ‘whiteness’.

In this respect it has rightly been argued that we need to develop a ‘politics of dislocation’ (Allon, 2000) concerned with

... what it means to be situated in particular places ... what different ... modalities of belonging are possible in the contemporary milieu ... [and] the various ways people are attached and attach themselves (affectively) into the world. (Grossberg, 1996: 185–6)

Thus, as Tsagarousianou (2001) observes, while many of the older Greek Cypriot and South Asian migrants living in London, who she studied, find solace in the access to the cultures of their ‘home’ countries now allowed them by ‘diasporic’ media (in so far as this helps them overcome what she calls the ‘cultural *aporia*’ of the migrant experience) they are also often frustrated by what these media offer them. One such migrant complains that these media do not seem to recognize that ‘We are not the people who left [our countries]. They keep showing old Greek movies. We want something different’; another says that ‘we have different

442 interests too. We live here, we have our families here, but they [the



diasporic radio and satellite television stations – DM] do not understand this'. As Tsagarousianou notes, 'diasporic audiences resent being treated as appendages of a "home audience" and express demands for more locality-specific programming' which better recognizes their attempts to negotiate their inclusion into the national community of the place where they are now living 'as well as affirming their commonality with fellow-nationals living in their home countries or other diasporas' (Tsagarousianou, 2001: 166–7). Such are the complexities and contradictions of the ideas of identity, place, belonging and 'home' in our contemporary mediated world, with which we must now attempt to come to terms.

## Notes

This article is a condensation of (and in part a retrospective reflection on) some of the arguments in my recently published *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000). An earlier version of some of this material appeared as 'Bounded Realms: Household, Family, Community and Nation', in H. Naficy (ed.) *Home, Exile, Homeland* (American Film Institute, 1999). These issues also provided the basis for my Inaugural Lecture at Goldsmiths College in December 2000. I am very grateful to the many people who have offered comments on different versions of these ideas when they have been discussed at, among other places, the University of Essex, the University of North London, the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, New York University, the Institute of Cultural Studies in Vienna, and the Universities of Amsterdam, Bergen, Klagenfurt and Stockholm.

1. For other examples of work which I would see as paralleling this 'materialist' approach see Allen (1999), particularly for its insistence not only on the materiality of the domestic environment in which media consumption occurs but also on the demographic dimension of audience analysis. See also the articles collected in Balshaw and Kennedy (2000) on the pressing need to better articulate questions of representation with the concerns of urban studies.
2. One of my own daughters came home from a hill-trekking holiday in Thailand with a photo of a village woman weaving 'traditional' cloth who was herself proudly wearing a Gap T-shirt.
3. I thank Wendy Wheeler for this example.
4. Brigitta Busch, private communication. Details of this research can be had from Dr B. Busch at the Centre for Intercultural Studies, Klagenfurt University, Stemeckstr. 215, A-9020, Klagenfurt, Austria.
5. On this latter point see, for example, the work of Mica Nava (1998, 1999) for an exploration of what she calls the 'allure of difference' in the context of cosmopolitan forms of modernity – an analysis which takes a very different perspective on these questions from the one offered here.
6. For an international perspective on the growth of this phenomenon see the website at [www.gated-communities.de](http://www.gated-communities.de)
7. 'Albert Square' and 'Coronation Street' are the fictional sites of the urban

- soap operas *Eastenders* (BBC) and *Coronation Street* (ITV). 'Ambridge' is the rural site of the long-running BBC radio soap *The Archers*.
8. For the converse case, of how very unwelcoming the countryside can appear to those designated as Other, see the work of the black British photographer, Ingrid Pollard (n.d.).
  9. None of this is to suggest that the residents are all necessarily duped by the 'Celebration' experience. In his well-nuanced study of the pleasures of life in the town, Ross notes that there is also a saying among the residents that the 'pixie dust rubs off quickly round here' (2000: 11).
  10. This project was conducted at Brunel University, 1987–92, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. The example offered here is one that has been used before (see Silverstone and Morley, 1990, for an extended commentary on this household), but for the sake of economy it serves well enough to make the central point at issue. For other, similar examples from the same project see Hirsch (1998a, 1998b).
  11. On the question of contemporary patterns of residential segregation in the USA, see the evidence quoted in Kettle (2001) that American cities are becoming, if anything, more racially segregated than ever; on this see also Scott (2001).
  12. We must, of course, also note Werbner's (1996) strictures on the need not to 'essentialise' essentialism – but not to the extent of falling back into the kind of fundamentalist politics to which Werbner's own argument would seem to lead.

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