

Home-countries: narratives across disciplines

"What's Home Got to Do With It?"

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Today, the primary connotation of "home" is of the "private" space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day. And yet, also in circulation is the word's wider signification as the larger geographic place where one belongs: country, city, village, community. Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography.¹ The term "home-country" suggests the particular intersection of private and public and of individual and communal that is manifest in imagining a space as home. Home-country, while widely used in travel documents, personal narratives and fiction, is not quite the object of nationalism as it is usually understood.

At the different levels of discourse that a culture engenders, the notion of physical or spiritual home-country is variously announced: as a heritage as well as a place where *some* persons were/are/or will be "at home." These utterances and assertions are routinely categorized as: personal, local, communal, and/or national affiliations. These affiliations are held apart as separate mutually conflicting claims or they are co-opted to satisfy the requirements of the specific narrative that is unfolding at any given location. In this chapter, I will document some of the readings of "home" formulated in various academic locations. The narratives are not similar, yet common to the rhetoric of "Home" in most disciplines, is an ahistoric, metaphoric and often sentimental story line. In fact, fictionality is an intrinsic attribute of home. The homes that are constructed through these texts are multifarious experiences and desires which are at best vigorously interrogated, frequently unchallenged, and never quite rejected. I will examine the overlapping constructs of home and nation to sug-

gest that while the nation is the object and subject of nationalist narratives, literary narratives are more centrally concerned with the idea of home. Finally, I turn from psychoanalytical and other readings to current feminist theorizing for direction in my project of pulling the rug from under a comfortable and singular understanding of home.

COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM AS NARRATIVES ON PLACE

The pitfalls of seeing nationalist movements as the only ideological frame through which one can imagine a space as home, can best be demonstrated by examining the classic mid twentieth-century western texts on nationalism.² Western studies of nationalism, more often than not, begin with a study of the origins of nationalism. Having located the origins of nationalism in late eighteenth-century Europe, these narratives go on to read all subsequent nationalisms as so many variations of the same model based on the same principles. When nationalism arises in the non-European parts of the globe it is read as a "borrowed" event. Hence the tenuousness if not the failure of these nationalisms (when measured against the dimensions of the model) is predicted as well as located in the borrowedness of the concept itself. In such a situation it is futile to use the terms of classic nationalism in an inquiry into global representations of the self and home because the terms are always loaded. Hence, the voicing of desires for "Home" in the non-western world has for the most part been declared nonexistent or at least unreadable *except* as further manifestations of a (borrowed) nationalistic fervor.

Reading home as articulated in global English *through nationalism* can be a productive enterprise only if the terms of nationalism are radically rethought. Beginning with *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* written by Benedict Anderson and first published in 1983, there have been a number of revisions to the traditional ways of reading nationalistic events as well as a whole new array of events that are deemed nationalistic. The most significant development is Partha Chatterjee's replacement of the notion of "borrowed" nationalism with the carefully nuanced assessment of "derivative" nationalism in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*.³ In his introductory chapter, "Nationalism as a Problem in the History of Political Ideas," Chatterjee carefully examines the western discourse on nationalism and the problem of derivative

nationalisms in non-European colonial countries. He enters "the field of discourse, historical, philosophical and scientific, as [if it were] a battleground of political power."⁴ Reading the ideological history of Indian nationalism within this discourse of power, Chatterjee demonstrates that "Indian nationalism" is derivative but different, not just from European models but also different at different stages in its own history.

Despite the shared rhetoric, anti-colonial nationalism operates from an impetus that is antagonistic to precisely its host body, colonial nationalism. And yet "Home" is articulated along similar lines in both discourses: it is the sentimentalized and pure cultural center. If, as Douglas Porteous claims, "home [is] the territorial core" of all societies then it becomes useful to examine how this territory is made to fit into the larger maps of nations and of empires.⁵ When is the word "home" shrunk to denote the private, domestic sphere and when is the "domestic" enlarged to denote "the affairs of a nation"? This fluidity of meaning cannot be appreciated unless we are willing to rethink cultural boundaries. Writing on Palestinian women's everyday redrawing of the spaces marked as home/the street, as inside/outside, Mary Layoun proposes that we account for this fluidity of assigned space by reading nationalism as narrative; as stories that are not just spoken and written but acted out as well.⁶ Nationalism, Layoun insists, "tells a story by articulating (presumably) linked elements. Not by chance, it also constructs and privileges its own narrative perspective" (p. 411). Layoun goes on to argue that:

The rhetoric of nationalism as narrative persuades and convinces its audience(s) – its implied readers and listeners – of the efficacy and desirability of its terms and of the "natural" relationship between those terms. Its appeal derives not just from the letter and word of truth and order (as "grammar"), but *with* letters and words in the sense of persuasion and likely possibility (as rhetoric). (p. 411)

The logical extension to this suggestion that nationalism is plotted along a literary path author(iz)ed by certain select persons is the proposition that "we can bring to bear on narratives of nationalism the critical and theoretical insights of analyses of literary narratives with their considerations of narrative voice, time, and space, emplotment, of closure and strategies of containment" (p. 413). If we were to read nationalism in this literary fashion, it would be easier to understand why certain counter-narratives fall by the wayside.

In the context of anti-colonial nationalist narratives the desired

“happy ending” is of the newly independent nation. The anti-colonial bent of such nationalist narratives imposes this single denouement that complicates and suppresses other story lines. Sara Suleri has referred to “the encounter of colonialism and the emergence of nationalism” as “secret sharers in an act of cultural transcription so overdetermined as to dissipate the logic of origins, or the rational framework of chronologies.”⁷ It is in this context that nationalism leads to the interpretation of diverse phenomenon through one glossary, thus erasing specificities, setting norms and limits, lopping off tangentials. I would like to consider what happens to disparate and local expressions of feeling at home when they are translated into the rhetoric of nationalism.

The urge to generalize on “home” as represented through various global English language texts is very strong because we have access to these utterances in a language that we can understand without the acknowledgment of difference that translation would impose.⁸ Translation can be seen as the attempt to impose a common interpretation via a common language – to move texts to a common ground. And yet, nationalism (one such common ground) can account only in nationalist terms for the processes by which diverse subjects imagine themselves at home in a specific geographic location.⁹ An anecdote from *Homecoming* by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o provides us with a demonstration of the “unsystematic” fashion in which a place is recognized as home as well as the way in which the event is translated into the dominant narrative of nationalism. Ngugi writes,

One day I heard a song. I remember the scene so vividly: the women who sang it are now before me – their sad faces and their plaintive melody. I was then ten or eleven. They were being forcibly ejected from the land they occupied and sent to another part of the country so barren that people called it the land of black rocks. This was the gist of their song:

And there will be great joy
When our lands comes back to us
For Kenya is the country of black people.
And you our children
Tighten belts around your waist
So you will one day drive away from this land
The race of white people
For truly, Kenya is a black man’s country.

They were in a convoy of lorries, caged but they had one voice. They sang of a common loss and hope and I felt their voice rock the earth where I stood literally unable to move.

Their words were not the platitudes of our university philosophers who use words as shields from life and truth: these women had lived the words they spoke. There was at once a fatalistic acceptance of the inevitable and also a collective defiance. “We shall overcome,” they seemed to say. The women had taken a correct political stand in the face of an oppressive enemy.¹⁰

One cannot but notice the blatant romanticizing and masculinizing (“Kenya is a black man’s country”) that Ngugi performs on the women’s text in the course of his translation. In nationalist discourses all articulation of “home” are drawn into one commonality of time and space. This harnessing of diverse discursive trajectories on “belonging” is as much a process of genericism as of gentrification: in analyses with a nationalist agenda, all desires for “home” are elevated by being addressed to and met by the prescribed happy ending. Ngugi’s presentation of “the gist” of the women’s song is quite “translated” into the discourse of nationalism even while he admires their “correct” political stance for being different from the “platitudes” of the bourgeois intellectuals. Yet in spite of our inability to have the anecdote outside or prior to Ngugi’s nostalgic re-presentation of it, one can glimpse an instance of imagining a place as home which is articulated in an event that evicts the subject from that very space.

Whether one is working with cultural discourses in the Euro-american context or in the context of once-colonized countries there is a pressing need to separate nationalism at the level of elite scholarship, political rhetoric, jurisprudence and state-building from the imagining of a place as one’s home that functions on the everyday level of ordinary people as they write and live ordinary lives. While thinking in terms of home and nationalism may occur simultaneously in cultural productions, the two events are often parallel or tangential to each other. This point is illuminated by Edward Said’s promising analysis of the notion of place:

The readiest account of place might define it as nation...But this idea of place does not cover the nuances, principally of reassurance, fitness, belonging, association, and community, entailed in the phrase *at home* or *in place*.¹¹

Here, Said moves beyond the traditional notions of “place = unit of national space,” and “any association with place = patriotism/nationalism.” At the everyday level of discourse, nationalism as we know it becomes too restrictive a term because it devalues (or else gentrifies) ordinary, everyday, subaltern, “non-official” experiences of home. Mary Layoun insists that the “every day struggles and choices of

ordinary folk, their attempts to come to terms with and sometimes to change the shape of a dominant narrative have too often been minimized by critical consideration" (p. 413). She goes on to make an even more crucial point:

And yet they [ordinary folk] too – and not just the states or leaders who speak in their names – engage in both theorizing about and acting in the narrative(s) of the nation. While this process should neither be effaced from consideration nor, conversely, treated with nostalgia and overvalored, there are moments when this everyday experience of parts of the nation/people truly confounds the dominant definition of the national narrative and, sometimes, offers more pragmatic and flexible alternatives to dominant national constructions. (pp. 413–14)

Is the concept of "home" (in global literature in English) one such "pragmatic and flexible" alternative to "dominant national constructions"? What would qualify a subject as a part of "ordinary folk"? The class affiliations of most writers from outside the Euroamerican globe who produce literature in English would automatically cancel their categorization as "ordinary folk." And yet, their fiction serves to blur distinctions and categories of nationalism, and to make the understanding of "home" as a purely private place and of "nation" as a public arena, wholly inadequate. Fiction, as we will see in the chapters that follow, puts the discourse of nationalism to uses other than that of nation building.

In *The World, the Text and the Critic* Edward Said draws a distinction between the two kinds of affinity that an individual can hold. I would like to use his distinction between "filiation" and "affiliation" to further my examination of the relations between formal nationalistic articulations and the thinking of a place as home. Theorizing primarily in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers, Said calls "filiation" the ties that an individual has with places and people that are based on his/her natal culture; that is, ties of biology and geography. "Affiliations," which are what come to replace filiations, are links that are forged with institutions, associations, communities and other social creations. The movement is always from filiations to affiliations.¹² This replacement of one type of ties with the other is read as "a passage from nature to culture" so that:

a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority – involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict – the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms – such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality,

professional respect, class, and hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realm of nature and "life," whereas affiliations belongs exclusively to culture and society.¹³

The language used in this passage could be read metaphorically so that it cites the usual location of what could loosely be called "home" as a filiation within discourses of affiliation that define "ties" in terms of larger arenas like nations. In Said's theory it is vital to maintain the distinction between the two levels of affinities; as a result, the more local "tie" is *necessarily* read as the more personal and private "natural" bond.¹⁴ Yet, to read this passage from Said's text alongside the following passage from Jomo Kenyatta's writing on the effects of colonialism on Gikuyu culture would suggest that neither filiations nor affiliations are ever "natural":

When the European comes to Gikuyu country and robs the people of their land, he is taking away not only their livelihood, but the material symbol that holds family and tribe together.¹⁵

Kenyatta sees this taking away of land as the "one blow which cuts away the foundations from the whole Gikuyu life, social, moral and economic."¹⁶ For Kenyatta then, rebuilding this sense of "homeland" requires more than the efforts of official nation building after independence. There is no "natural" link between a place and a people: instead there are links that are forged or forgotten on both material and spiritual levels. Yet, what is primarily reconstructed is just such a "natural" link with a place. The discourses that construct "home" in the contexts of colonialism and postcolonialism suggest that ultimately both affiliations and filiations are learned, created, recalled and/or forgotten in everyday history. A necessary alteration to propositions like Said's would be to see "filiations" as those bonds that are naturalized as "natural" through the discourses that differentiate them from those bonds that are naturalized as "artificial" or as "affiliations."

What we have in the many discourses that situate home in opposition to wider public spaces is a sense that "homes" and the desire for such spaces are "natural" urges common to all humans at all times. What the hyphen in "home-country" makes explicit are the ideological linkages deemed necessary for subjects who are at home in a social and political space and even more acutely for those who are, because of geographic distance or political disenfranchisement, *outside* their "legitimate" space. Home-country and home resonate differently from different locations for different subjects and often even for the same subject at different locations. And yet while the actual cultural practices change

rapidly and dramatically, the desired ideals that such practices are modelled after are much slower to change. Hence, in this current global moment of rethinking nation and nationalism, there may be an added desire to keep the idea of "home" and "community" intact.

Like several other scholars working in the area, Chandra Mohanty has declared that: "[w]ith the rise of transnational corporations which dominate and organize the contemporary economic system, however, factories have migrated in search of cheap labor, and the nation-state is no longer an appropriate socioeconomic unit for analysis."¹⁷ As a result, Mohanty goes on to add, contemporary postindustrial societies like Europe and the US "invite cross-national and cross-cultural analyses for explanation of their own internal features and socioeconomic constitution. Moreover, contemporary definitions of the "third world" can no longer have the same geographical contours and boundaries" (p. 2). Given this dramatic instability of large categories like "nation", "first world/third world," the inclination to maintain the smaller units like "home," "the family" and "community" increases. For example, in contemporary Hollywood interpretations of home and family, the desire for the comforts that these places undoubtedly provide has led to representations of such spaces as elastic, unendingly accommodating and ultimately big enough to hold everyone. Even alternative productions such as Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* follow the Hollywood prescription. A New York love story of a gay couple, a green card marriage, a pregnancy, two fathers, one mother, two happy grandparents, *The Wedding Banquet* provides just such a soothing narrative.

At the risk of implying a universal humanism, I will suggest that if any common pattern can be traced in the many versions of home that contemporary cultures provide us with, it is one of exclusions. Homes are not about inclusions and wide open arms as much as they are about places carved out of closed doors, closed borders and screening apparatuses. When different groups or individuals jostle each other to establish a space as their own, as an exclusive manifestation of their subjecthood, this struggle can become as urgent as keeping oneself alive. As a result, "home" becomes contested ground in times of political tumult either on the level of power struggles at a national communal stage or at the interpersonal familial level. The chapters in this book will examine several such projects of self-preservation as well as the ways in which signs of such struggle are (often incompletely) erased in the formulations of "home" in global English.

THE SELF AT HOME

The conflation of home and self is one of the threads that runs through the examination of "home" in the discourse produced by such different disciplines as literary theory, architecture, sociology, political science, geography, philosophy and psychology. In this section I will analytically explore some of these discussions, not comprehensively, but with the intention of reading various texts alongside and against each other. The focus returns inevitably to literary and related cultural texts.

While the issue of "homelands" or "home-countries" is raised primarily in the discourse on nationalism and other so-called masculine, public arenas, the issue of "home" and the private sphere is usually embedded in discourses on women. In literature and literary theory, until quite recently, most considerations of the home have occasioned examination of the status of women. The association of home and the female has served to present them as mutual handicaps, mutually disempowering. Hence, the woman is incapacitated because she is "tied" to the home, and the home is shelter for the incapacitated. For men, both women and the home provide momentary escape and respite, but to linger too long at these comforts is to be lost. This analysis could apply as easily (albeit differently) to a novel like *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899 by Joseph Conrad, to *Sons and Lovers*, published in 1913 by D. H. Lawrence, or to *Wife*, published in 1975 by Bharati Mukherjee. In these texts, the representation of the physical and psychic spaces called "home" serve as sites of both potential subversion and containment.

It is in psychoanalytical texts that this equation of home and self occurs most frequently and in some complexity. Carl Jung developed a thesis that explicitly reads an individual's home as the "universal archetypal symbol of the self."¹⁸ In *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, an autobiographical text, Jung recounts his dream of himself as a house which he proceeded to explore in the same dream. Jung's "dream house" unfolds in careful chronological correctness – his passage through its rooms and levels takes him from an upper storey salon "situated" in the eighteenth century to a lower level set in the fifteenth century, and further down a level to a floor that invoked the mediaeval period, from there to a cellar set in the Roman period and finally to a prehistoric cave below the cellar and from there to the earth itself which is the common ground beneath all houses, or in

Jungian terms, the collective unconscious. In Jung's interpretation of this rather scripted dream the movement through the house mimics the history of the psyche's development:

It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche – that is to say, of my then state of consciousness, with hitherto unconscious additions. Consciousness was represented by the salon...The ground floor stood for the first level of the unconscious.¹⁹

Later in this autobiography, Jung writes about building his house in Bollingen on Lake Zurich along the lines of the house plan revealed to him in his dream:

At first I did not plan a proper house, but merely a kind of primitive one-storey dwelling. It was to be a round structure with a hearth in the center and bunks along the walls. I more or less had in mind an African hut where the fire, ringed with stone, burns in the middle, and the whole life of the family revolves around this centre. Primitive huts concretise an idea of wholeness, a familial wholeness in which all sorts of domestic animals likewise participate. But I altered the plan even during the first stages of building, for I felt it was too primitive. I realized it would have to be a regular two-storey house not a mere hut crouched on the ground.²⁰

The dangers of such a close equation of home and the self are clear in the passages quoted above. The suggestion is that the style of one's dwelling place parallels the development of one's psyche. Here, Jung's rejection of what he sees as the African hut as too primitive for him, is, given his equation of house and psyche, a rejection of a corresponding "African psyche" as too primitive for him. Hence, in building his dream-house in material terms, Jung sees moving beyond this apparently singular and timeless African hut as a manifestation of his moving beyond the primitive in himself. Here as elsewhere, the equation of the self and the home is not an ideologically innocent association – it is predicated on a comparison with a home and a self that is perceived as static, basic, unadorned, less than adequate. And yet the (racial) political reverberations of home design are attested to as purely psychoanalytical data.

Gaston Bachelard, Clara Cooper, David Sopher, Yi-Fu Tuan, E. Relph, Douglas Porteous and more recently Adrian Forty and Witold Rybczynski, all stress the proximity of home and self-identity.²¹ Humanist geographers like Tuan, Relph and Bachelard are especially concerned with the emotional responses that places produce in people and their work can be seen as "an exception to geography's masculinist uninterest in the home."²² In her feminist assessment of the

limits of geographic knowledge, Gillian Rose defines humanist geography as a "humanist conceptualization of place" (p. 41). Of humanist geographers, Rose writes, "places for them were locations which, through being experienced by ordinary people, became full of human significance. Humanistic geographers tried to recover the ways in which places were perceived, arguing that it was impossible to make sense of the social world unless academics listened to the interpretations of those who lived in it" (p. 41).

Following the publication of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, the consensus seems to be that "home" and "non-home" are the basic divisions of geographic space, just as "self" and the "non-self" or "Other" represent the basic divisions of psychic space. What is striking about most of these articulations on the various aspects of the home is the absence of any kind of ambivalence about the assertions made or any recognition of the sweeping assumptions beneath the theses on home. This lack or oversight can perhaps be accounted for by the overriding assumption that the home is a given – a space that is already marked out in symbolic and material dimensions for the occupant. Hence, the confidence of these statements from the opening lines of Porteous' essay "Home: The Territorial Core":

Home provides both the individual and the small primary group known as the family with all three territorial satisfactions [identity, security, stimulation]. These satisfactions derive from the control of physical space, and this control is secured by two major means. The personalization of space is an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation.²³

Read, for instance, alongside accounts of child abuse and other forms of domestic violence, Porteous' definition of this territory as "an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation" takes on terrifying proportions. The last passage in David Sopher's "The Landscape of Home" is equally at ease with the notion of home as a stable, easily identifiable and universally available item:

Peace be upon Robert Frost, but home is not where they have to take you in, it is where they want to take you in. The landmarks of home are the signs that one is welcome. Most of us in academic life know that wherever we may be living, we are to some degree, in the biblical phrase, "strangers in a strange land." Yet the signs in the landscape are there to read, and they can tell us that we are, after all, at home.²⁴

Sopher's momentary delving beneath clichés, only to return to their soothing, solid familiarity is characteristic of this discourse. It is almost as if the very word "home" evokes an aura of safety and stability.

"Home-bases" Tuan insists in *Space and Place*, are "intimate places to human beings everywhere" (p. 147). This scholarship works toward buttressing this sense of "well-being" and security that has come to mean "home". Tuan's *Topophilia: A Study of Environment, Perception, Attitudes and Values*, coins a word ("topophilia") for the sentimental attachment that people have to places.²⁵ Topophilia is visual pleasure and sensual delight as well as "the fondness for place because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past because it provokes pride of ownership and creation" (p. 247).

Gillian Rose argues that the universalization and idealization of the comforts of home in this discourse is the logical outcome of a "feminization of place". With masculinity as the implicit norm of geographic discourse, place is understood as a maternal woman (nurturing, natural) and hence geographic knowledge is constructed on a foundation provided by the relationship of this (masculine) subject with the mother which is predicated on "the exclusion of women (among others) from the geographical" (p. 62).

Rose's astute reading of the feminization (or more specifically the mothering) of place is retraced along the axes of psychoanalysis, architecture and literature in Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays on the Modern Unhomely*. In the first section of his book, Vidler presents "[t]he perpetual exchange between the homely and the unhomely, the imperceptible sliding of cosiness into dread" as setting the parameters for much of the discussion on homes in nineteenth and twentieth-century western cultural discourses on the subject. However, this "dread" is primarily the dread of the "feminine." Beginning with the nineteenth-century trope of the haunted house, Vidler goes on to analyze the responses to the discovery of the ruins of Pompeii, and from there to consider work across several disciplines – Freud, Schelling, F. T. A. Hoffman, Melville, Poe, Walter Pater, Adorno and Le Corbusier among others. Vidler reads Freud's "uncanny" as the primary example of this "sliding of cosiness into dread" that underlies the notion of home. In Freudian terms, this "uncanny" stems from old, familiar experiences that are repressed and then emerge in the present as transformed anxieties. Vidler suggests that "the impossible desire to return to the womb, the ultimate goal represented by nostalgia, would constitute a true 'homesickness'" (p. 55). Vidler quotes the following passage from Freud's writing to substantiate his reading:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel that there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, how-

ever, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning... In this case too, then, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar: the prefix *un* is the token of repression. (p. 55)

Elsewhere in Vidler's book this association between homes and wombs is elaborated upon by other readings of (s)mothering: as in the images of being buried alive provided by the Pompeii excavations and by Freud's insistence that the fear of being buried alive by mistake is the repressed fantasy of "intra-uterine existence."²⁶ Homes, wombs and tombs take on a proximity that is tenable only within psychoanalytical discourse. The feminization of the home to the exclusion of women in this discipline substantiates Rose's reading of geographical texts. Ultimately what such gendering of place does is to further "naturalize" the notion of "Home" resulting in its categorization alongside "natural phenomena" like birth and death. Nature is of course to be understood as a construction of culture and yet "home" moves from being perceived as property to become a part of the life cycle. As in Tuan's celebration of "pride of ownership and creation," the economics disappear when "home" reappears as a natural formation.

The blurring of the distinctions between women, creativity and property is a trademark of patriarchal societies. Tracts on home design, decorum and other guidebooks for women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century exhibit a similar identification of women and homes. The home was believed to be an expression of the personality of the "woman of the house," and often it stood in as a metaphor for her body. The woman's job was to decorate and maintain her home as she did her mind, personality and body.²⁷

If one indulges in this identification of home with subject identity, then a brief examination of the representation of homes in the colonial novels can be very illuminating. Using for the moment the metaphors of these texts such as the use of the word "native" to signify all non-westerners, one notes that while much is written about the English home in the colony, representations of the "native" home are sketchy. Hobsbawm notes that some cities in the colonies during the age of empire, 1875–1914, had populations greater than large European cities of the time.²⁸ And yet the colonial novel does not acknowledge the large number of "native" homes that would, of necessity, have been established in the cities. Instead, "native dwellings" are either ramshackle huts, palaces that are disproportionately large or simply "ruins" inhabited by people. A classic example is provided by the

opening passage in Forster's *A Passage to India* where the city of Chandrapore is "scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish that it [the Ganges] deposits so freely...Houses do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life."²⁹ In *The Indian Metropolis: A View to the West*, architectural historian Norma Evenson draws our attention to a section from Rudyard Kipling's 1893 poem, "The Song of Cities," in which he laments the decline of the city of Madras, India: Kipling compares the city to "— a withered bel-dame now,/Brooding on ancient fame."³⁰ Evenson notes that in 1893, Madras was a fairly young city which had never been, as Kipling's poem claimed, "crowned above queens" in a glorious past. It was simply that Madras did not follow the urban plan usually identified with cities of its size and was hence perceived as a city in decay and decline.

In the colonial text, the "native subject" as manifest in the representation of the native home is either a "lack" or an "excess." Hence we are led to believe that the absence of a "self/home" that resembles the "self/home" born of western individualism signals the absence of alternative notions of subjecthood. There are no "ordinary" subjects; just faceless, outhoused "boys" or excessively bejewelled or painted rajahs and chiefs. It is significant that the novels written by Indian sub-continents and Africans in the postcolonial era, often establish as their protagonist, the ordinary citizen with his/her sometimes modest, but nevertheless potent notions of home.³¹

If the home stands not just for one's representations of oneself but for what others see of one, then it is doubly important to pay attention to the status of those without homes either because of economic circumstance or political disenfranchisement. Furthermore, what of those homes or selves that are not recognized as such because they are deemed inappropriate or inadequate? An everyday example would be that of the mobile home park in present day USA which is always set at the very edge of a town or suburb. Such parks are seen as violating the "true" image of the neighborhood and its occupants are often coded as "transients," a term which one is invited to read as "unstable." Or consider the black shanty towns in South Africa or the slums in urban India that are routinely torn down because they are interpreted not as homes but as spaces where non-subjects live in "informal circumstances."³²

Under colonialism, the "native" exists as another kind of "subject": one who is a subject of the colonial race. This is, in itself, a condition

that excludes subject status as those in control of colonial discourses know it. In "The Subject and Power," Michel Foucault draws attention to the two ways of reading the word "subject":

There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.³³

The concept of the subject must be further problematized if it is to be used productively in different scenarios. Are these "two meanings" mutually exclusive? Can one be subject to someone else and tied to one's own identity at the same time? Or are such multiplicities a luxury or simply a difficult stance to maintain because it would require that one resist the oppressive definitions of that *someone else* to whom one is subject?³⁴

Problematic as the concept of the subject is, I would like to use it as an evaluative tool for the measure of recognition given to various peoples, genders, and classes in the cultural texts that I examine. My justification is that in a world-view where subjecthood is the only measure of equal worth, criticism of such a world-view should not exempt itself from adopting a "strategic" use of the notion of "subjectivity" (to refashion Spivak's use of the term "strategic positive essentialism"). Much of the resistance from contemporary practitioners of theory in the west to using the subject as a trope stems from its history in the west as a part of liberal humanism. Claiming subject status for those who have been denied this privilege dramatically alters this history. There is no way that the non-subject's or subaltern's claiming of subject positions for herself can be read as "business as usual" in the world of liberal humanism.³⁵

"HOMESICK WITH NOWHERE TO GO"

In recent years feminist criticism has once again taken up the issue of home and its usefulness as a concept and as a place from which to launch feminist transformations of culture. In this section I intend to read a few crucial feminist essays on this topic and trace the ways in which they read and respond to each other. Several issues underlie my examination. What does home signify in contemporary western feminisms? Where does home end and community begin? What happens to the equation of home and self in feminist accounts? How do feminist readings of space account for the overlap between home,

community and nation? What are the politics of location in these texts? Last, and most importantly for the purposes of this book, what are the literary implications of such feminist rereadings of the home? Responses to these questions are scattered through the remainder of this chapter and through the book.

Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty begin their very influential 1986 essay "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" by stressing "the importance of not handing over notions of home and community to the Right."³⁶ The challenge as they see it, is "to find ways of conceptualizing community differently without dismissing its appeal and importance" (p. 192). Martin and Mohanty examine how subjects are constituted by their relationship with "home." Their argument is as powerful as is Foucault's argument that the subject is constituted by sexuality.³⁷ The Martin and Mohanty essay is particularly concerned with Minnie Bruce Pratt's account of the process of recognizing herself as a subject who is molded by her experience of "home." Written in 1984, Pratt's "Identity: Skin Blood Heart"³⁸ serves as a starting point for Martin and Mohanty's examination of –

the configuration of home, identity, and community; more specifically, in the power and appeal of "home" as a concept and desire, its occurrence as a metaphor in feminist writings, and its challenging presence in the rhetoric of the New Right.³⁹

What Martin and Mohanty share with the other scholars who have written on the home and whose work has been discussed earlier in this chapter, is their assumption that identity is shaped by the individual's experience of home. But the radical difference of the Martin and Mohanty text lies in their exploding of the received notions of "home" and the ambience of safety, security and individualism that the word has gathered around itself.

Martin and Mohanty accelerate a process that they identify as beginning in Pratt's work, namely, the process of disassembling the notion of "home." They read Pratt's essay as "constructed on the tension between two specific modalities: being home and not being home."⁴⁰

"Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself.⁴¹

Thus, to rephrase Robert Frost and David Sopher, home is neither where they have to take you in nor where they want to take you in,

but rather the place where one is *in* because an Other(s) is kept out. Both the essays work at uncovering the violence, terror and difference that is repressed in everyday securing of a home. By locating herself outside the protective environs of southern, white, middle-class ideologies that she grew up in, and by trying to establish a home with her Jewish lover in a black, inner-city neighborhood, Minnie Pratt attempts to rethink "home" and in the process reformulate "community," for those for whom such privileges *are* givens.

What the work of Pratt, Mohanty and Martin does in the process of interrogating the conventional notions of home and community, is to interrogate the notion of "identity" itself – even those identities that are based on progressive political alliances. Pratt's careful articulation of why her associations with NOW, as well as her desire for a safe space for lesbians, were *limited by definition* is central to her thesis that those who have power and privilege have to lose the self constructed by such privilege in order to gain admittance to a world community. Pratt works her way to this stance by walking her reader through the many locations that she has entered, occupied, felt at home in and then rejected. Finding herself "homesick with nowhere to go," Pratt asks: "What is it exactly that we are afraid to lose?" What is to be lost is safety, protection, and the self that is constructed through these privileges. Pratt writes:

When we discover truths about our home culture, we may fear we are losing our self: our self-respect, our self-importance...we may fear that we will lose the people who are our family, our kin, be rejected by "our own kind"...we can go "too far."⁴²

In her sophisticated analysis of "home" for those who have been granted the privilege, Pratt's text makes us question the entire project of subjecthood and feeling at home. Part of Pratt's intention seems to be to leave her essay "open-ended" and her choice of rhetorical style allows her to do so: faced with the rigor of operating from an unsettled self-identity/home, she ends her essay with "a dream...in waking life" of reconciliation with all those from whom she has been kept separate. Meanwhile she continues "to struggle with myself and the world I was born in." Home remains a desirable place. And yet, Pratt's advocacy of struggle and of embracing the unfamiliar is the absolute antithesis of what has (and continues to be) known as "home" – the place of comfort and familiarity.⁴³ Pratt's essay demonstrates that home can no longer be as we know it.

Pratt's autobiographical essay is crucial to Caren Kaplan's articula-

tion of a new "feminist poetics" that is based on the first world feminist critic's willingness to leave home in order to feel difference, displacement and "deterritorialization" more keenly.⁴⁴ In "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," (1987) Kaplan uses Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's construction of "Minor Literature," Pratt's essay, and Michelle Cliff's *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* to elaborate on the processes by which western feminism can learn to practice the revolutionary art of "becoming minor."⁴⁵ "Becoming minor" or "reterritorialization without imperialism" requires that first-world critics "dare to let go of their respective representations and systems of meaning, their identity politics and theoretical homes."⁴⁶ For the first-world feminist critic, Kaplan insists, "the challenge at this particular time is to develop a discourse that responds to the power relations of the world system, that is, to examine her location in the dynamics of center and margins."⁴⁷ In a reflective passage Kaplan herself voices the cautionary statements that need to be made alongside such advocacy of what elsewhere in her essay is dubbed "nomadism":

When first world critics advocate a process of "becoming minor" it is necessary to ask: where are we located in this movement of language and literature? What do we stand to gain? Do we have freedom of movement and where does this freedom come from? For example, I would have to pay attention to whether or not it is possible for me to *choose* deterritorialization or whether deterritorialization has chosen me. If I choose deterritorialization, I go into literary/linguistic exile with all my cultural baggage intact. If deterritorialization has chosen me – that is, if I have been cast out of home and language without forethought or permission, then my point of view will be more complicated...My caution is against a kind of theoretical tourism on the part of the first world critic, where the margin becomes a linguistic or a critical vacation, a new poetics of the exotic. One can also read Deleuze and Guattari's resistance to this romantic trope in their refusal to recognize a point of origin. Theirs is a poetics of travel where there is no return ticket and we all meet, therefore, *en train*.⁴⁸

Several points need to be made here. First, cultural baggage is also carried by those whom "deterritorialization has chosen." There are no wanderers, however impoverished, however sudden their eviction, who are cast out empty-handed or empty-headed.⁴⁹ What is commendable is Kaplan's effort to devise a common agenda for all feminists regardless of their (race, class, geographic) location. She writes: "Exploring all the differences, keeping identities distinct, is the only way we can keep power differentials from masquerading as universals.

We will have different histories, but we will often have similar struggles."⁵⁰ What remains murky is how this new feminist poetics will proceed from poetics to making "the connections necessary to change prevailing power relations"?⁵¹ Kaplan cautions against textual tourism and/or simple appropriation of the strategies of those who are already "minor." And yet this essay that begins with citations from Chela Sandoval's writing, followed by insights drawn from Gloria Anzaldúa and Minnie Pratt finally ends with Michelle Cliff's discoveries about herself in *Claiming an Identity*. Cliff writes of a garden that is a "private open space."⁵² Kaplan sees here a successful move to reterritorialization via writing. Hence she declares Cliff's garden:

a new terrain, a new location, in feminist poetics. Not a room of one's own, not a fully public or collective self, not a domestic realm – it is a space in the imagination which allows for the inside, the outside, and the liminal elements in between. Not a romanticized pastoral nor a modernist urban utopia – Cliff's garden is the space where writing occurs without loss or separation.⁵³

The central question that needs addressing is whether "a space in the imagination" that allows writing "without loss or separation" can come into being without a corresponding change in the actual ordering of space? If this corresponding change cannot be brought about by emulation or by theoretical forays into the unfamiliar, then the first world critic has to leave her privilege behind as she searches for alternate ways of "becoming minor."

Kaplan states that "we all meet, *en train*" after claiming that Deleuze and Guattari's resistance to "a poetics of the exotic" is ensured by their "refusal to recognize a point of origin." I would argue that Kaplan's article is marked by a similar refusal to recognize points of arrival. And that this refusal, rather than serve as resistance to textual tourism reveals a desire to avoid or suspend the first-world critic's investment in homes of privilege and power rather than to relinquish them altogether. Where does this train stop? When Kaplan advocates "nomadism," she is suggesting that the train never stops. Kaplan does not indicate how this literary train ride between equals will be matched by corresponding reordering of power and privilege in everyday life. Yet if the train did stop would it bring the first-world critic back home? Kaplan would argue that it would not and cannot... at least not for practitioners of the new feminist poetics, because home would be different. It would be a "private open space."

Perhaps Kaplan's "*en train*" could be understood as a variation of what Chandra Mohanty has called a "temporality of struggle." In

"Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience" (1992) Mohanty presents the temporality of struggle as that "which disrupts and challenges the logics of linearity, development and progress which are the hallmarks of European modernity."⁵⁴ Mohanty elaborates: "[i]t suggests an insistent, simultaneous, non-synchronous process characterized by multiple locations, rather than a search for origins and endings which, as Adrienne Rich says, 'seems a way of stopping time in its tracks'" (p. 87). Read in the light of this theorizing by Mohanty, it would seem that "points of arrival" are to be indefinitely deferred as we engage in a politics of process and movement.

In a 1988 essay titled "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" bell hooks suggests that the *diverse pleasures* of oppositional political struggle "can be experienced, enjoyed even, because one transgresses, moves 'out of one's place.' For many of us that movement requires the pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex and class domination. Initially then it is a defiant political gesture. Moving, we confront the reality of choice and location."⁵⁵ Certainly, Pratt's essay as well as the essay by Kaplan can be read within this rubric... they are self-consciously transgressive as the subject chooses to relocate herself. bell hooks presents the issue as a matter of *choosing* to position ourselves either "on the side of the colonizing mentality" or to "continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible. This choice is crucial" (p. 15). Kaplan's cautions must be reiterated here as a necessary corrective to hooks' proposition on choice. Indeed Kaplan's deterritorialization can be read as a parallel to bell hooks' transgressive moving "out of one's place." But are the subjects addressed in the two articles identical?

Kaplan's "we" is primarily "the first-world critic" who wants to "become minor" and hook's "we" constitutes those who are hailed by her definition of the politics of location: "those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision" (p. 15). In the final pages of *Feminism and Geography*, Gillian Rose categorizes much of the writing discussed here under the suggestive notion of "the politics of paradoxical space." The paradox comes from articulations of geography and geometry that do not come "naturally" to the writers and yet create "not so much a space of resistance as an

entirely different geometry through which we can think power, knowledge, space and identity in critical and, hopefully, liberatory ways."⁵⁶ Clearly there is some overlap in the subject addressed in all these feminist texts that attempt to theorize the need to move beyond one's home into less safe, less comfortable spaces. And yet the differences are what keeps any strategy from being perfectly viable for all subjects at all times. What is called for then, is a coalition politics across difference of the kind advocated by Bernice Johnson Reagon in her speech at the West Coast Women's Music Festival 1981 at Yosemite National Forest in California.⁵⁷

Reagon pares down the concept of home until it is no more than a "barred room" – a place which is nurturing, nationalistic and open exclusively to people like oneself. It is against this notion of home, that Reagon advocates coalition. Her words were initially directed to participants in a women's music festival:

We've pretty much come to the end of time when you can have a space that is "yours only" – just for people you want to be there. Even when we have our "women-only" festivals, there is no such thing...There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up. (p. 357)

Coalition work, Reagon stresses, is precisely the location that is not home. To coalesce is to open the barred room to persons from different locations with different agendas, to be willing to risk losing one's secure place. Reagon writes of the effects of such open-house events:

The first thing that happens is that the room don't feel like the room anymore. [Laughter] And it ain't home no more. It is not a womb no more. And you can't feel comfortable no more...Inside the womb you generally are very soft and unshelled. You have no covering. And you have no ability to handle what happens if you start to let folks in who are not like you. (p. 359)

While Reagon's essay was intended as a critique of the organized women's movement (and its perpetuation of "a myth that there is some common experience that comes from just cause you're women," p. 360), its reverberations continue to be felt on a variety of political projects that construct exclusive "homes" for its participants. Amongst these political projects the one which is central to *this* book is the production of literary "homes" as well as the theoretical "homes" constructed by literary and cultural criticism. How does coalition building function in the context of literary readings? How do we step out of literature's barred rooms?

Feminist readers have insisted on noting the ideological investments

of both literature and literary criticism. As such feminists have always been deconstructive. The project of much feminist literary criticism has been to invade barred rooms and to create discomfort in masculine strongholds. Yet a corollary to such activism has been an insistence on "a room of one's own" – constructed not so much by certain influential feminist theorists or literary figures but by a few, seemingly inviolable, feminist *cult texts*. Counter readings that question the feminist narrative woven around texts like *Jane Eyre*, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *A Room of One's Own*, or *Their Eyes Were Watching God* force discomforting but productive coalitions between feminism and other issues in cultural politics. Gender issues are forced to share the space they exclusively occupy in a strictly feminist reading with issues such as (homo)sexuality, race, class, and nationality. A brilliant example of such a coalition reading is provided by Susan S. Lanser's 1989 essay on *The Yellow Wallpaper* which radically challenged the definitive, feminist interpretation of this story of a young woman's descent into insanity.⁵⁸ After Lanser's rereading, this novella can no longer generate the angry, even exhilarating exposure of patriarchal oppression on the basis of which a certain feminism is learned and a corresponding feminist theory is formulated. Lanser claims "[a]lthough – or because – we have read 'The Yellow Wallpaper' over and over, we may have stopped short, and our readings, like the narrator's, may have reduced the text's complexity to what we need most: our own image reflected back to us." Part of this textual complexity that the narrator represses and what the feminist commentators have, according to Lanser, also refused to acknowledge is the racial and national ideology that would be immediately conjured up by the color yellow in the period when the story was written. Lanser writes:

If we locate Gilman's story within "the psychic geography" of Anglo-America at the turn of the century, we locate it in a culture obsessively preoccupied with race as the foundation of character, a culture desperate to maintain Aryan superiority in the face of massive immigrations from Southern and Eastern Europe, a culture openly anti-Semitic, anti-Asian, anti-Catholic, and Jim Crow...In California, where Gilman lived while writing "The Yellow Wallpaper," mass anxiety about the "Yellow Peril" had already yielded such legislation as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. (p. 425)

Read within this "discourse of racial anxiety," the feminist theorizing generated by this story needs drastic revision. The yellow woman behind the wallpaper who so distresses, attracts and repulses the white narrator is the Other in a nationalist discourse. How then do we read

the feminism inscribed by this text? The questions Lanser poses in her article are absolutely crucial:

Is the wallpaper, then, the political unconscious of a culture in which an Aryan woman's madness, desire, and anger, repressed by the imperatives of "reason," "duty" (p. 14) and "proper self-control" (p. 11), are projected onto a "yellow" woman who is, however, also the feared alien?...Might we explain the narrator's pervasive horror of a yellow color and smell that threaten to take over the "ancestral halls," "stain[ing] everything it touched" as the British-American fear of a takeover by aliens? (p. 429)

Lanser's reading of color politics in Gilman forces an acknowledgment of the existence of (in the course of its disruption and then demolition) a certain "barred room." In doing so through *The Yellow Wallpaper*, she compels us to rethink home and privilege as more than events in a universal, patriarchal time and space. Women, Bernice Reagon tells us, "have been organized to have our primary cultural signals come from some other factors than that we are 'women'" (p. 361). "Women people" as she terms it have to coalesce in order to cross "our first people boundaries – Black, White, Indian, etc." (p. 361). Each of us, then, is a mini coalition in ourselves – yoking together sexuality, race, gender, class, and countless other ideologies – working toward locations where *all of me* could feel at home for the time being.

What, then, are we left with? Perhaps, a daily resisting of the safety proffered by safe places. Perhaps Mohanty's "temporality of struggle" and Rose's "paradoxical space." A continual stepping out of or transgressing of boundaries and a redrawing of private and public spaces as well as of global divides. A recognition of privilege when we have it and a recognition of those who do not have homes or communities that we are familiar enough with to recognize. One caution is essential here. Much depends on who comprises the "we" that I address at the beginning of this paragraph. Can this "we" include or speak for (and to) those persons for whom homes, homelands or even nationhood are still unrealized desires? Is it feasible then, beginning from Pratt's stance, to work toward a unilateral rejection of safe-homes?⁵⁹

Perhaps it is time we examined varying notions of home to see what can be recycled in less oppressive, less exclusionary ways. In the next chapter, I examine an instance in which women claim national subject status for themselves on the basis of having successfully set up house in alien territory. In the following study of the impact on English women of successful home management in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth century, I reconsider the issues raised in this chapter: namely, the place of the home in nation and empire, the confluence of the self and the home, feminist aspirations and domesticity, as well as the direct link between attaining subjecthood and the denial of the same to Others.

CHAPTER 2

*The authoritative Englishwoman:
setting up home and self in the colonies*

Don't return male stares...it is considered a come-on. Turning away haughtily and draping your shawl over your head will have the desired effect...if you get the uncomfortable feeling that he's encroaching on your space, chances are he is. A firm request to keep help – use your best memsahib tone – may help.

*Advice to western women tourists,
India: a travel survival kit, 1990*

Whatever their differences, women shared the experience of having been denied access to an authoritative self as women.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

In juxtaposing the above two quotations, my intention is to draw attention to the codes of authorization that are available to *some* women in *some* situations.¹ The self as “memsahib” is a role that is readily available to white women tourists today as it was to white women colonists yesterday. The two citations also disclose the marks of ruling ideologies on the social constructions of gender: for the English woman in the empire, colonialism provided an “authoritative self” whose vestiges can be traced even in a “travel tip” from the 1990s. What are the implications of these historical continuities?

In “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse,” Caren Kaplan articulates the recent emphasis on the politics of location in some first world feminisms.² She works within and against the constructs of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of “deterritorialization,” (which she interprets as the “moment of alienation and exile in language and literature”) in order to describe “a new terrain, a new location, in feminist politics.”³ This deterritorialization or “becoming minor” requires that:

We must leave home, as it were, since our homes are often the sites of racism, sexism, and other damaging social practices. Where we come to locate ourselves in terms of our specific histories and differences must be a place with room for what can be salvaged from the past and what can be made new.⁴