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**Solid, ductile and liquid: changing notions of homeland and home in diaspora studies**

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**Abstract**

*Does diaspora imply a homeland? For a number of scholars who pioneered the growth of diasporic studies in the 1990s this was the sine qua non of the concept. Under the weight of social constructionist critics, who sought to deconstruct the foundational ideas of homeland and community, more complex and vaguer ideas of homeland and home emerged. These are characterized here as ‘solid’, ‘ductile’ and ‘liquid’, on a diminishing scale from historical reality to postmodern virtuality. I show that all three versions of home/homeland have some historical and empirical support, though resist pure social constructivism. There is also some evidence that solid notions homeland are gaining increasing attention.*

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Do we need a homeland in order to conceive of a diaspora? Even asking this question may have seemed absurd to the older generation of scholars and to those who pioneered the growth of diaspora studies in the 1990s. It was, in one sense, logically and etymologically impossible. A diaspora meant ‘dispersion’ and if people were dispersed, some point of origin – more concretely a homeland – was necessarily implied. One of the most influential statements marking the beginning of contemporary diaspora studies was Safran’s article in the opening issue of the then new journal, *Diaspora*.<sup>1</sup> Safran was strongly influenced by the underlying paradigmatic case of the Jewish diaspora, but correctly perceived that many other ethnic groups were experiencing analogous circumstances due perhaps to the difficult circumstances surrounding their departure from their places of origin and as a result their limited acceptance in their places of settlement.

Safran was, of course, not alone in recognizing the expanded use of the concept of diaspora, but he was crucial in seeking to give some social scientific contour to the new claims rather than allow a journalistic free-for-all to develop. The Jewish experience continued to influence Safran’s view of the vital importance of homeland in defining one of the essential characteristics of diaspora. For him, members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of ‘their original homeland’; they idealized their ‘ancestral home’, were committed to the restoration of ‘the original homeland’ and continued in various ways to ‘relate to that homeland’. He further maintained that the concept of a diaspora can be applied when members of an ‘expatriate minority community’ share several of the following features:

- They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from an original ‘*centre*’ to two or more foreign regions;
- they retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their *original homeland* including its location, history and achievements;
- they believe they are not – and perhaps can never be – fully accepted in their host societies and so remain partly separate;
- their *ancestral home is idealized* and it is thought that, when conditions are favourable, either they, or their descendants should return;
- they believe all members of the diaspora should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of the *original homeland* and to its safety and prosperity; and
- they continue in various ways to *relate to that homeland* and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are in an important way defined by the existence of such a relationship.<sup>2</sup>

### **Social constructionist critiques of diaspora**

Though the emphasis on an original homeland may have been too strongly stated, a group of critics, who I will describe as ‘social constructionists’, argued that Safran, this author and others were holding back the full force of the concept.<sup>3</sup> Influenced by post-modernist readings, social constructionists sought to decompose two of the major building blocks previously delimiting and demarcating the diasporic idea, namely ‘homeland’ and ‘ethnic/religious community’. In the post-modern world, it was further argued, identities have become deterritorialized and affirmed in a flexible and situational way; accordingly, concepts of diaspora had to be radically reordered in response to this complexity. Showing scant respect for the etymology, history, limits, meaning and evolution of the concept of diaspora, they sought to deconstruct the two core building blocks of diaspora, home/homeland and ethnic/religious community.<sup>4</sup> The first target of their deconstruction, home/homeland, is considered in this paper.

While a degree of decoupling of diaspora from homeland was signaled in my earlier work,<sup>5</sup> this rupture had taken a more insistent turn in Avtar Brah.<sup>6</sup> ‘Home’ became increasingly vague, even miasmic. By contrast, her concept of diaspora ‘offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire, which is not the same thing as a desire for “homeland”’. So, homeland had become a homing desire and soon home itself became transmuted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical, space. This is how Brah put it:

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day ... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.<sup>7</sup>

Through this and similar interventions, ‘home’ became more and more generously interpreted to mean the place of origin, or the place of settlement, or a local, national or transnational place, or an imagined virtual community (linked, for example, through the internet), or a matrix of known experiences and intimate social relations (thus conforming to the popular expression that ‘home is where the heart is’).

Anthias upped the stakes further by criticizing a number of scholars for using what she described as ‘absolutist notions of “origin” and “true belonging”’.<sup>8</sup> For her, diasporic discourse showed insufficient attention to internal divisions with ethnic communities or to the possibilities of selective cultural negotiations between communities:

...the lack of attention given to transethnic solidarities, such as those against racism, of class, of gender, of social movements, is deeply worrying from the perspective of the development of multiculturalism, and more inclusive notions of belonging. For a discourse of antiracism and social mobilization of a transethnic (as opposed to a transnational) character, cannot be easily accommodated, within the discourse of the diaspora, where it retains its dependence on ‘homeland’ and ‘origin’, however configured.<sup>9</sup>

Two years later Soysal amplified the charge. Despite the fact that notions of diaspora were ‘venerated’, they inappropriately ‘privileg[ed] the nation-state model and nationally-defined formations when conversing about a global process such as immigration’.<sup>10</sup> Post-war developments, she maintained:

... render diaspora untenable as an analytical and normative category, and direct our discussion to new formations of membership, claims-making and belonging – which either remain invisible to the conventional conceptions of diaspora, or are frequently deemed insignificant in the face of its normative weight ... In this [erroneous] formulation, the primary orientation and attachment of diasporic populations is to their homelands and cultures; and their claims and citizenship practices arise from this home-bound ethnic-based orientation.<sup>11</sup>

After her initial critique of diaspora, Soysal attended to her case of European citizenship, but she returned with a vengeance to her dislike of the concept of diaspora in a postscript, maintaining that the idea ‘suspends immigrant experience between host and home countries, native and foreign lands, home-bound desires and losses –

thus obscuring the new topography and practices of citizenship, which are multi-connected, multi-referential and postnational'.<sup>12</sup>

The crucial intent of these appraisals was to force a larger and larger wedge between 'diaspora' on the one hand, and 'homeland', 'place' and 'ethnic community' on the other. Clearly for some authors – of whom Anthias and Soysal are good representatives – diaspora was irredeemably flawed. It simply could not adequately address their own agendas by doing what they wanted – in Anthias's case, it could not produce a platform for a transethnic, gender-sensitive, anti-racist movement while, in Soysal's case, it could not provide a means of understanding post-national citizenship in Europe.

### The response

One response to such critiques of diaspora might have been to regard them as inappropriate or misplaced as they reflected political agendas that had little to do with the history and meaning of the term, or the phenomena it sought to, and continues to, explain. Diaspora theorists made no claim to explain the full spectrum of immigrant experiences, did not see their task as creating a progressive anti-racist movement (desirable as that may be), and did not seek to describe patterns of sociality and citizenship unrelated to some degree of prior kinship or religious affiliation. In other words the concept of diaspora is not a magic bullet and cannot be used to slay all enemies.

A more mature response was to find some dialogical possibilities between established and newer diaspora scholars and their social constructionist critics. Tölölyan, the leading scholar of diaspora and editor of the journal *Diaspora*, led the way by picking a path carefully through the middle, though still insisting that an attachment to place remained important in understanding the concept:

Diasporists shaped by globalizing discourse describe genuine erosions of the link between a bounded place and a people, diagnose it as irresistible, and quickly affirm its contribution to a pluralistic, multicultural, hybrid world of which they approve. Diasporists like myself, who want to argue that attachment to place was indispensable to diasporic life and thought until very recently, and that despite its erosion it remains important today, must tread carefully in order to avoid the charge that we are either imitating discredited nationalist rhetoric about the link between land, people, and culture, or that we remain naïve about the global spaces that have opened up in the past several decades.<sup>13</sup>

Brubaker also insisted that, despite the dispersion of its meaning, there remained 'three core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora'.<sup>14</sup> These are *dispersion* (either traumatically or voluntarily and generally across state borders); *homeland orientation* (whether to a real or imagined homeland) and *boundary maintenance* (the processes whereby group solidarity is mobilized and retained, even accepting that there are counter processes of boundary erosion).<sup>15</sup>

Though the social constructionist position was clearly overstated, the effect of their intervention was to generate a re-questioning and a more sophisticated understanding of shifts in the homeland–diaspora relationship. In so doing three main versions of home/homeland emerged, which I designate *solid* (the unquestioned need for a homeland), *ductile* (an intermediate, more complex, idea of homeland) and *liquid* (a post-modernist rendition of virtual home).

## Solid homeland

In general the idea of a homeland is imbued with an expressive charge and a sentimental pathos that seem to be almost universal. Motherland, fatherland, native land, natal land, *Heimat*, the ancestral land, the search for ‘roots’ – all these similar notions invest homelands with ‘an emotional, almost reverential dimension’.<sup>16</sup> Often, there is a complex interplay between the feminine and masculine versions of homeland. In the feminine rendition, the motherland is seen as a warm, cornucopian breast from which the people collectively suck their nourishment. One Kirgiz poet fancifully claimed that the relationship between homeland and human preceded birth itself: ‘Remember, even before your mother’s milk, you drank the milk of your homeland,’ he wrote.<sup>17</sup> Suggesting the same metaphor, the biblical Promised Land was said to be ‘flowing with milk and honey’.

In other interpretations, the nurturing white milk of the motherland is replaced by the blood of soldiers gallantly defending their fatherland. Their blood nourishes the soil, the soil defines their ethnogenesis. *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) was Bismarck’s stirring call to the German nation, an evocation that was renewed by Hitler two generations later. Even in the wake of the post-1945 liberal-democratic constitutional settlement, the Germans were unusual in stressing a definition of citizenship and belonging – *jus sanguinis*, the law of blood – that emphasizes descent, rather than place of birth or long residence. Thus, third and fourth generation ‘ethnic Germans’ from the former Soviet Union, many of whom no longer spoke German,



A JEWISH CAMERAMAN PRAYS AT THE WAILING WALL,  
A SOLID REMNANT OF THE OLD HOMELAND

were accorded instant citizenship in preference to second-generation Turks who had been born and educated in Germany. Sometimes the images of motherland and fatherland are conflated. The androgynous British conceptions of homeland evoke the virile John Bull character exemplified in modern times by the indomitable wartime hero, Winston Churchill. They are also derived from the received history of Boudicca, Britannia, Queen Victoria and, perhaps more fancifully, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The solid idea of homeland has been given additional force in recent years by the recognition of the increasing role diasporas are playing in international politics and as agents of homeland development. Of course diasporas have been important in international politics for many years. Philhellenism, Zionism, Garveyism, Pan-Africanism, the attempts to create Khalistan and to remake Greater Armenia – all these are represented by the political vanguards of the diasporas as the only certain means to overcome their precarious and isolated existence in exile. Improvement schemes for homelands also were common in other diasporas. Although born in China, Sun Yixian (Sun Yat-sen) developed his political consciousness in Hong Kong and in the Chinese community in Hawaii. His Society for the Revival of China was a crucial instrument in the promotion of a modern Chinese nationalism. Without pronouncing on the justness or otherwise of their causes, in recent years we can note the destabilizing role of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in their support of the Tamil Tigers, the persistent efforts of the Kurdish diaspora to establish a Kurdish state and the success of the Croatian diaspora in helping to establish an independent Croatian state.

As the last examples indicate, what has changed is that the bipolar shape of international politics has disintegrated after the Cold War. States, NGOs, powerful corporations, networks and religions all compete for power and influence in a more complex, pluralist world. Within this lattice work of competing interests, diasporas have emerged as key players in the often precarious politics of their homeland states. The key finding of a recent collection of studies on diasporas in conflict is that they can be a force for stability ('peace-makers') as well as a force that amplifies and even creates conflict ('peace-wreckers'). As the editors remark: 'Diasporic involvement in conflict still needs to be studied, but what can be said is that diasporas play "significant and varied roles" in the whole range of activities in the conflict cycle'<sup>18</sup>

Another recent boost to the solid idea of homeland is the enhanced role of diasporas as agents of development. Scholars of diasporas have always been aware that diasporic connections led to profound changes at points of origin. Failing agricultural pursuits were given a renewed lease of life, family and kin were supported in their old age and in poverty and sometimes more dramatic and far-reaching changes were initiated. While long recognized in the academic literature, only recently have these effects been recognized by development agencies, NGOs and richer countries seeking to target their development aid. The 'penny dropped' when development agencies noticed that 'remittances' (recorded money sent to home countries by migrants abroad) are a large and rapidly growing part of international financial flows. In 2005, some US\$188 billion was transferred to poor countries and the sum was expected to grow by US\$11 billion in 2006, while total remittances to rich and poor countries amounted to US\$ 268 billion. These figures arise from a World Bank report, whose authors also point out that these sums only reflect officially-sanctioned transfers. They add that: 'unrecorded flows through informal channels may add 50 percent or more to recorded flows. Including these unrecorded

flows, the true size of remittances, is larger than foreign direct investment flows and more than twice as large as official aid received by developing countries'.<sup>19</sup>

Not only have they acknowledged that the existing volumes of funds transferred are immense, development agencies see channelling aid through diasporas as preferable to sending aid to governments in poor countries, some of which are ineffective at best and corrupt at worst. For practical purposes the ambiguities of home and homeland have been abolished as diaspora scholars have entered a new field of applied diaspora studies.

### **Ductile homeland**

Let me now turn to my intermediate category. Even in a case of the prototypical Jewish diaspora the solid idea of homeland seems to be weakening. Interestingly, William Safran, whose early work on the necessity of homeland has already been discussed, now adopts a more flexible (ductile) use of homeland. Partly on the basis of attitudinal surveys, Safran argues that in the case of Israel on the one hand, and European and American Jews on the other, the links between hostlands and homeland are becoming more tenuous.<sup>20</sup> Those in the Jewish diaspora experiencing a process of 'dezionization' include groups he designates as secularists, socialists, potential investors in Israel, non-orthodox believers, enlightened Western Jews, left-wing ideologues, academics and others disillusioned with the expressions of Israeli state power. The other side of the coin is that (despite intermittent bursts of anti-Semitism) life in the diaspora is sufficiently attractive and sufficiently emotionally and physically secure not to prompt an invariable identification with Israel.

Intriguingly, proto-Zionists have also promoted summer camps when, in safe rural US settings, virtual *aliya* (migration 'up' to Israel) can take place, complete with Israeli flags, Hebrew lessons, religious rituals, imitations of life on a kibbutz and access to other attractive aspects of Israeli popular culture.<sup>21</sup> As Safran himself recognizes, the harder notion of homeland has now yielded to softer notions of a 'found home' in the diaspora and to a 'virtual home' in a summer camp – perhaps augmented by occasional visits to Israel rather than permanent settlement. I will add that the unexpected but considerable flow of Israelis to the USA and Europe (which attracts strong disapprobation by Zionists), has also fundamentally changed the relationship between the Jewish homeland and the Jewish diaspora.<sup>22</sup>

I would also like to draw attention to two other intriguing examples, both centred on Bombay. The first concerns the Sindhis, historically settled in the area currently defined as the southernmost province of Pakistan. Sind had a prior independent existence, but was governed by the British for a little over 100 years, from 1843–1947. The area is bisected by the navigable Indus river which debouches into what was once called 'the Sindhi Sea' (now the Arabian Sea); ancient Greek, Persian, Arab and Sindhis mariners were tied into far-reaching trade networks long before the arrival of the Europeans.<sup>23</sup> The province is strategically salient, with a long frontier with India and a key port connecting Sind to Central Asia and the wider Gulf and Indian Ocean business and trade networks.



MUMBAI (BOMBAY) HARBOUR, WHERE MANY SINDHI REFUGEES FROM PAKISTAN ARRIVED AT THE TIME OF PARTITION. BOMBAY IS NOW THE DISPLACED HOMELAND EVEN THOUGH FERRY LINKS WITH KARACHI ARE TO BE RESTORED.

Concentrating particularly on the case of Hindu Sindhis (most of who accept the teaching of Guru Nanak, the first guru of Sikhism but remain within the Hindu camp), Falzon takes up their story.<sup>25</sup> The first diasporic wave was generated at the beginning of the British occupation and constituted a classic trade diaspora but the second, and far more numerous, accompanied the grisly end of British rule and partition. The Hindu Sindhis found themselves in Muslim Pakistan and moved en masse to India, notably to Bombay and its satellite town, Ulhasnagar (redubbed Sindhunagar, because of the many Sindhis there). There were already strong administrative, educational and trade links with Bombay and exit to Bombay by sea was the safest course of action for the refugees.

India has been kind to the Sindhis, with the Bombay-based community at large being regarded as politically integrated and economically successful. The emblematic evidence of this success was the election of L. K. Advani to the deputy prime ministership of India and the prominence (sometimes notoriety) of the fabulously-wealthy Hinduja brothers. Like the Hinduja brothers who have spread their wings, many Indian Sindhis have moved on, settling in perhaps 100 further countries, sometime linked to the pioneer Sindhi traders. Do they constitute a deterritorialized diaspora? Falzon argues that ‘the notion of a (distant) homeland is still central to the Hindu Sindhi’s diasporic imaginary’, but that the idea of recovering a homeland in historic Sind is generally and increasingly seen as a political impossibility. By contrast, the benefits of forming an economically successful transnational network centred on Bombay are apparent to all, except a few ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ who wistfully look to their lost homeland.<sup>26</sup> Some are even prepared to argue that partition in 1947 was a ‘blessing in disguise’, while one poet enthused:



Oh Sindhi! May God be with you  
 May you spread happiness  
 Wherever you find your people, call it home.  
 Wherever you find Sindhis, call it your Sind.<sup>27</sup>

While the Sindhi population of Bombay remains substantial, the diasporic Sindhis often own second homes there and return to sample the remembered pleasures of the city, to see friends and relatives, to participate in the thriving marriage market for their sons and daughters and to handshake with new and old business partners. As Falzon explains, Bombay has become the ‘cultural heart’ of a deterritorialized diaspora:

Business reputation, personal narratives, indicators of wealth, virtue and a host of other aspects of the person and, more importantly, the family, are periodically transported to Bombay from every corner of the world, and through interaction in the city, re-exported to the various localities of the diaspora. The city’s five-star hotels, expensive restaurants and sari emporia provide an excellent opportunity for the type of conspicuous consumption for which Sindhis are stereotypically but hardly erroneously famous wherever they are located.<sup>28</sup>

Bombay (renamed Mumbai by nationalists) is, of course, a famously cosmopolitan city with famous diasporic intellectuals like Salman Rushdie who celebrate its diversity. The central characters in his novel *The Moor’s last sigh* are drawn from the city’s Cochin Jews and Portuguese Christians and the city has been home, or a point of transit, for many diasporic peoples. There is an Armenian church in Meadows street established in 1776. In 1864, Ewald notices, ‘more than half of the (probably under-reported) two thousand Africans in Bombay earned their living as sailors or in related maritime work’.<sup>29</sup> Given this diversity, it is perhaps not therefore surprising to find a substantial Zoroastrian community in Bombay – where they are known as Parsis. The Parsis became an established part of the landscape of the city as early as 1640, while the British East India Company conceded that their funeral practices (where vultures eat the dead) could be carried out at the Tower or Silence at Malabar Hill in 1673.

As Hinnells explains in his monumental study of the Zoroastrian diaspora, the Parsis in Bombay became the major cultural and religious centre for the worldwide community from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>30</sup> He considers the cases of some eleven other Zoroastrian communities (in Hong Kong, East Africa, Britain, continental Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia) showing how endogamous norms, social mobility and late marriage have steadily reduced this ancient community to about 100,000 members. However, the main threat to the Zoroastrians has been manifested in their natal homeland, Iran (formerly Persia) where, since the revolution of 1979, emigration or conversion has reduced the community to about 22,000. Founded centuries ago, Zoroastrians had once succeeded to the throne of Persia, before being driven out by Muslim rule in 652 AD. While some holy relics remain as Chakchak in Iran, which is still a site for pilgrimage, the diaspora has become nearly entirely deterritorialized, with its main religious and cultural reference points anchored in Bombay.

## Liquid homes

This is a world of ‘liquid modernity’, says Zygmunt Bauman, where ‘we are witnessing the revenge of nomadism over the principles of territoriality and settlement’.<sup>31</sup> The evocation of constant movement and liquidity recalls Marx and Engels’s remark in the *Communist Manifesto* that ‘All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned’. The literary scholar, Marshall Berman, echoes this last quote. To be in our world, he says ‘is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air’.<sup>32</sup> Do we wish to loosen the historical meanings of the notion of a diasporic home even further to encompass new forms of mobility and displacement and the construction of new identities and subjectivities? I propose we adopt the expression ‘deterritorialized diaspora’ to encompass the lineaments of a number of unusual diasporic experiences.<sup>33</sup> In these instances ethnic groups can be thought of as having lost their conventional territorial reference points, to have become in effect mobile and multi-located cultures with virtual or uncertain homes.

It is easy enough to think of some population groups that might qualify as travelling cultures on the grounds that they have always had a wandering character – the Tuaregs, Bedouins, San, Qashqa’i, Maasai and Berbers come readily to mind. However, if home has always been on the move, it is doubtful that the word ‘diaspora’ can add anything useful to the traditional use of the expression ‘nomad’, other than providing a novel label. A much more intriguing example is the case of the Roma (Gypsies), who have a narrative of ethnogenesis in India, but have lost any sustained connection with the Indian sub-continent. Treating the Roma as a diaspora provides a stimulating challenge.<sup>34</sup> However, the most important case of a deterritorialized diaspora, with a liquid home, is that of Caribbean peoples.

The main population of the Caribbean has been both multiply displaced and continues its migratory traditions – from Africa, within the Caribbean archipelago and to far beyond the region. The earliest settled peoples of the Caribbean, the Caribs and Arawaks, generally failed to survive the glories of Western civilization – nearly all died from conquest, overwork and disease.<sup>35</sup> Virtually all of those who settled in the Caribbean came from somewhere else – the African slaves from West Africa, the white European settlers, planters and administrators from Europe, Indians arriving as the indentured workers from India and the traders from the Middle East. Settler and immigrant societies are, normally, conceived of as points of arrival, not departure, and sites of a renewed collectivity, not of dissolution, emigration and dispersion.



A CARIBBEAN MAN LOOKS OUT ON THE 'BLACK ATLANTIC'. AS IDEAS, PEOPLE AND POPULAR CULTURE CRISSCROSSED BETWEEN AFRICA, THE AMERICAS AND EUROPE, A DETERRITORIALIZED DIASPORA AND A FLUID IDEA OF HOME HAVE EMERGED

Despite this, Caribbean peoples can be considered an exemplary case of a deterritorialized diaspora. This arises first from their common history of forcible dispersion through the slave trade – still shared by virtually all people of African descent, despite their subsequent liberation, settlement and citizenship in the various countries of the New World and beyond. Partly, this is a matter of visibility. Unlike (say) in the cases of Jews or Armenians, where superficial disappearance is possible in Europe and North America if exogamy occurs, in the case of those of African descent skin colour normally remains a marker for, two, three or more generations – despite exogamy. The deployment of skin colour in many societies as a signifier of status, power and opportunity, make it impossible for any people of African descent to avoid racial stigmatization. As one black British writer graphically puts it, 'our imaginations are conditioned by an enduring proximity to regimes of racial terror'.<sup>36</sup>

The most intellectually ambitious attempt to define a Caribbean fluid home is made by Paul Gilroy in *The black Atlantic*.<sup>37</sup> He sees the consciousness of the African diaspora as being formed in a complex cultural and social intermingling between Africa, Europe and the Americas. However, this does not lead to cultural uniformity, but rather to recognition of 'transnational and intercultural multiplicity'. Of course, some degree of unity must exist in the Atlantic Africans' diasporic culture for it to be deemed a shared impulse and form of consciousness. This emergent culture is characterized as 'the black Atlantic', a truly liquid home.

True, an idea of Africa remained in the imaginary in both the francophone and Anglophone Caribbean. For intellectuals like Césaire, the idea of return was subliminal, figurative and symbolic.<sup>38</sup> In the English-speaking Caribbean the idea of a

link with Africa spread beyond the intelligentsia to the masses – through the Garveyite and Rastafarian movements, but the idea of Africa was a invention, an Ethiopia of the mind that rarely translated into a real return movement or sustained association. The real links were not with Africa, but with other dispersed people of African origin. This was particular true in popular culture – in music, literature, carnival, the visual and performing arts and language – where there was considerable cross-pollination of ideas, images and concepts over the waves and the air waves, exactly in conformity with the black Atlantic thesis. The frontiers of the region are beyond the Caribbean – in the consciousness of Caribbean people to be sure, but also in their social conduct, migration patterns and achievements in their places of settlement and sojourn.

If we reach back into the history of diasporas, we can find other forms of liquid home in the connections between religion and diaspora. Not only did ‘diaspora’ enter its conventional use in Jewish history via the Greek translation of the Bible, Bauman points out that in the first century AD Christians adopted the term, altering its ‘soteriological meaning according to Christian eschatology’. He continues:

The New Testament uses the noun *diaspora* and the verb *diaspeírein* three times each. Without going into detail on the complicated usages, the individual writers of the different Biblical stories and letters interpreted the early Church ‘as a pilgrim, sojourning and dispersed community, in the understanding that it is the eschatological people of God’. On earth Christians living in dispersion would function as a ‘seed’ to disseminate the message of Jesus. The Christians’ real home, however, was the ‘heavenly city Jerusalem’, the goal of Christian pilgrimage.<sup>39</sup>

There are, indeed, a number of Christian communities who behaved precisely in conformity with the tradition Bauman describes. The Mennonites (sixteenth century Christian Anabaptists) are a case in point. Dispersal took place as a result of internal schisms (often over seemingly minor theological differences), in reaction to overt persecution, or as a response to attempts by states to bring religious communities into their tax regimes and place them under state authority. For those who believed only in the Kingdom of God, spreading the seed of Christianity to other parts of the world seemed the obvious thing to do. The Mennonites ended up largely in small rural communities, dispersing to 51 countries all over Africa, Europe and the Americas. A Mennonite theologian, Alain Epp Weaver, argues that there is (or perhaps should be) a close parallel between Christians and Jews. Both, he maintains, took erroneous turns in subordinating themselves to state power – for the Christians it was the Roman Emperor Constantine (280–337 AD) who established Christianity as a state religion, while for the Jews it was the creation of the state of Israel. By getting themselves entangled with temporal institutions Jews and Christians foolishly abandoned their spiritual missions. Both, Weaver argues, ‘are called to an exilic, diasporic faith which embodies an alternative politics amidst the Babylons of the world.’<sup>40</sup>

The fate of religious diasporas in global times is described, though rather briefly, by Ninian Smart.<sup>41</sup> The background to his argument is that, with the increased pace of connectivity, especially in respect of cheap long-distance travel, even rather poor religious communities can maintain contact with the principal epicentres of their religions: the Jews with Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall, the Catholics with Rome and Lourdes, the Hindus with Varanasi and the Ganges, the Sikhs with Amritsar and the Golden Temple, the Muslims with Mecca and the Kaaba, and so on. Contact often takes the form of pilgrimage to sites of religious significance – the fires of religious

passion often being nurtured by long separation followed by ritualized forms of connectivity, such as the Hajj. The Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam, is a source of inspiration and bonding for the Islamic world community, the *umma*. Those who are medically fit and can afford the journey are obliged to travel to Mecca at least once in their lives: about two million do so each year. Occasionally, the facilities are overwhelmed by the enthusiastic crowd. In 2006, 345 pilgrims on the Hajj lost their lives in a stampede near the three pillars where the devil appeared to Abraham and where they are enjoined to throw stones.

Christian pilgrimages have also experienced a massive revival with the reduced cost of international transport and greater accessibility.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of this is the case of Lourdes, a small town in the French Pyrenees. Each year, millions of people travel to Lourdes.<sup>43</sup> The town only has a permanent population of 15,000 but it has 270 hotels and is second nationally only to Paris in terms of the number of tourist beds available. As is often the case with places of pilgrimage, the religious aura surrounding Lourdes arose from the mysterious appearance of a religious figure. In this case a 14-year old girl is said to have seen the Virgin Mary 18 times in 1854. The water of Lourdes is thought to be blessed and many who are sick (some in wheelchairs or on hospital trolleys) come to the town in the hope of emulating the 66 officially-recognized miracle cures. Pilgrimages have also acquired new importance in other religions. Increasing numbers of Buddhists and Taoists are returning to Mount Tai in northeast China, where the shrines were vandalized by Maoist Red Guards but restored after 1976. Shinto priests hold at least 15 festivals each year to welcome pilgrims to Taisha, Japan.

## Conclusion

If we review the various uses of the idea of home and homeland in diaspora studies we can find good historical and empirical support for all three notions – solid, ductile and liquid. The myths of a common origin are often territorialized, while highly romantic, yet powerful, myths of the ‘old country’ are avowed. The ‘promised land’ of the Jews flowed with milk and honey. The aged cedars and scent of mint on Mount Lebanon can be used to brush away the smell of the corpses produced in the recent civil wars and invasions. The impressive buildings of Zimbabwe stand as a testament to the notion that Africans once had superior civilizations and great empires: a direct refutation of their often low social status in the diaspora. The Assyrians in London and Chicago talk of their link to the great civilization in Mesopotamia, while their arch rivals, the Armenians, mount expensive archaeological expeditions to uncover *their* palaces and shrines.

We have also observed that in some cases homeland has given way to a more ductile notion of homeland, which can be displaced, as in the cases of the Sindhis and Parsis of Bombay or somewhat attenuated as in the case of dezionization. We also have noticed that virtual, deterritorialized, liquid homes can be constructed through cultural links, as in the Caribbean case, and through the substitution of sacred monuments, rivers, icons and shrines for home, as in the case of diaspora religions. It is perhaps important to stress that Africa does not disappear from the Caribbean imaginary, just as Sind and Persia are still remembered, however distantly, by Hindu Sindhis and Parsis. Rather than a complete process of erasure, the conditions in the natal homeland have become so hostile (and the relatively benign conditions in parts of the diaspora so attractive) that the recovery of homeland has been deferred indefinitely and displaced by newer centres of religious, cultural and economic achievement.

How then do we mediate between the three uses? One possible way of dealing with this escalation is to allow self-declaration to prevail. Home and homeland is what you say it is. Who are we to object? Another strategy is to follow the tactic adopted by the ancient Greek, Procrustes, who offered hospitality in his iron bed to passers-by. So that they would fit the bed precisely, he stretched short people and cut off the limbs of long people. By analogy, we could espouse an utterly rigid set of criteria to which all home/homelands would have to conform before we would allow them to lie on our conceptual bed. Rejecting these two strategies, I have insisted on empirical and historical support for any notion of home/homeland. Largely unsupported post-modernist critiques have suggested that there is a one-way movement from solid notions of homeland to liquid notions of home. But, as I have argued, the intermediate category remains important and the solid versions of homeland are gaining increasing support as diasporas become mobilized to play an enhanced role in homeland and international politics and in the economic and social development of their natal territories.

## Notes

- 1 William Safran 'Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return', *Diaspora*, 1 (1), 1991, pp. 83–99
- 2 All phrases in quotation marks from Safran 'Diasporas in modern societies', pp. 83–4. Emphasis added. In response to the normal canons of social scientific debate initiated by this author and others Safran has amended and extended his list to one that will command considerable consensus among diaspora scholars. See William Safran 'The Jewish diaspora in a comparative and theoretical perspective', *Israel Studies* 10 (1), 2005, p.37.
- 3 I have used the expression 'social constructionist' to signify a mode of reasoning, closely associated with post-modernism, which suggests that reality is determined by social interaction (or intersubjectivity), rather than by objectivity (the acceptance of a natural or material world) or by subjectivity (a world determined by individual perceptions). The perspective tends to favour voluntarism and collective human agency over structure, history and habituation.
- 4 It might be worth recalling Marx's crucial insight that 'Men [read 'people'] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living'. See Karl Marx 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon' in Lewis S. Feuer (ed) *Marx and Engels: basic writings on politics and philosophy*, New York: Anchor Books, 1959, p. 321 [first published in 1852]
- 5 Robin Cohen *Global diasporas: an introduction*, London: UCL Press, 1997.
- 6 Avtar Brah *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*, London: Routledge, 1996.
- 7 Brah *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*, p. 192.
- 8 Floya Anthias 'Evaluating "diaspora": beyond ethnicity', *Sociology*, 32 (3), 1998, pp. 557–80. She includes Robin Cohen's *Global diasporas* in her charge, though I thought it was clear that I was arguing for a more complex notion of origin (see Chapters 3 on Africans and 6 on Sikhs). However, I concur that 'belonging' is not a given, but has to be established, mobilized and defended in social, cultural and political practices. My views are clarified at length in Robin Cohen *Frontiers of identity: the British and the Others*, London: Longman, 1994, Chapters 1 and 7.
- 9 Anthias, 'Evaluating diaspora', p. 577.
- 10 Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal 'Citizenship and identity: living in diasporas in post-war Europe?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23 (1), 2000, pp. 1–2. Nearly all diaspora theorists had in fact pointed out that diaspora was a concept that long pre-dated the nation-state and that diasporic formations were constantly in tension with nation-states. See, for example, Robin Cohen 'Diasporas and the nation-state: from victims to challengers' *International Affairs* 72 (3), July 1996, 507–20
- 11 Soysal 'Citizenship and identity', pp. 2–3.
- 12 Soysal 'Citizenship and identity', p. 13.
- 13 Khachig Tölölyan 'Restoring the logic of the sedentary to diaspora studies' in Lisa Anteby-Yemini, William Berthomière and Gabriel Sheffer (eds) *Les diasporas: 2000 ans d'histoire*, Rennes: Presse Universitaires de Rennes, 2005, pp.138–9.
- 14 Rogers Brubaker 'The "diaspora" diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 (1), 2005, p. 5.
- 15 Brubaker 'The "diaspora" diaspora', pp. 5–7
- 16 Walker Conner 'The impact of homelands upon diasporas' in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.) *Modern diasporas in international politics*, London: Croom Helm, 1986, p. 16–45. See also André Levy and Alex Weingrod (eds) *Homelands and diasporas: holy lands and other spaces*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- 17 Walker Conner 'The impact of homelands upon diasporas' in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.) *Modern diasporas in international politics*, London: Croom Helm, 1986, p. 17.

- 18 Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (eds) *Diasporas in conflict: peace-makers and peace-wreckers*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007, p. 9.
- 19 Sanket Mohapatra, Dilip Ratha, and Zhimei Xu *Migration and Development* Brief 2 Development Prospects Group, Migration and Remittances Team 1, Remittance Trends, Washington, DC: World Bank 2007, p.3.
- 20 William Safran 'The tenuous link between hostlands and homeland: the progressive dezionization of western diasporas' in Lisa Anteby-Yemini, William Berthomière and Gabriel Sheffer (eds) *Les diasporas: 2000 ans d'histoire*, Rennes: Presse Universitaires de Rennes, 2005, pp. 193–208.
- 21 Safran 'The tenuous link between hostlands and homeland', pp. 199–200.
- 22 See Steven J. Gold *The Israeli diaspora*, London: Routledge, 2002.
- 23 Mehtab Ali Shah *The foreign policy of Pakistan: ethnic impacts on diplomacy*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1997, p. 43.
- 25 Mark-Anthony Falzon "'Bombay, our cultural heart": rethinking the relation between homeland and diaspora' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26 (4) 2003, pp. 602–83.
- 26 Falzon "'Bombay, our cultural heart"', pp. 668, 669.
- 27 Quoted in Falzon "'Bombay, our cultural heart"' p. 662.
- 28 Falzon "'Bombay, our cultural heart"', pp. 673.
- 29 Janet J. Ewald 'Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and Other Migrants in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1914' *American Historical Review* 105 (1) 2000 Online version <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.1/ah000069.html>
- 30 John R. Hinnells *The Zoroastrian diaspora: religion and migration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, Chapter 2.
- 31 Zygmunt Bauman *Liquid modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, p. 13.
- 32 Marshall Berman *All that is solid melts into air: the experience of modernity*, New York : Simon and Schuster, 1982, pp. 345–6.
- 33 I have adopted the expression 'deterritorialized diasporas' in the second, revised, edition of *Global diasporas: an introduction* (forthcoming, 2008) to replace 'cultural diasporas' used in the first edition of the book. The latter was insufficiently precise and led to some confusion.
- 34 I'm grateful to my colleague at Warwick, Paola Toninato, who has educated me on the salience of Romani literature in fostering a diasporic consciousness. Her forthcoming article on the theme is very helpful. There is a vast literature on the Roma/Gypsies; one good specialist collection is at the University of Leeds. See <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/spcoll/spprint/26600.htm>
- 35 On a recent visit to the island (2007) I was pleased to learn that some 3,000 people in Dominica claim to be Caribs and have a small degree of territorial autonomy. Many of the claimants are of mixed heritage, but the cultural identification with Carib ways is none the less impressively strong.
- 36 Paul Gilroy *Small acts: thoughts on the politics of black cultures*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1993, p. 103.
- 37 Paul Gilroy *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness*, London: Verso, 1993.
- 38 Aimé Césaire *Return to my native land*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956.
- 39 Martin Baumann 'Diaspora: genealogies of semantics and transcultural comparison', *Numen*, 47 (3), 2000, p. 319. The long quote within the block quote comes from a PhD thesis by Aiyenakun P. J. Arowele fully cited in Baumann's article. I am grateful to Martin Bauman, Steven Vertovec and Stéphane Dufoix who in various ways have 'put me right' on the connections between religious communities and diaspora.
- 40 Alain Epp Weaver (n.d.) *Constantinianism, Zionism, diaspora: toward a political theology of exile and return* Occasional Papers, Number 28, Akron, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Central Committee, <http://mcc.org/respub/occasional/28.html>



- 41 Ninian Smart 'The importance of diasporas' in S. Shaked, D. Shyulman and C. G. Stroumsa (eds) *Gilgut: essays on transformation, revolution and permanence in the history of religions*, Leiden: Brill, 1987, pp. 288–97.
- 42 This section draws on Robin Cohen and Paul Kennedy *Global sociology*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, Chapter 16
- 43 See A. D. Smither 'The business of miracle working' *Independent* (London daily newspaper) 14 August, 2004