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## Theorizing Diasporic Queer Digital Homes: Identity, Home and New Media

Ahmet Atay

*College of Wooster*

Email: [aatay@wooster.edu](mailto:aatay@wooster.edu)

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## Abstract

In this essay, I argue that, for the most part, hybridity is a state of confusion or complication rather than a state of empowerment. Because diasporic individuals experience a constant state of flux, the state of hybridity can be considered a fluid state of being that allows contestation, negotiation, and (re)creation of cultural identities. Consequently, diasporic individuals – particularly queer diasporic people – carve out physical, psychological, or cyber locations (homes) where they exist simultaneously within their host, diasporic, and queer cultures.

## Contributor Note

Ahmet Atay is an associate professor at the College of Wooster. His research revolves around critical intercultural communication, cultural studies, and media studies. In particular, he focuses on diasporic experiences and cultural identity formations of diasporic individuals; political and social complexities of city life, such as immigrant and queer experiences; the usage of new media technologies in different settings; and the notion of home. He is the author of *Globalization's Impact on Identity Formation: Queer Diasporic Males in Cyberspace* (2015) and the co-editor of *The Discourse of Disability in Communication Education: Narrative-Based Research for Social Change*. Atay is currently finishing two edited book projects (one is under contract with Routledge and it is focusing on 'special population' discourse from intercultural communication pedagogy perspective).

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## Research Questions

This cyber ethnographic exploration was built on a research question about the possibility of diasporic queer digital homes. In order to answer the following research questions, I carried out longitudinal cyber-ethnographic field work on three social media platforms, predominantly used by gay men: Global Queer, GaySpace, and Queer House. After the initial data gathering process, I returned to the field as an observer during three consecutive periods. The goal of this research was answering the following question:

*R.Q. Can advanced communication technologies or cyberspace provide new ways to feel and be at home, new ways to construct, create and recreate an identity, and new ways to be to present and represent self, both diasporic and queer selves?*

Notions of home and belonging are heavily theorized and articulated by intercultural communication, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. Some of these studies have interrogated the role of traditions, cultural practices, and even daily and stage performances (Munoz 1999), but not many of them have considered the role of television programming, movies, and more importantly, the Internet and other computer technologies in the formation of 'idealized' or 'dreamed and desired' imaginary homes which can be considered 'homes-away-from-home'. In this research project, I investigated and theorized the role of computer and Internet technologies in the creation of 'homes-away-from-home', and how diasporic queer individuals establish and articulate the notion of belonging through representation and self-

presentation in cyberspace and visual culture.

## The Notion of Home

The notion of home is one of the most crucial aspects of this project. I am particularly interested in how diasporic queer bodies create a sense of home through the Internet and other communication technologies, in an attempt to maintain links to their home cultures. Diasporic communities leave their homeland for various reasons, such as political struggles and social and cultural restlessness in their homeland, lack of economic opportunities, the appeals of Western lifestyles, and the urge to move to a former colonizer's land for a better life. Consequently, these circumstances push ethnic and national groups to move from one locale to another. Although physically they change geographical locations and create new homes in these locales, emotionally, mentally, and culturally they are often rooted in their homeland. Returning to their homeland for some remains one of the most important issues. According to Safran (1991), some members of diasporas continue to believe that members of their diaspora should not want to go back to the homeland because there is no 'home' to which they can return. Although a homeland may exist, he argues that this place might not be welcoming because of social, political, and economic circumstances. The meaning behind the notion of return has changed over the last few decades developments in communication and transportation technology. New media technologies, particularly the Internet and other cyberspace forms and forums, now allow diasporic individuals to 'return'

home to be at home without physically travelling.

James Clifford emphasizes that the transnational connection between diasporas and their 'real or symbolic homeland' (Clifford 1994: 306) should be carefully investigated. Home does not only refer to homeland, a geographical locale, but the term can also mean 'homes away from home' (Clifford 1994: 302) and also the myth or illusion of a homeland. Clifford notes that diasporic individuals experience constant struggle, such as adapting to a new culture, while they try to maintain their communities, their collective homes away from home. Let me use the Turkish diaspora as an example to flesh out this notion. Turkish people moved to Germany mostly during the 1960s and the 1970s as guest workers for rebuilding the new Germany. Turks were looking for economic opportunities. The Turkish diaspora in Germany maintains community features by living in the same neighborhoods. Particularly first generation Turks struggled with adapting to a new culture very different from their own. Therefore, for them, the urge to hold on to the idea of a homeland was stronger than for the subsequent generations. Clifford writes, 'Diaspora discourse articulates, or blends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy describes as an alternative public sphere, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national/space in order to live inside, with a difference' (Clifford 1994: 308). Collectivity and community consciousness, which require maintaining links to the homeland, involve dis-identification with the new culture. Therefore, in their new homes or homes-away-from-home, diasporic individuals create alternative spaces to

exist as 'different' and yet live within the host culture. In this sense, the new definition of home includes difference along with collective consciousness for diasporic individuals.

Stuart Hall's (1995) definition of homeland or the concept of home is particularly important to understand the critical turn in the articulation of this concept. Hall's definition of home is also important to support my arguments on creation of homes-away-from-home through the usage of communication technologies and cultural texts. Hall's definition emphasizes the importance of 'homeland' and 'preserving some kind of connection to a homeland' as much as creating new homes in host cultures. He defines diaspora as a group of people who belong to more than one world, who speak more than one language, inhabit more than one identity, and have more than one home. Like Hall, I also believe that diasporic individuals have more than one home. Geographically they reside in one particular locale, their host culture. On the other hand, they also belong to their homeland because they practice beliefs, traditions, and norms of their home culture. Therefore, they simultaneously occupy two homes; their homes in the host cultures and their imagined, desired, yearned for, or envisioned homeland.

Members of diasporas belong to actual and imagined homes simultaneously because they physically and psychologically occupy more than one cultural place. Hall (1995) states that there are different ways of being at imagined homes. Here, the argument of fluidity of diasporic identities comes into play. As I have noted previously, diasporic individuals create identities based on their negotiations between 'here' and

'there', or the negotiation and translation between their host culture and the culture of their homelands. Because of their ability to manoeuvre among cultures and the resultant fluidity of their identities, diasporic individuals experience not only in-betweenness but also a sense of belonging to multiple places at the same time. Physically, it is impossible for one to belong to multiple locales simultaneously. However, one can belong to a place and desire another one at the same time. Therefore, this experience creates a space for being at different 'places' (imagined and actual) simultaneously.

Since diasporic individuals have the ability to translate between cultures and languages, they experience a multiplicity of beings and becomings. Hall (1995) defines this notion as the 'capability of drawing on different maps of meaning' (207). In actuality, diasporic individuals can also be at one particular geographical location, but linguistically or emotionally or even culturally they can be at another location. For example, my great aunt has lived in London for more than 30 years speaking no more than 10 words of English. In actuality, she was in London, however, linguistically and culturally she was in her hometown in Cyprus. For her, the idea of being at home was more real than claiming an unknown geographical locale and culture as home, even though she lived in the unknown or alien 'new home' for more than 30 years. There are also other ways of being at home without being there physically. Hall (1995) posits that diasporic individuals can be locating themselves in different imaginary geographies at the same time without being tied to a particular place. For example, satellite technologies and the Internet have provided alternative ways

for diasporic individuals to be at home or belong to multiple geographical locations. For example, members of the Turkish diaspora in Belgium can watch television programming from Turkey through satellite dishes. Therefore, they can be at home physically, and they can be at home linguistically and culturally at the same time. Moreover, they are also able to connect and interact with members of other Turkish diasporic communities through the Internet and computer technologies while they can also maintain communication with people from their homeland and also from their host culture. In this way, the notion of home, gains a new meaning and momentum to create alternative ideas about home or being at home. This particular aspect of home will become important for the discussion on diasporic queer bodies.

In addition to Hall, Pico Iyer's (2004) notion of home also provides fresh perspectives on theorizing the meaning of home for diasporic communities, particularly diasporic queer bodies. Iyer argues that because of the globalization processes, a new group of people has emerged, a transcontinental tribe of wanderers that does not particularly belong to one single geographical place or home. Iyer writes, 'nothing is strange to us, and nowhere is foreign. We are visitors even in our own homes' (Iyer 2004: 10). This newly emerged cultural sense of self represents the 'free-floating' nature of identities, which are the direct outcome of globalization processes. As Iyer explains, 'these people are strangers to everywhere including to their homes. Therefore, they are rooted in ideas rather than places' (Iyer 2004: 11). This particular way of seeing home, roots and articulation of belonging, along with Hall's ideas on home, are particularly

crucial to my project since I argue that diasporic queer bodies create home and institute belonging through their usage of media texts and computer technologies. Internet technologies become a haven for diasporic queer bodies to present themselves, to articulate their identity related issues, and create homes-away-from-home by associating with images and sounds, and forming an identity based on their roots in ideas, images, and sounds rather than actual geographical places. Even though the actual places matter, when going to actual places is impossible, visual, textual, and digital representation of home substitute for the actual place.

Although diasporic individuals have moved to different countries because of various reasons, they usually maintain close links with their home nation-states. I believe this process works at two levels. First, these individuals maintain links to their homeland by practicing and believing in their homeland's cultural traditions, beliefs, or religions. Second, they do so by sending money to the homeland government, political parties, or organizations. Based on this discussion and the previous discussion on Hall's notion of home, I posit that diasporas are imagined communities (Anderson 1991) rooted in multiple geographical locations and associated with at least two nation-states. Even though by 'imagined communities' Anderson refers to the notion of the nation-state and the role of print capitalism in making such imagining possible, here I use the concept of imagined community to refer to diasporic communities, particularly diasporic queer communities. According to Anderson, imagined communities, such as nation-states, are relatively recent social and political formations.

Despite the fact that there are cultural and linguistic similarities among their members, imagined communities encompass members who are socio-economically different from each other. Therefore, although members of imagined communities might be dispersed, they coexist as a vital part of these communities. The notion of imagined community can be rearticulated by focusing on diasporic communities, and more importantly, diasporic communities that exist because of the Internet oriented social network sites. In this sense, the notion of imagined community differs from Anderson's idea because it exceeds the border of nation-state and other community formations bounded by time and space. Consequently, I argue that diasporic queer communities as imagined communities can be situated in multiple geographical locations and time zones; therefore, they differ from their more traditional counterparts.

Diasporas as dispersed communities might be located in different nation-states. I argue that this condition troubles the fixity of the notion of nation-state because it allows multiple diasporic communities from a same homeland to co-exist within different countries. For example, the Indian diaspora is located in various cities in the United States, England, and Canada along with other nation-states. Moreover, since diasporas cut across the physical borders and boundaries of nation-states and can exist in multiple locales while maintaining links to home nation-states, they do problematize the notion of the typical nation-state, which is mostly assumed to be a homogenous imagined community. Anthias (1998) argues that this new situation creates new identities

for diasporic individuals, which are constructed on a global scale.

The notion of return is also closely related to the notion of home. Safran notes, 'the "return" of most diasporas can thus be seen as a largely eschatological concept: it is used to make life more tolerable by holding out a utopia – or eutopia – that stands in contrast to the perceived dystopia in which actual life is lived' (Safran 1991: 104). Not many diasporic individuals return to their homeland, and even if they do, they are most likely to go back to their host nation. However, I argue that the idea of returning energizes their existence and functions as a dream that they can hold on to. According to Clifford (1994), a sense of connection to the homeland must be strong enough for diasporic individuals to resist the normalizing process of forgetting or assimilating.

### **Belonging and Hybridity**

Since 'home' is typically considered to be the place where one belongs, I see home and belonging as two interrelated concepts. The above discussion suggests that one can occupy more than one place, both geographically and psychologically; therefore, one can belong to more than one location, geographically and emotionally. Here, I argue that, without any doubt, new media and Internet technologies provide limitless opportunities for people, particularly diasporic queer bodies, to create homes and belong to more than one cultural and geographical locale.

Scholars such as Pico Iyer (2004), Stuart Hall (1995), Madan Sarup (1996), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1994), and Salman Rushdie (1988) have argued that the notions of

home and belonging carry different meaning for diasporic individuals who are dispelled from or leave their home country compared to their non-diasporic counterparts. Diasporic individuals might occupy more than one home and belong to more than one nation-state, and they create different ways of being or feeling at home. For example, Minh-ha writes, 'for a number of writers in exile, the true home is to be found not in houses, but in writing' (Minh-ha 1994: 16). Similarly, Hall, Rushdie, and Iyer argue that diasporic individuals use writing, ideas, and languages to feel at home or find ways of belonging to a culture or a nation. I add that diasporic individuals in general, and diasporic queer bodies in particular, use media and Internet technologies to create 'homes-away-from-home' to generate a sense of belonging.

Diasporic bodies in general, and diasporic queer bodies in particular, experience in-betweenness, and 'here' and 'there' simultaneously. I have already pointed out that although diasporic individuals occupy a particular geographical locale, their ideas, cultural practices, and even hopes can be rooted in different places. Diasporic individuals, because of their multifaceted experiences, enter into in-between spaces, or what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls a 'liminal space' or a 'third space'. This space is where diasporic individuals negotiate where they belong and who they are. Since the shadows of homeland and the past influence their state of being, their experiences in new locales are influenced by their cultural and social histories. This process opens up spaces for multiple belongings.

According to Minh-ha, 'Third is not merely derivative of First and Second. It



is a space of its own. Such a space allows for the new subjectivities that resist letting themselves be settled in the movement across First and Second' (Minh-ha 1994: 18–19). As Minh-ha explains, third space is a space of its own where individuals create, recreate, and negotiate their cultural identities and subject positions. It is not simply adding 'here' to 'there'; it is a hybrid space. As Minh-ha notes, it is 'an elsewhere-within-here/there that appears both too recognizable and impossible to contain' (18–19).

Bhabha (1995) argues that individuals who experience 'here' and 'there' simultaneously are 'caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation' (208). This constant negotiation hybridizes their experiences and cultural identities. Pnina Werbner (1997) sees hybridization of cultures and experiences as a politically correct solution to anti-ethnic or nationalist agenda. Although this state of being weakens the power of the nation-state as a concept, it also troubles the individuals by creating conflicting experiences. On the other hand, Nikos Papastergiadis (1997) recognizes the positive aspects of hybridity. He acknowledges that identity is constructed through negotiation of difference. For him, the presence of fissures and contradictions are not a sign of failure; instead, Papastergiadis sees them as a positive aspect of hybridity. I see the discussion on hybridity to be particularly important for making a case for the hybrid nature of diasporic queer bodies.

Although hybrid positions might provide an opportunity for diasporic individuals to swing between cultures, to reside simultaneously in multiple geographical

and psychological locations, and also to occupy different standpoints, they still remain marginalized within their host cultures. In the case of diasporic queer bodies, this marginalization could extend to marginalization within their own diasporic communities. Because of these reasons, Anthias (2001) does not see hybridity as an empowering state of being. According to Anthias, the concept of hybridity assumes 'a free-floating person' (Anthias 2001: 629). In relation to this argument, one has to ask how much agency a diasporic hybrid individual might have. It is true that hybridity can empower diasporic individuals in an avowed sense, but such an ontological status does not necessarily provide them with tools for interfering and influencing the power dynamics between diaspora and host nation. I have to agree with Anthias that hybridity is not always empowering. In the case of diasporic queer bodies, I argue that, for the most part, hybridity is a state of confusion or complication rather than a state of empowerment. Since diasporic queer bodies experience constant flux, the state of hybridity can be considered a fluctuating state of being that allows contestation, negotiation, and (re)creation of diasporic cultural identities. Consequently, through these liminal spaces and hybrid state of beings, diasporic queer bodies carve out physical and psychological locations to exist within their host and diasporic cultures simultaneously.

When we talk about diasporic queer bodies and their cultural identity formations, we can never disregard the importance of history in this process. Their cultural identities are always molded by the history of their homeland and the history that they are making in the host culture. This position results in a





liminal space within which diasporic queer bodies negotiate belonging. Hall (1990) writes about the dialogical relationship between the two axes of difference and rupture when he discusses cultural identity. This dialogical relationship becomes more complicated for diasporic queer bodies because they experience difference and rupture in two different locales. They have to negotiate between their host culture, diasporic communities, mainstream queer culture within their host culture, diasporic queer communities, and homeland to make sense of their identities. I argue that belonging to in-between spaces and to more than one locale could be a productive way of thinking about belonging. In-between spaces open up new possibilities to exist in multiple locations and cultures without having to choose one over the other.

## Discussion

One of the goals of this project is to explore the articulation of the Internet, cyberspace, and other computer and media technologies as a home place/space. Is creation of home possible through computer and media technologies and visual and cyber cultures? To interrogate this question, first I had to examine the notion of home, geographical location and meaning of this locale for diasporic queer bodies. In order to come up with a working definition of home, I examined more than 50 social network profiles of diasporic queer individuals and held private discussions around the notion of home on Global Queer, GaySpace and Queer House. The notion of home emerged as a complex and multidimensional concept. Some of these definitions directly refer to a

geographical location, some of them articulate a sense of feeling, and some of them describe hybrid realities related to the idea of home, which are outcomes of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization.

For example, for GermanTurk, home is Dusseldorf, a geographical location. He often goes to Turkey to visit his relatives. Therefore, Turkey is a holiday destination. FilipinoQueerGuy, a regular member of Global Queer and My Queer House room, moved to Canada five years ago when his mother married a Canadian man. The Philippines represents his past and his old home. Since his immediate family is in Canada, he considers Canada his second home. For LosAngeles000, home is not an easy concept to define. He was born in Tel Aviv, Israel, but when he was a child, his family moved to Los Angeles to explore the economic opportunities in the area. Even though he goes back to visit his relatives in Tel Aviv, his old home now only represents a holiday destination. The definition of home becomes even more complicated because currently he lives in London due to his job situation, but he does not consider London as his home. For him, London is a place where he is currently residing. For BosnianMan/09, home is in St Louis. Since his childhood was impacted by the war in the former Yugoslavian states, home carries different meanings for him. His birthplace and his old home mostly represent unpleasant memories and scars of war. He says, 'I don't miss Bosnia because I didn't live there long enough to miss it'.

Defining the notion of home was rather difficult for Asiatico500. Since he has lived in several different places, his definition of home is a blurry one. He

describes himself as an Asian/Pacific Islander. He was born in Thailand, but when he was two-years-old, his family moved to California. When he started to work at an international corporation, he became a global queer nomad. He lived in Spain for two years. Now he lives in London. Even though he considers London his home at the moment, he knows that it is a temporary one. Since home becomes a fuzzy notion to fully express, articulation of his experiences about his cultural identity is also a rather complex one. His idea of who he is changes with changes in geographical locations. The Thai diaspora or Asian diaspora in California is not the only diaspora that he is connected to. Since he resides in London, his definition of home place and his articulation of diasporic community start to shift. His appearance marks him as other. This otherization process is a unique one because his body is marked differently. Therefore, he occupies unique cultural spaces. For example, Asiatico500 is an American citizen who is diasporic because of his cultural roots. At the same time, his is a diasporic body that has acculturated to the Thai diaspora in London. On the other hand, since diasporic experiences in different locations are different (i.e., Thai diasporic experiences in London are not similar to the Thai diasporic experiences in California), he can be easily labelled as an American by the Thai diaspora in London to mark his difference. The important question that one has to ask is: can diasporic bodies, when they move from one nation-state to another, still be defined as diasporic, particularly when they start to enjoy the benefits that are provided by their new homeland? In this case, can Asiatico500 remain diasporic and at the same time can he enjoy the benefits of being an American citizen in

a rapidly globalizing world? I argue that when one starts associating with different homes and starts belonging to more than one diasporic community, not only one's articulation of home but also one's association with a diasporic community shifts, changes and becomes less bounded.

Similar issues and dilemmas can also be observed in the experiences of AwesomeGuy, a GaySpace user. Like Asiatico500, I met AwesomeGuy in the London room of GaySpace. When I asked him 'Where are you from?', he gave an interesting answer. He said 'I am Latin German'. Instead of claiming a geographical location as a home, he chose to foreground his ethnic origins to answer my loaded question. Our conversation revealed that the notion of home for him is a complex one as well. He writes, 'I was born in Chile but raised in Germany'. When he was a child, his parents moved from Chile and settled in Stuttgart. However, later on, they were dislocated once again and moved to Munich. Two years ago, AwesomeGuy decided to move to London, and since then London has been his home. Without a doubt, he is a diasporic person, a globalized one too. When he was living in Stuttgart, his family did not maintain any connections with Latin American diasporic communities; however, when they moved to Munich, they chose to become members of a diasporic community. Even though AwesomeGuy moved to a different geographical location, he still maintains strong relationships with his diasporic community in Germany. At the same time, he is carving out a space for himself in Latin American diasporas in London. Therefore, he simultaneously belongs to two different diasporic communities.

Adding language as a component into the equation further problematizes the notions of home and diaspora. For example, AwsomeGuy uses German and Spanish to communicate with his parents and members of his diasporic community in Germany. On the other hand, in London he uses English and Spanish as his primary languages of communication. If I add the sexuality component to this situation, AwsomeGuys's lived experiences starts to appear even more complex. For example, considering that the diasporic communities in Germany might react to queer bodies differently compared to the diasporic communities in England, it is inevitable that dissimilar cultural forces would affect AwsomeGuys's experiences. In this sense, his cultural identity segments might be articulated differently when he maneuvers between geographical and linguistic locations.

The following two cases also present different sets of problems for traditional articulations of the notion of home. In order to understand the role of computer and media technologies in theorizing home, I problematize the notion of home by looking at these next two examples. Both of these examples help to deconstruct the traditional ways of looking at and theorizing the notion of home.

RealOrientalGuy was very self-conscious about what home means for him. It appears that he was already contemplating the meaning of home because when we started our conversation, he presented well thought-out arguments. I met RealOrientalGuy in one of the Asian Canada rooms in GaySpace. Although he was born in the Philippines, he has been living in Canada

for the last eight years. When I asked him if he likes Toronto, he said 'I call Toronto home. I am a proud Canadian and Torontonian'. While he identifies with Canadian nationality and considers Toronto as home, he also distances himself from his ethnic roots and diasporic experiences. For example, he wrote 'Toronto is where my soul is. My heart is here. Home is where you blossom'. This response provided another way of articulating home. Rather than a birthplace, ethnic roots, or one's current geographical locale, home was defined as a place where one blossoms.

RealOrientalGuy offered new insights about his life and his articulation of home. When I asked him what the Philippines means to him, he said 'My history, my background. I am not denying I am Filipino but if I was to ask if I am more Filipino or more Canadian, I am more Canadian'. The Philippines represents his birthplace and his history. On the other hand, Canada represents his current life. Furthermore, Canada also represents his growing up process as a queer diasporic Canadian man. Canada, the new home, provided him with new experiences and opportunities to understand his sexuality. Therefore, Canada is where his sexuality blossomed.

Eros1938's case also illustrates how difficult defining the notion of home has become in the context of globalization. Eros1938's life has been shaped and reshaped by multiple immigration processes and international movements. I met him in the Montreal room in GaySpace. He was born in Venezuela. Because of his screen name (part of his original screen name also had Eros in it), I first thought he might be from Greece. (Since Eros was the god of love in

ancient Greece, this was a legitimate mistake!). He explained that his father is from Italy and that his mother is an 'Amazon Indian'. Because of his father's cultural roots, Eros1938 was born into the Italian diaspora in Venezuela (while simultaneously belonging to Amazon Indian culture). Moreover, he is a Venezuelan citizen. At the same time, he is an Italian citizen. Twenty years ago, he moved to Canada for higher education, and decided to settle down in Montreal. Now, he simultaneously belongs to Italian and Venezuelan diasporas in Montreal while holding Canadian citizenship. Placing him into a rigid category becomes rather impossible. In order to define him, one has to consider his diasporic roots as well as foreground his Canadian citizenship. Therefore, he is a diasporic queer Italian-Amazon Indian-Venezuelan-Canadian. To put it simply, he is in Canada; therefore, Canada is home. However, home is also all those places where his roots lie. When I asked him if he goes home to Venezuela to visit, he simply said 'no'. He wrote 'Never. My family lives all over the world'. In this case, there is no particular home to 'return to' or no home to visit. Since his family is all over the world, home almost equates to all of the places his parents have been and where they are currently living.

One has to keep in mind that all these transnational movements, translations, dislocations, and relocations shape and reshape the queer aspects of the cultural identities of diasporic bodies. For example, the potential meanings that their sexuality carries in a particular culture change when they move from one location to another. Hence, every home place redefines their sexuality while presenting new challenges, understandings, and complex

experiences. Moreover, each place marks diasporic queer bodies differently because of legal and cultural forces. Furthermore, each citizenship and political, cultural, and economic identification creates new experiences and realities. Therefore, defining home turns out to be one of the most difficult issues for diasporic queer bodies.

The notion of home carries a unique and also rather multilayered meaning for diasporic communities. Since diasporic individuals often experience constant in-betweenness and continuously translate from one culture or linguistic system to another, they occupy complex cultural subject positions (Anthias 1998 & 2001; Anzaldúa 1991; Cruz-Maleve & Manalansan 2002; Gopinath 2002). In addition to their in-between experiences and constant translations, they also negotiate between 'here' and 'there' and maneuver among geographical, cultural, and ideological locations to capture the potential meanings of 'home'. Traditionally, the notion of home refers to one's geographical locale. Often it is associated with a piece of land or even a building. However, in the diasporic experience, the notion of home often refers to more than one geographical location, such as new homes in host-nations and homes that are left behind in motherlands. Before the rapid advancement in communication and transportation technologies, visiting homelands or communicating with others who were left behind was rather difficult. Hence, in those times the notion of home often referred to lost places that could have only been captured in the memories and imaginations of diasporic individuals. However, advancement in communication and transportation technologies drastically changed the notion of home by making 'returning'

easier or possible. Even though, in most diasporic experiences, 'returning' takes the form of a 'visit' or a 'holiday', the idea of returning home is now more than a utopia or a piece of memory of long lost home. On the other hand, as Safran (1991) argues, for some, 'returning' never appears as an option due to the fact that there might be no home which one might return to due to political or economic situations (e.g., Palestine).

In his discussion, James Clifford suggests that for diasporic individuals, the notion of home often refers to 'homes away from homes' (Clifford 1994: 302). This particular way of seeing the notion of home enables diasporic individuals to create more than one home, homes at homeland and homes at host-cultures. Since new homes at new geographical locations can be oppressive and even become life-threatening, diasporic individuals typically create alternative spaces (or spaces within spaces) within mainstream host-cultures to keep their cultural practices and traditions alive, and exist as 'different' and yet live within the host-culture. While they create these alternative spaces, diasporic communities often blend cultural practices from their homelands with values and cultural performances from their new host-cultures.

Stuart Hall's (1995) definition of home offers different ways of seeing and imagining homelands and being and feeling at home. Hall states that there are different ways of being at imagined homes. I argue that advanced media and communication technologies play a crucial role in terms of creating new meanings and envisioning new ways of being at home. Based on my findings, I posit that diasporic bodies in general, and diasporic queer bodies in particular,

use new media and cyberspace forms to carve out cultural spaces to exist, express aspects of their cultural identities, and create, recreate, and perform new identities. Hence, I argue that computer and new media technologies in general, and social network sites in particular, enable new articulations of home and belonging for diasporic queer bodies. These can be summarized as (1) a form of connection to homeland, (2) alternatives homes, and finally (3) as spaces for articulation of new definitions of home, which are an amalgamation of online and off-line realities and experiences.

For diasporic queer bodies, exchanging information among different parties can happen easily and more efficiently than ever before. Interactions among the members of home-nations and home-nations' dispersed diasporic communities often occur; therefore, these interactions often influence the nature of these communities. For example, while diasporic queer bodies influence the queer culture in their home-nations, in turn they are also influenced by queer cultures at these locations. Therefore, cyberspace and Internet technologies equally affect members of home-nations and diasporic communities and create a continuous reciprocal relationship.

Since these channels create more venues for communication between diasporic bodies and their motherlands, they create more opportunities for diasporic queer identities to change and transform. I have to acknowledge that these channels might also challenge some of the traditional cultural practices and core-values of diasporic individuals because they often interject new ideas and practices that can lead to cultural

changes and transformation of people in homelands. As I discussed earlier, several diasporic queer members of Queer House, GaySpace, and Global Queer (such as RealOrientalGuy) often use these social network sites to communicate with gay men from their homelands. Therefore, these channels often remain their only exposure to the queer cultures in their homelands. Unless they have other experiences with members of queer communities in their home-nations, their exposure to queer cultures, other than the ones in their host-nations, remains limited to their online experiences.

New technologies also provide 'escape' from everyday off-line realities, sometimes the harsh realities of mainstream host-nations and mainstream queer cultures. While they provide outlets for escape, at the same time they offer tools to construct new, cyberspace-based, realities. Through these outlets, these sites present different cultural spaces where diasporic individuals in general, and diasporic queer bodies in particular, can create and experience possible connections to their homelands. In addition, these technologies also create a sense of belonging and ways of 'feeling at home'. Therefore, I argue that while promising escapism from everyday realities, rapidly developing computer technologies and new media forms also provide new understandings of 'feeling at home' or 'being at home'.

I have to acknowledge that these new ways of imagining home are relatively different than the traditional definitions. However, by offering alternative and new ways of 'feeling at home', communicating with others who possibly share similar experiences, and also experiencing and

creating new realities which are often silenced or suppressed by host-nations, diasporic communities, and mainstream queer cultures, these new communication forms and technologies provide cultural spaces where diasporic queer bodies can reveal or perform hidden aspects of their identities. In addition, social network sites, such as GaySpace and Global Queer, enable the construction of online communities (often they are extended to offline interactions), which create feelings of togetherness and belonging. During my stay in Global Queer's My Queer House room, I lived in a virtual environment for more than four months, where the regular members of the room functioned as family members. I shared my everyday realities with others who occupied this cultural space. Due to webcam technologies, the members of this room are able to visually and aurally communicate with other members of the site and at the same time observe their whereabouts.

Clearly, these technologies enabled members of the site, including myself, to create a home within a home. I believe this new way of seeing 'home' can be valuable for diasporic individuals, including diasporic queer bodies. Even though these online homes can possibly function as 'home-away-from-home', they often exist within homes. Therefore, realities in one home often intersect with experiences in other homes (online ones). For example, although diasporic queer bodies might change their geographical location (such as in the case of Asiatico500, RealOrientalGuy, and several other participants of this study) and move from one geographical locale to another, they are still able to feel at home because of the presence of their more constant online homes, such as My

Queer House. Hence, I argue that social network sites, such as Global Queer, manage to arouse the feeling of stability and being at home by offering familiar cyber environments and continuous connection among diasporic queer bodies by enabling them to communicate despite geographical disparities. In addition, new media forms, such as online gaming, visual texts, and moving image-based networks, such as Youtube, also offer outlets to communicate with images, sounds, and movements that are familiar. These cyber visual homes are accessible from anywhere. This way of seeing the notion of home pushes the theories on the notion of 'home' one step further to include cyberspace.

The third way of envisioning the notion of 'home' is to consider new media and cyberspace forms as cultural spaces for articulation of new definitions of home, which are an amalgam of online and off-line realities. As I have already discussed above, seeing computer technologies and new media forms as different ways of envisioning home appear to be one of the most productive ways of defining the notion of home in the context of globalization wherein not only cultural practices but also identities and our everyday realities are sliding, reforming, and transforming. Due to the fact that social network sites, particularly webcam-based ones, connect both these realities and create experiences which are an amalgam of online and off-line realities, these sites function as hybrid cultural spaces that connect different realities. For example, when diasporic queer bodies submit themselves to Global Queer rooms, they willingly put their bodies and lives on display. Since these rooms require the presence of webcams, users of these sites can easily

observe other members while they are being observed. For instance, during my stay in My Queer House, I was in front of a webcam more than seven hours a day. During this time, my actual home environment (physical) was immersed in the home environment that was created by My Queer House. As I started earlier, My Queer House functions as a big virtual home place for queer individuals. So when members of this room turn their webcams on, they merge online and off-line environments and realities. This new phenomenon of seeing homes within a visual or digital home and communicating with others from a more traditional home space stretches the boundaries of the traditional notion of home. For example, while diasporic queer members of these social network sites, such as Global Queer, might be situated in a geographical location (home), at the same time they might be communicating with others from their homelands through cyber or digital homes. In this sense, these combinations of mediated realities and off-line experiences lead into new, hybrid experiences, and new ways of thinking the notion of home, and 'feeling and being at home'.

## Conclusion

As I suggested earlier, some diasporic queer bodies belong to more than one diasporic community, and some of them move around between and among various diasporic communities. At the same time, they widely use computer and media technologies to create homes-away-from-home, express aspects of their identities, and create new cultural spaces to communicate and also express aspects of their multidimensional selves. Thus, because

of media and computer technologies, global queer cyborgs can easily communicate with other queers around the world, follow the recent happenings in queer politics in different geographical locations, and also borrow from multiple

queer cultures to create constantly changing patched-together cultural identities.

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