

Afsana Afrin Esha
Durham University

Out of Home: Everything Opposite to Comfort and Peace

Abstract

The concept of “home” is important to so many of us. But what happens when you leave home to study abroad as a first-generation scholar? In this piece, Esha shares a dialogue with other first-gen scholars who are in the same boat, but maybe not in the same waters. By examining each scholars’ attachment and unique connections to home, Esha hopes to provide support to fellow first-gen scholars who have left home to pursue their higher education goals.

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Out of Home: Everything Opposite to Comfort and Peace

“Home.” The word can mean so much to us humans, as it did for me once. I am sure we have all heard sayings such as “home is where the heart is,” “home is where we feel safe,” or “home is where I can be myself.” Authors worldwide have written extensively on this subject, or is it better described as a feeling? A place? I don’t really know, and I am still figuring it out myself. For this piece, I am going to reflect on the idea of home with a group of first-generation scholars in the hopes to better understand it myself and maybe, to help others understand it as well.

Over the past two years, I have met many wonderful Chinese students studying in the UK. Like me, they shifted homes and speak a completely different language. Talking to a friend about the concept of home made her emotional about who she used to be, or *how* she used to be: “In China, I was extrovert, I am not anymore.” It seemed almost as if being able to speak her **language** was her home.

It is common to associate language, food, and places with home. Weather, familiarity, and comfort are also parts of it. One thing that enriches all these aspects of home are **friends**. The presence of friends provides a sense of comfort that can be felt in the language we speak, the food we eat, and the places that we share together. Friends are wonderful to have, and, when you think about it, they are all you really have when you leave home, aren’t they? But for another first-gen student, Evan, “making friends” was a concept that was non-existent at home; friends just used to be there. Putting new energy into these innate bonds is something many of us had to learn when we moved away from home.

Speaking of **energy** reminded me of how Sami describes home. Home is where one does not need to think, one can be at peace, where one is supported by family. This also speaks to Kevin’s take on home: “Being takes energy, the people are not familiar, even the room is not familiar. Who I am is the memories, now I have to spend energy to make memories.” Of course there is still work and things to take care of at home, but they don’t seem to take as much energy as they do here.

“**Here**” and “**there**.” For me, I spend most of my time transmuting between these two places, navigating different time zones, weather, air, food, people, rules, and ideas. I imagine sharing things between here and there, bypassing the laws of physics, human biology, and mostly immigration. The feeling of guilt for enjoying finer things without the people in your home can take a lot away from the present.

But we must fight to be here, in the present. Francis finds comfort in the staff who work in her university, especially the people that serve food, who remind her of her father. Lin shares how conversations with her own mother have now become incomplete. “How are you? What have you eaten? It’s as if I can’t make out words from our never-ending chats back at home.” For me, my **mother** is a constant spirit of the two borders. I want to tell her about my work, how I know big words but that wouldn’t be fair since she stopped being able to help

me in 3rd grade at school. But it's not her fault. I am trying to change that. That's why I am here, remember?

I still am home.

When I hear mum's decade old ring tone out on a walk.

When the movie screen shuts, and the exit door opens.

When I wake up in the middle of the night.

I have been uprooted to let my roots expand, to accomplish more. It is wonderful to see the vastness of the world, which in many ways helps me appreciate everything back home. "The world is that big," said Viviana when we spoke. The same feeling of missing home becomes the drive to go further, to build a home anew with bits and pieces from the past.