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Home as Envisioned by Migrants in Diasporic Imagination with Special Reference to Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*

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Abstract

Diaspora is a term which has a very wide ranging significance and the concept of home and homeland becomes very significant in diasporic situations. Diaspora is used across a variety of academic disciplines because of its capacity to look holistically at a movement, tying together both quantitative and qualitative understandings of the movement. As a term related specifically to the movement of people, diaspora accounts for the motivation of human movement in a manner that terms such as 'immigration' or 'refugee' cannot. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie focuses much on the concept of home and says that it is based around an organizing principle of inclusions and exclusions for populations that have not been entirely settled in one place.

Keywords

Diaspora; Home; Homeland; Exile; Migrants; Dispersion.

Diaspora is a wide reaching term, and as it constitutes to be used in critical scholarship to address the phenomena of movement, the concept of homeland becomes increasingly prevalent to our understanding of it. Originating from the idea of displacement from homeland, the definition of diaspora at its most basic can be said to be "communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile" (Braziel and Mannur 1). Inherent within defining diaspora then, is also the need to define 'home', as the foundation from which diaspora builds finds its cornerstone in the notion of home. The aim of this paper is an attempt to understand the notion of home as envisioned by migrants in diasporic imagination with special reference to Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*.

It is worthwhile to mention here Diaspora, as a term, stems from a specific movement of people-that of the Jewish people from their identified homeland of Palestine. It has since grown to encompass movements beyond this historical exodus, to those of the other peoples, namely the Black African diaspora that continued throughout the sixteenth century and into the early nineteenth, propagated by the legalized slave trade of the time. Diaspora has also been a label applied to "the historical Greek and Armenian dispersions, among others" (Clifford 303). It is now a term commonly applied to contemporary movements of people, as well as an analytical framework used to understand movement in other fields of study such as queer theory, film and literature. Therefore, even within its initial usage, the concept of home is integral to understanding of diaspora. If taken at face value diaspora exists only as an extension from a distinct geographical locale - a nation or a state geopolitically bounded area - which is the original home, or homeland of the dispersed people. James Clifford argues that the idea of a bounded territory being necessary to the diasporic experience is not always true, arguing that "borderlands...presuppose a territory defined by a geopolitical line...Diasporas

connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-locale diaspora cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary" (Clifford 304). He supports this statement by citing the ability of modern technology to create connection with the lost homeland that transcends traditional boundaries and methods of interaction.

Clifford then takes particular issue with William Safran's assertion that a key feature of diaspora is "a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland" (Clifford 305). He argues that an actual return to a homeland is not always a deciding indicator of the diasporic experience and examines the Jewish diasporic experience that has not historically been motivated by a return to a homeland. The Jewish diaspora is not rooted in an actual homeland but instead founded in an understanding of home cultivated through cultural forms, kinship relations, business circuits, and travel trajectories as well as through loyalty to the religious centres of the diaspora. This multi-centered diasporic network widens the understanding of diaspora, opening the discourse of its application beyond imagined borderlines to the imagined worlds. "The diasporic experience is a continuous flow between ethnicity, ideology, economics and politics and it is no longer even a multiple centre-periphery model, it is a complex disjunctive order" (Appadurai 31). Appadurai argues this is the best analytical framework we can use to understand how communities of people continue to effect and be affected by diaspora. Therefore, where Clifford is concerned with defining diaspora, Appadurai is interested in examining its effects.

Appadurai lifts diaspora out of a discourse that seeks to define it, or use it "to define a specific movement of people or ideas, to instead examine the concept of diaspora generally looking at it through five specific dimensions: (i) ethnoscapes; (ii) technoscapes; (iii) financescapes; (iv) mediascapes; and (v) ideoscapes." (Appadurai 31). What is fascinating about these dimensions

Appadurai puts forward how they ultimately tie back to the notion of home. Even when the concept of diaspora is examined generally, the notion of home and homeland is impacted by ethnic, technological, economic, media and ideological dispersion. The relation of these five dimensions to the notion of home is simple, as all dimensions contain a home element, and it is this human element in which the notion of home is centred. The held notion of home becomes further shaped through interaction with other ideologies people come into contact via dispersion, The notion of home becomes both a concept that shapes and is shaped by the diasporic experience. The homeland and the notion of home are integral to the discussion of diaspora. The question now arises is: What is home, and why is it so fundamental to both a focused and generalized understanding of diaspora.

Home is not so easy to define as it is rooted in physicality - the homeland. The homeland is subject to the imaginary boundaries of nation states. Imagined boundaries, however that encase very real ideas of nation, state, country and identity. The homeland, therefore, becomes imagined beyond its material parts. What it becomes is the notion of home - which is the essence of homeland encapsulated outside the limitations of an imagined border. As noted above, both in reference to specific movement or wider movement, the notion of home underpins the general understanding of diaspora. The notion of home is predominant in our understanding of diaspora because it is from the notion of home that we draw our identity. If "diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself - religious, ethnic, gendered and national" (Braziel and Mannur 3) then the notion of home must be defined.

Often, however, the singular notion of home stems from an understanding of homeland that is multifarious. As Stuart Hall contends, "The specific examination of the Caribbean diasporic experience, the cultural identity of the diasporic peoples does not necessarily relate back to one homeland, but a variety of homelands. Each homeland exacting an influence

over the notion of home that arises from the interplay between the homelands that constitute it" (Hall 233). Halls calls these influences 'presences' which are inspired by Derrida's concept of *differance*, which holds that meaning is never fully pictured but instead inn a constant state of interpretation. Hall notes that in the specific example of the Caribbean diasporic experience, there are three presences: (a) Presence African (b) Presence European and (c) Presence American. Each of these presences are rooted in a specific homeland and all of them affect how modern Caribbean identity is shaped and constitutes to be shaped. Hall argues that there is no one dominant identity - either historic or present - instead only constant fluctuation between multiple identities. Arising out of this continual state of flux is a notion of home that is rooted in all three presences, but applied to the 'current' present.

The idea that identity is formed through the interplay of many homelands is also supported by R. Radhakrishnan, who argued that "ethnicity is always in a state of flux, far from being static, unchanging, and immutable...understandings of ethnicity are always context-specific" (Radhakrishnan 119). Radhakrishnan also offers a specific example of identity creation in a diasporic context by examining his own history as both Indian and American. In the process of doing this, he grapples with the 'authenticity' of either identity as both are subject to incomplete or selective understandings of their respective homelands. An imperfect perception of identity, however, is not to be lamented; it is the ground from which departs a rich and complex negotiation of identity.

Both Hall and Radhakrishnan argue that identity creation happens within a focused and broad understanding of diaspora. They show how lost homelands mingle with new homelands, and how a sense of identity and the notion of home arises from the interaction between the lost and found homeland. Identity, and how it is created in a diasporic context is integral to the discussion of diaspora because it is both affected by the diasporic

experiences and effects it. Where Clifford looks at identity as stemming from a specific diasporic experience, Appadurai looks at identity as molded by, and a molder of a global diasporic experience. Both analytical frameworks help deepen the understanding of diaspora. Both frameworks rely on identity and the notion of home that arises from it as a key tool in assessing diaspora, both frameworks offer a method of analysis that account for the deeper motivations and resultants of movement, and both frameworks forces us "to rethink the rubrics of nation and nationalism, while refiguring the relations of citizens and nation-states" (Braziel and Mannur 3). To this end, diaspora studies have become ubiquitous, as diaspora is ultimately concerned with a changing global order - one in which imaginary borders become increasingly broken down, while the worlds arising from these fading borders still hold sway.

Diaspora has become a popular method of analysis in academic study because it shows the greater complexity of movement - it studies the effect of movement, but also validates and examines the emotional subtext of the movement. Diaspora is used across a variety of academic disciplines because of its capacity to look holistically at movement, tying together both quantitative and qualitative understandings of the movement. As a term related specifically to the movement of people, diaspora accounts for the motivation of human movement in a manner that terms such as 'immigration' or 'refugee' cannot. Such terminology concerns itself with counting immigrants or mapping refugee camps. Although reasons motivating such movement are offered, they do not look at the deeper issues associated with dispersion; namely the impact of a lost homeland on the notion of home and how that interacts with and shapes new notions of home. Without this deeper analysis we cannot fully understand how traditional boundaries through which the world is divided continue to fracture, how imagined borderlines begin to give way to imagine worlds. These imagine worlds exert great influence over our global community, which exists within the overlapping and disjunctive dimensions outlined by Appadurai.

Therefore, it shows us to know how those imagined worlds are subject to and created by notions of home.

Moreover, these imagined worlds relate back to studies that extend beyond simple human movement, they connect to any object of study that is centred around a notion of home. It is this notion of home that expresses the essence of a subject because it defines the ideal that arises from, which is the reality of the homeland. Being able to draw academic analysis back to the essence of what is being studied achieves a deeper understanding of the reality in which the subject exists. For this reason diaspora has become ubiquitous. It not only offers a focused analytical framework for the examination of specific movement - whether it be people, economy, media, technology, or ideology - but also a broad framework through which we can examine the essence of a movement and not just its effects.

Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* is a book which shows Rushdie's deepest thoughts on world happenings of the 80s. From politics to literature, governance to Stephen Hawking, religion to radical extremism, Rushdie's hawk eye observation and exemplary analysis is eye-catching. Of course, not all the essays may interest readers, as with any collection of essays. But for the neural keen to read a different opinion, this book is a wonderful account of home and homeland. Rushdie argues how home is so much important in the life of persons who are alienated from their homeland. Rushdie remembers how once he visited Bombay which is his lost city and he opened the telephone directory and looked for his father's name and he was overjoyed to see the name, address and telephone number of his father. He thinks that they had never gone away to the unmentionable country across the border. He was overwhelmed to see his ancestral home and thinks that those writers who are exiled or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. So Rushdie suggests that the exiled writers should create

fiction not about actual villages or cities, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, thus the sense of displacement always remains. Hanif Kuraishi, born in Britain with a Pakistani father and British mother records his experiences as a boy growing up in London, a visit to Pakistan as young man and some comparisons between life in both locations. His relationship with Pakistan is different to his father as he was born in England like his mother but he was not permitted to belong to Britain like his classmates. When he visits Karachi as an adult, his uncle's anti British remarks make him feel uncomfortable even in his homeland.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie argues that the past is a country from which they have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity which seems to be evidently true. He further says that the writer who is out of country and even out of language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being elsewhere. This my enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie further elaborates that once he took part in a conference on modern writing at New College, Oxford where various novelists including Rushdie himself were talking earnestly of such matters as the need for new ways of describing the world. Then the playwright Howard Brenton suggested that this might be a somewhat limited aim and asks: does literature seek to do no more than to describe? Then all the novelists at once began talking about politics and Rushdie applies Brenton's question to the specific case of Indian writers, in England, writing about India. Indian writers in England include political exiles, first generation migrants, affluent expatriates whose home here is temporary, and people born here who may never have laid eyes on the subcontinent. But one of the interesting things about this diverse community is that, as far as Indo-British fiction is concerned, its existence changes the ball game, because this fiction is

in future going to come as much from addresses in London, Birmingham and Yorkshire as from Delhi or Bombay.

After the last sky, there is no sky and after the last border, there is no land - Rushdie converses with Edward Said, a critical voice for Palestinian hope, in an essay titled 'On Palestinian Identity'. This book is what Rushdie defines a passionate and moving meditation on displacement, landlessness, home, exile and identity. He speaks of the crucial phase of post-imperial Britain. A crisis of culture that has racism written all over. The British fear of being swamped by immigrants and their attempt to regain the long lost imperial pride resulting into racism. The effects of the displacement of peoples - their forced migration, their deportation, their voluntary emigration, their movements to new lands where they made themselves masters over others or become subjects of the masters of their new homes-reverberate down the years and are still felt today. The historical violence of the era of empire and colonies echoes in the literature of the descendents of those forcibly moved and the exiles that those processes have made. Although the term 'post-colonial' is insufficient to capture fully the depth and breadth of those writers that have been labeled by it. There is a common bond among the works of those novelists who understand the process of exile and see themselves as exiles- both from their homes and from themselves.

Conclusively, one of the central aspects of diaspora is a culture of longing for homeland, while a more specific site for place making is the actual home, dwelling or geographical community. Avtar Brah remarks, "The concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' an 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins" (Brah 192). Blunt and Dowling offer a critical geography of home and suggest "three areas of investigation: (a) home as simultaneously material and imagined, (b) how home is politicized power and identity, and (c) an appreciation of the multi-scalar nature of home, that is from actual space of

dwelling and nationhood to homelands that are produced by Empire" (Blunt and Dowling 22). V.S Naipaul in 'Prologue to an Autobiography' mentions an incident when a ship Ganges collected immigrant Indians reached Calcutta because for them India had been a dream of home, but the ship was stormed by hundreds of people, who now wanted to be taken back to some other place. They were facing poverty in Trinidad and India seemed to be a refuge from their miserable conditions as they had constructed a India but their return journey proved that it was an illusion. Avtar Brah also says, "Home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 26).

Home is not a place on the map rather it is a mark on one's heart and it is a reference point in one's life. Home is also not a city or a town, it is regarded as the central point of one's life from where one starts and where one ends the life journey. Home is thus the point of departure as well as the arrival and arrival is always a kind of final arrival i.e. the final destination of one's life. Therefore Home makes adventures, struggles and new experiences happen, so start is very important and that starting point is home. From geography and sociology, Home is the centre of one's consciousness and psyche. So one really carries one's home in one's mind and heart. So wherever one goes, one carries one's home within oneself. The concept of Home stands for stability, security and shelter, where we are always welcome but what the migrants face when they return after many years is only an illusion. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie focuses much on the concept of home and says that it is based around an organizing principle of inclusions and exclusions for populations that have not been entirely settled in one place. Related, another aspect is the transnational entanglements of home which examines the species of people's relationships with kin in their countries of origin. This notion of home is also tied to the intimate scale of belonging. Related to the homeland, there has been an emphasis on place and place making in Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*. Creating place is integral to understanding populations who long, as a group,

for a distant homeland and projecting that longing onto a physical site where diaspora groups inhabit. For a migrant, diasporic and expatriate or even an exile, home lives in and permeates one's being. This unfixed but unchanging conception of Home is especially true for migrants and diasporic. In fact, it is only through this unfixity that home is kept alive in the hearts of exiles and migrants.

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