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A Postcolonial Explication of Homelessness in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract

*This paper examines Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* using dislocation in postcolonial theory. Postcolonial dislocation creates an opportunity to explore the rootlessness and the crises of identity that occurs when colonialism affects the culture of both the colonizer and the colonized in the two novels. In *A Passage to India* the paper examines the homelessness of the British colonialist as occasioned by them leaving their country and home and travelling to India: of the Indians as the colonial masters make India not to be a home, not even for Indians. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* the paper looks at how the author shows the homelessness of Indians and their attempt at finding a home and the attendant homelessness that occurs to the individual and the nation through contact with colonialism and independence. The different ways that the two authors bring out the issue of postcolonial homelessness is highlighted with colonialism, post colonialism and migration being the chief cause of homelessness in the novels.*

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Dislocation, Identity, Home, Homelessness

Introduction

A Passage to India by E. M. Forster and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie are both set in India with both authors concerned about home and diaspora. While *A Passage to India* is a story of India written by a Briton whose focus is more on the British citizens, *Midnight's Children* is the story of India written by an Indian. Both novels are concerned with the cultural displacement that happens when the culture of the colonial powers clash with the culture of Indians through the instrument of colonialism.

Homelessness in postcolonial studies refers to the effect of colonialism on the nation or an individual who has encountered a new culture and is not comfortable with their native culture and is also not comfortable with the new culture. Colonialism brought about dual displacement; the movement of those from the center and homeland to periphery and those from the colonial lands to the center and western world. All these movements brought about dislocation in land and culture and identity. The movement of people affects the culture and therefore the identity of the people Ashcroft et al. (2002) state that "A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (8). Postcolonial theorists are concerned about the dislocation and homelessness that the disruption of people and of culture that happens as a result of colonial movements.

Ashcroft et al. (2007) say dislocation in postcolonial theory is:

A term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. The phenomenon may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location. The term is used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth (65).

Dislocation is also called homelessness as Ashcroft et al. (2007) notes “A term often used to describe the experience of dislocation is Heidegger's term *unheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit* – literally 'unhousedness' or 'not-at-home-ness' – which is also sometimes translated as 'uncanny' or 'uncanniness’” (65). From unhousedness comes homelessness to refer to the dislocation of the postcolonial subject.

Mehmet Recep Tas attempts to explain the concept of homelessness, he says:

An unhomed person does not have the feeling of belonging since s/he is in a psychological limbo which generally ends in some psychological disorders and cultural displacement. Here, being “unhomed” does not mean being homeless. To be unhomed, as Lois Tyson states in *Critical Theory Today*, “is to feel not at home even in one's own home because you are not at home in yourself; that is, your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee” (116).

Homelessness in postcolonial studies does not necessary refer to the lack of a home but the feeling of not being at home even if you are at home and in your country as a result of the clash of cultures. Creative writers have different ways of portraying this in their works. In the two novels under study, the authors show the characters as unsettled and constantly seek to create an identity after the ravages of colonialism. The sense of home, the place of home is questioned in the two novels under study as the authors portray the crises of identity attendant with colonialism that lingers and still torments the soul even after independence as seen in *Midnight's Children*.

Homelessness in *A Passage to India*

In *A Passage to India*, Forster writes about India, Indians and the British colonial officials in India. The colonial officers have left Britain their home country, therefore they are not at home in Britain but neither do they consider India, their

country of residence as home. India is not Britain therefore it will not just do. The Indians in India too are left feeling homeless both physically and culturally as their land has been taken over by colonialism and their culture also changed by the same colonialism. The opening of *A Passage to India* contains several dismissive descriptions of the landscape to show the author comparing it to Britain “[e]xcept for the Marabar Caves-and they are twenty miles off-the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary” (3). “The streets are mean, the temples ineffective...” (3). “So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye... like some low indestructible form of life” (4). From the description of the landscape alone it is easy to see that the idea of India as a home is rejected by the author; not being at home in Britain and not at home in India, the British characters thereby become homeless. This description of homelessness is similar to the example given by Ashcroft (2007) et al.:

Nineteenth-century Australian writers show this process of dislocation in action: for example, novelist Marcus Clark, who speaks of the 'uncanny nature' of the Australian landscape's 'funereal gloom', or the poet Barron Field who declared that 'All the dearest allegories of human life are bound up with the infant and slender green of spring, the dark redundancy of summer, and the sere and yellow leaf of Autumn . . . I can therefore hold no fellowship with Australian foliage (65).

The land, the weather, the language and even the people are different. The English expatriates in India are unable to understand the country in which they reside as it is very different from the country from which they arrived so they remain strangers in the country. Ronny the city magistrate says “[n]o one can even begin to think of knowing this country until he has been in it twenty years” (27-28). This is a picture of a man who is not at home in Britain and is also not at home in India where he is currently domiciled.

A Passage to India starts about the period that Mrs. Moore and Miss Quested arrive in the country. This shows a proper image of the uprooting that takes place as the author shows the two of them struggling with the cultural shock and the attendant homelessness. The land does not make the English citizens to feel at home yet with Britain determining how life is lived in India, even Indians do not feel at home in their own country. Ahmed Abu Baker shows how the landscape makes the colonisers not to feel at home, “India refuses to give a sense of home to its colonisers. Hence, they remain in “exile”. It is hard on them as well and therefore, the houses they build are only “retreats” in which to hide from its aggressive nature” (70). Abu Baker goes on to show from the author's treatment of the landscape how the Europeans do not feel at home:

The Marabar Caves serve as an example of this promise/appeal binary. Fielding sees them from the Club as 'beautiful' (p. 197). However, seeing

them close up makes one notice that “nothing was to be seen on either side but the granite, very dead and quiet.” Even the sky there “seemed unhealthily near” (p.153). The caves appear to be “fists and fingers” (pp. 32-33) thus exposing their hostility. Indeed, India makes sure that no coloniser can call it home. Hence, when the Anglo-Indians “looked out at the palisade of cactuses stabbing the purple throat of the sky; they realised that they were thousands of miles from any scenery that they understood (70).

Abu Baker shows how Forster uses the land to show the dislocation that the colonial officials feel about India. Even Fielding the friendliest to Indians is not at home in India or with Indians. He has this to say about India: “Every one was cross or wretched. It was as if irritation exuded from the very soil. Could one have been so petty on a Scotch moor or an Italian alp? Fielding wondered afterwards. There seemed no reserve of tranquility to draw upon in India” (83). Colonial dislocation affected the colonial officials and their families who have left the familiar home terrains and culture to lands that hold no resemblance to the home country. If Fielding in his friendliness with Indians is not at home with neither Indians nor with India as the “irritation exuded from the soil” and thinks such irritation will not be found either in Italy or in Scotland, then no European in the novel is at home in India.

A good example of both the Europeans and Indians being uncomfortable with the place is at Turton's bridge party; a party that is supposed to be a bridge, to create an avenue and environment where both the Europeans and the Indians can socialize. But the Europeans are uncomfortable mingling with the Indians and the Indians are uncomfortable mingling with the Europeans. Miss Quested attempt to actually bridge the divide by going over to talk to the Indian women, to ensure. The author says “[t]here was a curious uncertainty about their gestures, as if they sought for a new formula which neither East nor West could provide” (42). The bridge party fails to provide a bridge that can make both the colonizers and the colonized Indians to feel at home, a place that is neither West nor East. There is no middle ground, no creation of a new home but a constant homelessness, displacement and dislocation.

Miss Quested's wish to know the real India and Aziz's wish to become friends with the English citizens in India did not only culminate in a major disaster to bring about the major conflict in the novel but even the little attempts of both Aziz and Miss Quested to know the culture of the other ends as failure with Fielding declaring that “Aziz and I know well that India is a muddle” (73). If India is a muddle, there is no need to task oneself in trying to understand it, what remains is for the characters to just grudgingly bear the presence of each other and endure the land and environment. There is no logical explanation for the disappointment with the first scheduled visit of Mrs. Moor and Miss Quested to an Indian home with the Indian never showing up and the novel offering no explanation, no closure why the Indian did not send his carriage to pick up the two ladies after promising to do so, for after all India is a muddle.

The visit of Mrs. Moor and Miss Quested to the caves and the subsequent charge of attempted rape leveled against Aziz also is a muddle. It is deliberately left as a muddle by the author so that even when Miss Quested withdraws the charge against Aziz, there is no logical explanation of what actually took place in the caves. One cannot as much even conclude that there was an attempted rape; all is a muddle (269). Evidently, everything in India is a muddle as Forster sets out to make it.

Forster ends the novel with Fielding's attempt to be friends with Aziz so he can feel at home in India but Aziz rejects the offer of friendship. Stating that they can never be friends until the last Englishman is driven into the sea, Fielding asks "why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want." But the horses didn't want it-they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks...they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there" (362). All of nature from the horses to the birds and the open sky refuse to offer friendship, refuse to help both the English and the Indian to live together therefore succeeding in making both set of people at home yet not at home. Colonialism uprooted the colonial officials from their familiar land and culture to a land that is not like their land and a culture and language very different from the home country and the citizens of India too became citizens of a land that they could no longer be able to determine the culture and the governance of the land. Colonial dislocation in *A Passage to India* shows how colonialism makes a land to become a land where no one can call home.

Homelessness in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* tells the story of the birth and growth of Saleem and the birth and growth of India which we learn are handcuffed together by reason of birth. Saleem is born on the midnight of India's Independence, therefore, he is born the very day and hour India is born. Saleem the narrator starts the story from his grandfather and the cultural displacement that forms the core of his grandfather's character when he hits his nose on a tussock of earth and decides not to bow to any God:

Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed. He also felt-inexplicably-as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscope return. Beneath the winter ice, it had been coldly neutral, but now there was no doubt; the years in Germany had returned him to a hostile environment (2).

The decision to become an agnostic is not made over night and neither is it just because Aadam Aziz knocked his nose on a crust of earth that hid under his praying mat but as the narrator traces Aadam Aziz's dislocation and displacement from his land after studying medicine in Germany and his vision of the land is now seen

“through travelled eyes” and is unable to feel at home, instead feels hostility from the land, even the crust of earth that he hit his nose against is both nature and the land. The narrator goes on to show how Aziz suffered from his friends at the university due to his religion and even his very existence as an Indian living in colonial territory as his friends believed he was an “invention of their ancestors” (2) as he tries to define himself. Aziz does not feel at home in his nation, he says “I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim. Then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian. I’m still not much of a Muslim...” (17). Aziz is dislocated from the religion that his parents have practiced for years, education has also made him to feel dislocated from the land.

Rushdie uses several other techniques and devices to show cultural homelessness. The characters in *Midnight's Children*, Particularly the major character Saleem is without religion, there is Indian because his Kashmir falls under Indian control yet he was forced to migrate and be without a country for several years. Saleem, the narrator is swapped at birth; the parents he grew up with are not his biological parents. With Saleem's magical powers he was aware that he was growing up with parents that were not his own even before his parents discovered and he had to stay with his uncle who really was not his uncle (123). He in turn takes care of his son who is not really his son but is the grandson of his parents whom he grew up with as opposed to his biological parents who are not even aware that he is their son (211). This displacement of identities in the novel creates characters that are homeless even when they are staying in their home.

Rushdie shows the different nations formed out of India to show the level of dislocation and homelessness in India. Aziz struggled with his identity, not knowing if he was Kashmir or Indian (54). The country is further divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh further compounding the quest for identity. These divisions come about as a result of colonialism as the author says “there were six Islands but the British joined them together” (70). All these constant fragmentations make a permanent identity only a mirage, there is constant dislocation that the postcolonial subject has to keep adjusting to.

The parentage of Saleem is again used by Rushdie to show the homelessness of an individual in a colonial and postcolonial world. Saleem's parents are sold a block of flats called Methwold Estate with each of the block having English names like Buckingham Villa and Versailles Villa which they bought from William Methwold who said he will hand over the deed to the houses on the day of Indian Independence but also insisting that certain habits like “six O' Clock every evening to be cocktail hour”, to be done till he hands over the deed to the house “on the 15th of August, the day of Indian independence” (46). Saleem's father goes on to stay in a house that is at once his own and not his own, learning new habits and culture, he goes on to enjoy his cocktail hour and becomes an alcoholic for most of the remainder of the novel.

The fact that Saleem, his parents and other Indian families had to live in Methwold Estate with English names and the names of the royal palace of Britain and

France to the building and maintain English habits with pictures of strangers inside makes Saleem's home to not be his own yet it is no longer the home of Methwold. Even when the handover is done, it is still called Methwold estate; maintaining its aloofness. It is no longer the estate of Methwold but it is not wholly owned by an Indian so it reserves some of its Englishness and cannot really be claimed by any one person. This is very much a picture of postcolonial Indian society; the nation is now an independent nation but the border, the language the culture has been affected by colonialism and even in the postcolonial world, the dislocation of colonialism is rendering the postcolonial Indians homeless in their country.

The uprooting of the narrator from Methwold is further exploited by the author. It is also at this period that Mary Peirara who switched Saleem at birth confessed to her crime and Saleem and his mother had to move to Pakistan which the narrator says "is the period of his second exile" (144). Migration is a very good example of homelessness as the migrant leaves home to stay in a foreign country that is at once home and not home. The migrant is also affected by the culture and the new home which means the migrant cannot really return home unchanged. The migrant returns home changed to a home that has changed rendering the migrant culturally in a limbo and therefore homeless. Saleem left home not by choice and went into a country he did not love. Yet he was to later become a citizen of Pakistan and fought on the side of Pakistan in the war against India in the battle for Bangladesh's Independence and became a citizen of Pakistan. He returns to India "without passport or permit" (194). All these incidents help to show the homelessness of the narrator. Janmejay K. Tiwari also points out the homelessness in Rushdie's *Midnight Children* which the critic calls rootlessness as Saleem searches for a place where he can call home:

In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie deals with displacement and rootlessness. Rootlessness that occurs due to routelessness is the main source of identity crisis and almost all the major characters whether it is Saleem Sinai, Shiva or Padma or Parvati suffer from this psychological disease. The novelist himself is the victim of same ailment. Saleem Sinai, like his creator, wanders from one place to another, from Bombay to Karachi to Bangladesh then again Bombay (79).

There is no tangible home that the narrator can hold onto and claim as his own, even the house that his father started building in Pakistan was destroyed with bombs before it could be completed (175). When Saleem returns to India he has to stay with a group of magicians, clowns and snake charmers but even this accommodation was demolished by the government leaving him homeless (219) until he finds accommodation with Mary Pereira, his father's erstwhile secretary where this story is narrated from. Thus, Saleem gets a home that is not his home. He is settled in a complete new home, not the home before Methwold estate, not going back to Methwold estate and also not permanently wandering on the streets signifying the

creation of a new home and a new identity of the postcolonial subject and at once showing that it is not possible to go back to the culture and identity of the precolonial world. The required task is to get a culture, a language and even a nation that will make the postcolonial subject to be at home; until that task is completed there is need to keep searching.

Conclusion

Both *A Passage to India* and *Midnight's Children* show the homelessness and dislocation that occurs with the disruption of colonialism and continues to trouble postcolonial nations. In *A Passage to India* homelessness is as a result of contact through colonization which makes both the Indians and the English citizens of the country not to feel at home in India and the change that both go through in the country in their search for a home. The English are in a country that bears little or no resemblance to their home country in land, weather and the culture. The language of the people is very different causing a loss of identity to the colonial officials and their family. The Indians live in a country that has been changed through colonialism and they have to constantly redefine who they are.

In Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, he examines the colonial period to the postcolonial and shows the effect of seeking for a home in a postcolonial world where the boundaries of countries are set to suit the colonial powers and how citizens seek to redefine their home and identity and even define what constitutes a home. The postcolonial concern about dislocation, homelessness and the crises of identity shown in the colonial period in E M Forster's *A passage to India* and in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* the dislocation is traced from the colonial to the postcolonial nation showing the crises of identity for the postcolonial nation and the postcolonial individual as both the nation and the individual seek to define new postcolonial identities for themselves. Even in a postcolonial and independent state, the subject living in an independent nation still needs to keep redefining who they are and constantly redefining who they are and what constitute homeland as shown in *Midnight's Children*.

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