

Perspectives on the Notion of Home

Nayera Mohammed Hassan Ali^{1,2}

¹Department of English, Jouf University, Sakaka, Saudi Arabia

²Department of English, Minia University, Egypt.



ABSTRACT: This paper aims to handle the conceptual framework within which critics present home. It helps us think about our relationship with home and examine questions about the problem of displacement directing research to Third World. This overview provides the vocabulary for articulating this dilemma. Regarding methodology, the paper is an in-depth qualitative study based on views of selected critics. The findings have indicated that applying the critics' reflections on the conditions of people is advocated to detect whether homing is attainable or still remains a desire aspired to. Hence, the paper, as a preliminary study, stimulates for further research.

KEYWORDS: attachment, concept, displacement, home, identity, space

INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact, the problem of belonging and search for home is one of the main characteristics of our modern world. God has predestined that the earth is a home for all humanity, but with the increase of man's ambitions and greed, and with ascendancy of the bad side in him over the good, everything goes disturbed and unbalanced: homes are lost and people are displaced. Now, human life is conflictual encircled by irresolvable problems. It is fluctuating between good and evil, triumph and defeat, rejections and reconciliations. Hence, this preliminary study on home helps provide an entry, a key to building strategies of homing and rehomeing. This in turn enables us to stand as possible as we can against all the means and endeavours that hinder the creation of settled homes in a secure world.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is an in-depth qualitative study based on presenting the opinions and perspectives of some selected critics and scholars on the concept of home. The paper uses gradation in tracing the critics' statements and definitions. It begins with the simpler, the traditional, and the "taken for granted". Then, it moves on to the deeper, the more thorough and the more theoretical. A part is dedicated to investigating the critics' viewpoints, followed by the findings and discussions. Then the paper ends with a conclusion.

CONCEPTS OF HOME

As a spatial concept, home is a place or rather a private space. Douglas Porteous (1976) indicates that home is at the centre of traditional phrases which help one understand how the term "home" bears a great variety of meanings. He says, Accepted, commonplace phrases illuminate the meaning of home: home is imbued with emotion ("Home is where the heart is"), its objective quality is less important than the feeling of belonging it imparts ("Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home"); it is the symbolic hearth and the source of our being ("The old folks at home") to which we constantly return. It is a refuge we defend against the rest of the world (Every man's home is his castle"). Territorial principles suggest that our ability to defend increased with our proximity to home ("Every dog is a lion at home"). Conversant with a subject, we are "at home" with it; secure in the fortress of a friend, we "make ourselves at home" (387)

Porteous's words show that home is a place linked to strong feelings such as the sense of belonging, a sense that implies strong connection with and membership in a family, a society or a nation. Home is the source of one's being, the place of origin where one takes refuge and spends the greater part of his life. This is the desired place which gives one power, security and protection. Porteous, also, defines home as "the space- group- time entity"(390). It means that home is a multidimensional term incorporating a certain space, a certain time and a certain society.

Home bears the meaning of literally belonging somewhere: it provides a fixed point of reference that one uses to define and secure himself and to manage his own affairs in the world. Rosemary George (1999) states that Homes and home-countries are exclusive. Home, along with gender, race and class, acts as a determinant of the subject. The term "home-country" in itself expresses a combination of elements considered necessary for the existence of the individuals: the notion of belonging, of having a home, a

Perspectives on the Notion of Home

place of one's own (2). George means that home is a way of establishing difference; it distinguishes one's nationality from another. She clarifies the notion of "home" by emphasizing that home primarily signifies a "private space" even if home is used to define larger areas such as the nation or the country. To her, the term "home- country " suggests the intersection of "private and public and of individual and communal"(11). Actually, the term "home-country" stresses this interlocking and this connection by uniting with a hyphen the public space of the country to the more personal and sentimental notion of home. At any rate, home, home- country and homeland are all commonly used to express the idea of belonging to a particular place which means forming a part of and being accepted by a group or society. Hence, acceptance is important for one to be granted the right to belong.

In Addition, home implies rootedness and is always presented as stable and fixed. Rootedness results from a long habitation of one's home and from historical and cultural continuity in the place. It is this rootedness which establishes a link between specific individuals and places giving them a sense of comfort and a feeling of balance in life. Yi. Fu Tuan (1974) coins the word "topophilia" standing for the sentimental attachment that people have to places. He says, "Topophilia is visual pleasure and sensual delight as well as the fondness of the place because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past, because it provokes pride of ownership and creation"(247). Tuan is really concerned with the emotional responses that home produces in people: love of the place, familiarity, rootedness, pride of a property and construction of a culture. Sopher (1979), as well, is comfortable with the notion of home as a stable, easily identifiable, and available item. He says, "...the signs in the landscape are there to read, and they can tell us that we are, after all, at home (147). To Sopher, home evokes an atmosphere of stability, safety and rootedness. Commenting on these views, Gillian Rose (1993) claims that this idealization of the comforts of home is the logical outcome of "a feminization or, more specifically, the mothering of place. Place is understood as a maternal woman, nurturing, natural"(47). Furthermore, Anthony Vidler (1992) associates homes with wombs. He says, "the impossible desire to return to the womb, the ultimate goal represented by nostalgia, would constitute a true homesickness" (55). Vidler shows how the loss of home that is the womb, the mother, inevitably leads to homesickness. George (1999) highlights the point saying that "homes, wombs and tombs take on a proximity within psychoanalytical discourse and this naturalizes the notion of home resulting in its categorization alongside natural phenomena like birth and death" (23). Home is really read as a natural formation and a part of the life cycle. Consequently, Simon Weil stresses the need to be rooted saying, "... to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (qtd in George 199). He sees rootedness as absolutely necessary to all human beings. From the other side of the coin, Salman Rushdie argues that roots immobilize people. He says, "We pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths sprouting through the soles. Roots, I think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places" (qtd in George 199). He sees that rootedness implies imprisonment and abandonment of the liberty to move from place to place and so it hinders development. In addition, though Douglas Porteous (1976) refers to home as a source of power, security and protection, he adds, "Nevertheless, home may stultify the individual, and can be most fully appreciated only by leaving it" (390). As a protective shell, home can imprison and weaken the individual. In this way, rootedness may be a negative influence on the individual keeping him back, suppressing and stopping him from being himself because of its powerful influence. Leaving home, then, is a way to expand one's abilities and discover some truths about home.

Hence, home is defined in opposition to exile and traveling. Home may frustrate the individual and becomes the place one has to escape from. Thus, Theano S. Terkenli (1995) states that home is best discovered from a distance, whether physical, social, cultural, or historical (331). Besides, Andrew Gurr (1981) remarks that exile, in a modernist context, is a symbol of twentieth century creativity and that the normal role of the modern writer is to be an exile. Examining then the relation between home and exile, he says, "Deracination, exile and alienation in varying forms are the conditions of existence for the modern writer... The basic response to such conditions is a search for identity, the quest for a home, through self-discovery or self- realization" (14). Actually, West Indian writers are a typical example of exiled writers and they participate in giving literature of exile special distinction and importance. Exile stimulates them to be creative writers while focusing on the quest for home and identity and on an awareness of their own state and that of their islands. Gurr adds, "An artist born in a colony is made conscious of the culturally subservient status of his home and is forced to go into exile in the metropolis as a means of compensating for that sense of cultural subservience"(8). He wants to say that exile is positive because it makes the modern writer attain a better understanding of his own identity and enables him to form his point of view on his homeland due to his distance with it.

Shifting to another point, Theano S. Terkenli (1995) states that home is not only a spatial concept, but a social and psychological concept as well (325). On the psychological level, Terkenli emphasizes the role of home, as the place of origin and belonging in the construction of one's identity. The distinction between home and non- home is used in parallel to the opposition, self and non self. He calls home an "interface between their self and their world"(325). He means that home is the connecting link between man and the world around him which determines the formation of his identity.

Home, as a social concept, is identified with the family; home is where one's family lives. George (1999) says, " the primary connotation of " home" is of the private space from which the individual travels into the larger arenas of life and to which he or she returns at the end of the day" (11) She adds, "...home immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self- identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection" (1). Home, in brief, is what Douglas Porteous (1976) calls " a building unit or area" where one is brought up, cared for and where his sense of self is born (390). He emphasizes this point saying, "Home

Perspectives on the Notion of Home

provides both the individual and the small primary group known as the family with all three territorial satisfactions [identity, security, stimulation]. These satisfactions derive from the control of physical space"(383). Porteous stresses the notion of home as the source of safety and protection where the self is constructed and stimulated to progress and develop properly.

Also, home corresponds to wider social circle signifying the larger geographical place where one belongs: country, city, village or community. It implies social and habitual conditions and is constructed through repetition of habits. Rosemary George (1999) contends that "communities are... extensions of home providing the same comforts and terrors on a larger scale"(9). In fact, George says "comforts and terrors" because in her view, homes and communities are not neutral places; they may be positive or negative, they are flexible being places of both nurturing and violence.

There is also the gendered concept of home as a domestic space associated with women. The home is believed to be an expression of the personality of the woman of the house. It stood as a symbol of her body. The woman's job is to decorate and maintain her home as she does her mind, personality and body. George underlines the identification of women and home saying, "while the issue of homelands or home-countries is raised primarily in the discourse on nationalism and other so-called masculine, public arenas, the issue of "home" and the private sphere is usually embedded in discourses on women"(19). She also sees that this association of home and woman has negative implications because both are presented as "mutual handicaps, mutually disempowering. The woman is incapacitated because she is tied to the home, and the home is shelter for the incapacitated"(19). This means that this gendered concept limits the power and abilities of women.

In addition, George refers to another definition of home as the imagined location that can be more fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography (11). Home might be a space in the imagination; home, for instance, is in the books one writes or in preoccupation with nature and its mysteries. Therefore, Terkenli (1995) defines home as "a state of being, constructed on the accumulation of personal habits, thoughts or emotional patterns of the life world"(332). One, for example, might feel home in the interacting and coexisting with the orphans and the needy.

With colonialism, imperialism and the evolutions of the modern world, emerges the tendency to detach from the traditional notion of home; home is no longer as one knows it. Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984) claims that home, "the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries", becomes "an illusion due to the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance"(15). Indeed, Pratt uncovers the colonial and imperial violence that has threatened the security of home. It becomes the place where one is in because others are kept out. To Pratt, home is established as the exclusive domain of a few and that it is not equally available to all. Bell Hooks (1989), as well, says, "At times home is nowhere. At times one only knows extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations"(15). This loss of the traditional concept of home is emphasized in Rosemary George's words. She says, "The association between an adequate self and a place to call home is held up to scrutiny and then let go. As postmodern and postcolonial subjects, we surprise ourselves with our detachment to the things we were taught to be attached to" (200). Detachment from the familiar notion of home is the post-colonial and postmodern attitude to geographical origins. This makes George refer to the motif of homelessness and exile in twentieth century fiction claiming that all fictions of this period are homesickness. She sees that "homesickness – the sentiment accompanying the absence of home – could be a yearning for the authentic home (situated in the past or in the future) or it could be the recognition of the inauthenticity of the created aura of all homes" (175). She means that homesickness implies either eagerness for home or an ultimate detachment from the notion of home realizing that it is mere illusion unattainable or non-existent.

Besides, it is worth mentioning that George differentiates between the writing of homes in literature and nationalism. She says, "twentieth century literature in English is not so concerned with drawing allegories of nation as with the search for viable homes for viable selves. Literature...does not relate the exact same story that nationalism does. Nationalist movements narrate one story" (5). In fact, the search for the place in which the self is at home is one of the primary concerns of twentieth century fiction in English. Literature expresses many stories about home. It writes home in various ways allowing personal interpretations on the topic. Nationalism, to the contrary, is a restrictive term that glorifies only one point of view on the country that is a devotion to the interests of one's country and the desire for national independence. George sees that nationalism disregards the "ordinary, everyday, non-official experiences of home". This does not mean that personal visions of home are deprived of political action. To George, imagining a home for ordinary people who live ordinary lives is as political act as is dealing with a nation (6).

In addition, Edward Said (1983) says, "The readiest account of place might define it as nation ... But this idea of place does not cover the nuances...of reassurance, fitness, belonging, association, and community, entailed in the phrase 'at home' or 'in place' "(8). Said goes beyond the notion of home as a national political space and goes beyond patriotism and the official nation building that may be associated with place. He, rather, focuses on the natural link between a place and certain people. Said sees that the ties that an individual has with place and people are based on his or her natal culture; this is my birth place and those are the people among whom I was born and brought up. Thus, it is a filial relationship held together by natural bonds involving obedience, love, respect and instinctual conflicts. These "filiations" or sonship have been replaced by what Said calls "affiliations" which means links constructed by institutions and associations such as joining political parties or the attachment to certain organizations. This replacement implies a passage from nature to culture. Said emphasizes the idea that filiation belongs to nature and life while affiliation belongs to culture and society defining ties in a way that includes politics. He sees that with the development of societies,

Perspectives on the Notion of Home

the relationship between the individual and home goes beyond the natural to mean the national and the political. Anyhow, one might conclude that seeking home is a natural urge common to all humans at all times; home is the symbol that holds the family and the nation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This paper, through critics and scholars, has provided an overview of the notion of home presenting considerable reflections and perspectives. However, the paper has limitations. It should have extended beyond mere definitions. It requires, as further research, an application of these views on the realities of peoples, societies and even individuals. Since the selected critics have directed research to Third World, the word "peoples" directly brings to mind a particular region of the world epitomizing homelessness and uprootedness. I mean the Caribbean where people suffer from a severe loss of home as a direct consequence of colonial history. In this context, the idea of home has much cultural, ideological, and psychological work to do. Because of the dislocations caused by colonization and slavery, the cultural identity of the Caribbean is problematic. All ethnic and racial groups in the Caribbean came from other homes; they are people intermingling with one another; one is shocked by the ethnic and cultural diversity encountered. In fact, culture clash and miscegenation shaped the texture of the Caribbean from the early days of slavery. The majority of populations were separated from their own cultures and were inserted into the cultures of the colonizers. They are not only in a condition of out-of-country displacement but also out-of-culture, out-of-language and out-of-one's experiences. They experienced a sense of uprootedness and unbelonging. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to find home in the Caribbean. These Ethnic groups thrown together by enforced enslavement, violent rupture and fragmentation, found themselves with no way back home.

Caribbean writers convey these dilemmas trying to find outlets. Each writer has his own approach to the concept of home and his own strategy in dealing with this problem recreating homeland in fiction. Some writers see that home lies in casting away the notion of race as a basis of belonging and non-belonging and in advocating a community based on shared cultures as opposed to race. Other writers see that home is built through self-knowledge and through an awareness of the truth about colonial history with its ruins. Also, Caribbean writers reflect the opinion that homecoming is in clinging to birthplace as a central part of one's identity. Some writers, to the contrary, find that home may not be restricted to one geographical place. Plurality of possible homes provides a solution. This does not mean undermining roots; it rather highlights the idea of routes: home is through movement and flexibility providing a transnational concept. Actually, the works of Jean Rhys, V.S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, Michael Cliff, and other Anglo-Caribbean writers provide suitable material for further research on home. As another example, Middle-Eastern Literature tackle the loss of home focusing on the state of the minorities and the in-betweens living in the Western countries. Home can never be attained as long as there is racial segregation and non-acceptance of the other which are grounded on social, political, and religious false views. In this context, works like *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by the Syrian-American Mohja Kahf and *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by the Australian-Palestinian Randa Abdul-Fattah among others, are worthy to be studied. In these novels, the in-betweens are unable to attain a whole subjectivity or one fixed home. Overall, it is difficult for man to pursue "only" one good way to be at home somewhere. Home is a broad term that bears a weight of implications related to our nature as human beings. They all depend on different personal experiences, different circumstances, and different atmospheres. As a concept, home demands a more and more thorough explorations.

Contrary to the conceptual comprehensive framework within which home is presented in this paper, an article entitled "Landscapes of Home" focuses on the geography of place or rather home as space, "landscape" in relation to some human factors. In a domestic social context, the article handles the relation of place to emotions, everyday life, gender and sexuality, in addition to the idea of housing and identity. Then, it extends to place as settlements and transnational homes connecting it with the reproduction and the location of home in a colonial "imperial" sense.

CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be said that this paper has aimed at the clarification of the notion of home and its different definitions. It has been seen now how opinions differ whether to cut off roots or to establish ourselves firmly in our countries of origin. Our home is significant to identify ourselves in this globalized world that is marked with mobility and coloured by factors of economy and free choice; we have to assess the idea of homeland. To mark your identity, you have to tell about your home. To deal with the great stream of globalization and world's evolutions, you have to attach yourself to the places where they actually belong. Home remains the desired place fought for.

REFERENCES

- 1) Duncan, J., Lambert, D. (2004). Landscapes of home. In James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, Richard H. Schein (Ed.), *A companion to cultural geography*, (pp.382-403).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996515.ch25>
- 2) George, R.M. (1999). *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Perspectives on the Notion of Home

- 3) Gurr, A. (1981). *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature*. The Harvester Press.
- 4) Hooks, B. (1989). Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (15-23). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660>
- 5) Porteous, D. (1976). Home: the territorial core. *Geographical Review* 66 (4) (pp.383- 390). <https://doi.org/10.2307/213649>
- 6) Pratt, M. B. (1984). Homesick with nowhere to go. In Minnie Bruce Pratt, Elly Bulking and Barbara Smith (Ed.), *Yours in struggle: Three feminist perspectives on anti-Semitism and racism*. New York: Long Haul Press (pp. 11-63).
- 7) Rose, G. (1993). *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. London: Blackwell, Polity.
- 8) Said, E. (1983). *The World, The Text and The Critic*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- 9) Sopher, D. E. (1979). The Landscape of Home: Myth, Experience, Social Meaning. In D. W. Meinig (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. New York: Oxford University (pp.129-152).
- 10) Terkenli, T. S. (1995). Home as a Region. *Geographical Review*, 85 (3), 324 - 334. <https://doi.org/10.2307/215276>
- 11) Tuan, Y- Fu. (1974). *Topophilia: A Study of Environment, Perception, Attitudes and Values*. New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.
- 12) Vidler, A. (1992). *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays on the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution–Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.