

Conceptualizing Transnationalism: A Study on Nadia Hashimi's *The Sky at Our Feet*

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Abstract:

This article scrutinizes the subjects of transnational migration in Nadia Hashimi's novel *The Sky at Our Feet*. The setting of the novel is in transnational cognizance. Hashimi's discourse articulates the perception of illegal Afghan migrants living in America. Hashimi exemplifies the predicament of Afghanistan, which provides the transnational migrants nothing but an incapacitated home. This article scrutinizes the notion of home, identity crisis, and memory through transnational characters.

Keywords: transnationalism, home, identity, memory and language

Transnationalism embraces a wide range of phenomena, including worldwide migration and diasporic communities. It recognizes that the global landscape is characterized by dynamic interconnections and interdependences that constantly shape and modify their identities, and political and societal institutions. Steven Vertov, in *Transnationalism*, defines transnationalism as "it is the actual ongoing exchanges of information, money, and resources as well as regular travel and communication the members of the diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalized ethnic community" (137).

The Sky at Our Feet quantifies the transnational issues. The flashback narrative technique formulates the readers to discern the state of affairs in Afghanistan, during the course of pre-migration which facilitates the readers in comprehending the rationale of their transnational migration. Hashimi acknowledges the problematic catastrophe of non-belonging. This non-belonging forefronts Afghan inhabitants to migrate in search of a new home, and scrutinize a sense of belonging in a host country. As far as the setting is concerned, Hashimi has chosen cosmopolitan New York. There are two primary reasons why Hashimi deliberately chooses, New York. Firstly, New York is a cosmopolitan city. Secondly, it is a cosmopolitan city and migrants are drawn to it because of its ethnic inclusiveness, antithetical neighbourhood, myriad opportunities, and miscellaneous population. Hashimi depicts the Cosmopolitan to foster a convivial cognizance.

Hashimi's discourse discloses the transnational impediments of Jason and his family.

The narrative priorities on Jason's family facilitate comprehending the perturbing life of illegal migrants in the host country. Jason's mother is an Afghan by ethnicity and resides in America with her son Jason. Being in an undocumented status puts them in precarious circumstances. This depicts a recurring motif in a transnational narrative, emphasizing the social and legal tribulations they encounter. She leads an incognito life which her son and the government are unaware of. At the outset of the novel, it is evident that Jason's mother

constantly monitors the news, apparently preoccupied with a major concern, she is contrived to decipher.

Promptly, the news broadcasts the foregathering in opposition to illegal migrants in America. In the news she witnesses, Americans are vociferating and hovering over posters like, "America for Americans and go home" (7). The act of watching the news ascertains the heightened vigilance and concern of the undocumented status.

Hashimi correspondingly proliferates Jason's mother's apprehension of non-belongingness through the culminating event. The Americans are enraged by those who infringe the rules to linger in their country. This, for instance, is seen as American citizens in fear of national security, on account of which they disintegrate to comprehend the emotions and distress of the expatriates.

Transnational issues unravel through the narrative of Jason's mother. Being transnational, her narrative emphasizes the expression of transnational experiences. Jason's mother gets apprehended by the officers for being an illegal migrant. She is displaced from Afghanistan to the United States. She is coping with her dislocation. She has been in America for several years and confronts permanent dislocation. She is coerced to stay in the host country due to the political tension in Afghanistan, demonstrating that a proportion of migrants do not prefer to return to their motherland.

Regarding the conceptualization of home, Hashimi implies more than just the physical function of the home, she attempts to articulate the feeling and emotions of being at home where an individual feels safe and secure. The ephemeral moment of sentimental longing for a home arrives when Rona's family calls her from Afghanistan. Because of vicissitude, she supposes her home in Afghanistan to be a disenchanting location. According to the discourse, Jason's father no longer has a sense of belonging to his motherland. He encounters an egregious condition. He acts as a catalyst who thrusts the plot narrative into an intense dynamic. He serves with American soldiers for two years as a translator to provide for his family and to build a promising future in America. He believes in transnational mobilities that might disclose new possibilities for him. Due to the circumstances in Afghanistan, he resolves to depart the country and seek residence in a foreign land, prompting him to collaborate with American soldiers. He is discontented with his homeland and does not have a sense of belonging. He begins to accumulate distressing thoughts due to the terror occurring in Afghanistan. This circumstance of unhomeliness makes him relocate. This ascertains the proliferation of the home, which is exempt from external influences, similarly, the circumstances in Afghanistan intrude on the privacy of the home. The survival and sanguinity render him persistently put him in a position to ponder about a home in a foreign land. Having hope in American soldiers. He obtains a student visa for Jason's mother to pursue her medical studies and eventually decides to settle in America. Jason asserts, "He was waiting for the visa. There were some bad people in Afghanistan saying terrible things about your father. The American told him don't worry. They said soon he will have the visa" (14). In this regard, it is evident that Hashimi projects the idea of home, which does not always refer to the motherland but also the geographical location where they encounter a sense of belonging.

Martin Heidegger in "Letter on Humanism" asserts that home resides in the language a person speaks. Human beings survive and protect the home through language, "Language is the house of being. In its home, man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. This guardship accomplishes the manifestation of being

insofar as they bring the manifestation to language and maintain it in language through their speech” (193). In this context, Jason's mother is proficient in Dari, an Afghan dialect. Jason's mother seeks to enhance her English proficiency with Jason's aid. This indicates that Jason's mother endeavours to establish a home in the host country by acquiring proficiency in the American language. Although she is proficient in Dari, she speaks it infrequently, while most of her dialogue with Jason is conducted in English. Dari in this regard signifies her regional identity. Jason's mother does not communicate in Dari. She finds a sense of belonging not in her native language but in a foreign one. Jason possesses a limited understanding of Dari but demonstrates fluency in English, indicating his comfort with English.

Salman Rushdie, in his, *Imaginary Homelands*, acknowledges how migrants relinquish their place and embrace the foreign language. Rushdie substantiates the client by stating that, “he loses his place, he enters into an alien, language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings, whose social behaviour and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own” (278). Similarly, Jason's mother embraces the alien language. Her compulsion to reside in the host country compels her to learn English perfectly. She persistently strives to communicate in English. She wants to improve her English, but she hates it when Jason corrects her pronunciation. She speaks English fluently except for a few words such as “volleyball is wolleyball. Sponge is eh-sponge...” (23). Jason's mother often mixes ‘he’ with ‘she’ due to the absence of gendered pronouns in her vocabulary. The library, customer service representatives, and receptionist often requested her to reiterate her statements. Conversely, Jason is incapable of forgetting these events. He is apprehensive about his pronunciation of words, as he has acquired them from her.

Transnational communication enhances human communication across the border. K.Satchidanandan in his essay, “That third space: Interrogating the Diasporic paradigm“, discusses “how large communication network erode national boundaries. The homeland becomes at once remote and accessible because of the contrary phenomena and of migration and cyber communication.” (16). When Jason's mother's family from Afghanistan calls her after the death of her husband, she says “Family back home called me. I was broken. I want to go there, but they told me no” (15). The phone call from Afghanistan bespeaks the transnational connection across the border.

Memory, at its core, is a transnational disposition. Hashmi employs memory as a motor needs the pre-migration fees. Hashmi depicts Jason's father as a character who exists only in the form of memory because only through the narration of Jason's mother, readers become more acquainted with his existence. Although he is deceased, his character serves to represent the incentive for the pre-migration phase. Jason's father has existence is a sempiternal phenomenon in Jason's mother's memory. Jason's mother has a recollection of the past memory, remembers both optimistic and pessimistic experiences that happened in Afghanistan. She narrates Afghanistan from her rupturing memory to Jason. Jason asserts:

The fruits taste like they've been sprinkled with sugar. People open their homes even to strangers so travelers are always fed and cared for. The mountains are tall and proud, more impressive than any skyscraper. Every home has a poet and every home has a musician because words and music give Afghans life. Afghanistan is home to the best horsemen—they can defy gravity on the back of a stallion. For honor and family, an Afghan will go to the ends of the earth. Celebrations are rich and festive—a time for new clothes and money handed to smiling children. (8)

The transnational memory is riveting. It craves for the moment that has passed and lost as well as for the residence, a home that has become distant. As a result, the past is not merely a foreign country but a motherland. Her memory reconstitutes in Afghanistan.

The transnational identities substantiate the vital nexus between the motherland and the host country. The identity crisis unfolds through Jason's mother. She hides her identity and muddles along with the permanent geographical dislocation. It begins with the Jason's naming process. In the beginning, Jason's mother has decided to name him Sardar Shah, but when the nurse tries to pronounce the name, it sounds horrible. She comprehends the complexities of his Afghan name, which will eventually divulge his ethnic identity. When the nurse has a list of me, she prefers "Jason.D.Riazi. She repeated the foreign name to herself, holding her American baby in her arms. She hoped that this name she could hardly pronounce would protect me, make me untouchable" (17). The middle name D stands for December. She believes that giving him a middle name would make him more American. This incident reflects her attempt to hide their identity. This illustrates the sense of who they were and how their identity is related to the world. Jason's mother implies the transnational realities of expatriates, inhabiting, hybrid identities and residing double life of substituting here and there.

Jason's mother is aware that she is an Afghan citizen but in the case of Jason since he is born and brought up in America, she states, "You are American . I'm not. I'm not supposed to be here. I don't have papers" (36). Jason's mother has the alacrity to put up with the incongruity, which will protect her and Jason. Jason is unsure of his identity. Jason negotiates his transnational identity. Jason is in an ambivalent state. He feels that his mother has made a mistake by staying on a visa that has already expired. A continual sense of reality provokes his persistent guilt. Having to deal with eerie questions becomes a part of Jason's life. He was born in America and has never been to Afghanistan. He proclaims, "I am American but a different kind of American" (85). Jason is in a state of suspension, which is impenetrable because he is constantly searching for an answer regardless of the circumstances. In this regard, it is substantial to notice that Jason's sense of American nationalism is crumbling down as he is in a persistent dilemma between his ethnic and American identities. Because of transnational issues, Jason's pile of thoughts leads him to loneliness and isolation, which makes him contemplate his hyphenated identity. He says "If my mother was not American, how can I be? But if I've never been to Afghanistan, how can I be Afghan?" (20). It implies the relationship Jason amasses between Afghanistan and America. Jason infers his ethnic identity; the anxiety betwixt the nation and the other arises.

During the conversation with his friend, Max, she asserts, "But you're from another country, so it's different for you. I bet you eat different foods and speak a different language and all that. You are not a plain old American" (79). In this instance, Max draws Jason's attention to the fact that his family is distinct from other American families. Jason compares himself to Max. He begrudges Max. He believes it would be different if he's like Max. Even though Jason is an American citizen, he feels different, he says, "She's a real American, the kind who never gets asked where she's from. Everything would be different, if I were more like her" (101). However, Jason's mother who was born in Afghanistan, believes she does not want to return to Afghanistan because she feels at home in America. This article investigates the significant shifts in myriad dynamics of transnational issues such as identity, home, language, and memory. As a result, the paper delves into the attributes of transnational life.

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