Home-Coming and Goings: A Review Essay

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Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, Volume 13, Number 1, Spring 2004, pp. 111-121 (Review)

Published by University of Toronto Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.2006.0005*

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Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return. Ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders Stefansson. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004.

The Substance of the Debate

Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return examines various types of return migration, including the return of war refugees, political exiles, and diasporics to their real or imagined homelands, as well as "roots tourism" and forms of long-distance nationalism that are collectively, if not precisely, referred to as "homecomings." According to one of the editors, Anders Stefansson, return movements across time and space have been ignored in migration studies and social anthropology research because "going home" is perceived as an "antiprogressive, illogical, and illusory" practice that is "structurally invisible" (5). Stefansson adds that the analytical neglect of return migration is due to the fact that the conceptual and practical issues of homecoming have fallen at the margins of the "grand narratives" of migration research (i.e., assimilation, multiculturalism/diaspora, and transnationalism/globalization) and that return migrations are seen by some migration scholars as unproblematic and natural reinsertions into the "home" country. The other editor, Fran Markowitz, contends that *Homecomings* aims to move beyond the restrictive binaries of migration research that represent movements as emigration versus immigration, and/or as places of departure versus destinations, to explore the "messy points of convergence" that are created when individual and cultural beliefs and memories lead to movements toward places people consider their homelands. The volume not only aims to fill the gap in migration research but seeks to demonstrate that the "blessings of homecomings" are well worth the struggle and difficulties encountered by diasporics, political exiles, and war refugees who "go home."

By embracing a Geertzian anti-anti-essentialism, the volume explores the interrelationship between mobility and fixity and attempts to demonstrate that homecoming is a meaningful concept and social practice that deserves greater attention from scholars.

The strength of this book is that it opens a space for considering the various forms of return migration and how such returns are influenced by historical narratives, cultural discourses, and memories; the relationships between people and places and between people and nation-states; and how yearnings are transformed into social practices. Its chapters examine, to varying degrees, the diverse meanings of "home," the role of host as well as homeland states in encouraging or inhibiting homecomings, and how homecomings are experienced both by those who return and by those who are variously referred to in the chapters as "locals," "natives," or "stayees."

In examining the various understandings of "home," several of the authors demonstrate how home, homeland, and homecoming are socially constructed concepts that shift over time and space (Markowitz; Levy; Tsuda; Hammond). In her chapter about the migration of the Black Hebrew Diaspora from the United States to Israel, Fran Markowitz refers to semiotician Yuri Lotman's discussion of the concepts of home and anti-home. According to Lotman, home is the "safe, divinely sanctioned, life giving space" whereas the anti-home is the "alien, satanic, and life-threatening space" (Markowitz 183). Given the overlaps between these moral and spatial domains, individuals constantly find themselves traveling in search of home, even if that may be a different place than the one where their journey began. This search for home, and attempts to create homes away from home, is a key issue that runs through the book as it depicts individuals who struggle to find their homes and to feel at home once they are there. The Black Hebrews, for example, rejected the United States as their homeland, seeing it as the anti-home, and instead directed their efforts at retracing the route of their "exile" to Israel, from which they did not materially or historically originate. By choosing to emigrate from the United States to Israel, the Black Hebrews defined Israel as their homeland and anticipated that this journey would be the ultimate homecoming, since it would take them to the place from which their ancestors had been exiled centuries ago, according to a fiction they regarded not as fiction but as fact. Upon arriving in Israel, however, the Black Hebrews realized that they were not welcome at "home" and were merely a "tolerated presence" (Dominguez qtd. in Markowitz 186). Through a historical analysis of the Black Hebrews' experience, Markowitz illustrates this community's struggle to resolve the home/anti-home conundrum and demonstrates the lengths to which individuals and communities will go in their search for a home.

In her chapter about the Tigrayan refugees' return to Ethiopia, Laura Hammond argues that the term "home" must be subjected to greater scrutiny if we are to enhance our understanding of the concept and of how these understandings of home shape the relationships between people and places. She argues that the

understandings of home found in migration research are bounded by Western notions not applicable to certain non-Western contexts. Hammond analyzes the different Tigrayan words for "home" in order to illustrate their multidimensional perceptions and experiences of "home." Furthermore, since the Tigrayan refugees did not return to the specific villages and towns they had originated from and instead were settled in new and largely uninhabited areas, Hammond calls their return to Ethiopia an "emplacement." She defines "emplacement" as the process whereby a space that previously had no particular significance to an individual or group is rendered meaningful.

One is encouraged by Hammond's essay to wonder yet again how many migrants ever return to the exact places from which they originated. Given that most of the cases described in this volume deal with people returning to places from which they or their immediate kin did not originate, one is led to wonder whether many more of these returns should be considered "emplacements" rather than "homecomings." George Bisharat's earlier discussion of the experiences of Palestinian refugees shows that initially the identities of the refugees were closely tied to their villages and that many individuals kept the keys to their homes as a symbol of their hope of returning to their particular village—an act and a figure of hope that is found also among Jews exiled from Spain in the fifteenth century and Armenian survivors of the genocide. Over time, Bisharat convincingly argues, the identification with and the longing for return to a particular village was replaced by an identification with and longing for return to a space—but not any space—of the Palestinian nation. Since *Homecomings* examines the relationships between space, identity, and agency, it makes sense to consider simultaneously how people relate to specific geographical locations but also how they relate to the more abstract spaces encompassed by nation-states. Away from home, refugees, exiles, and migrants will sometimes consider and embrace returns to places that are considered national homelands but are not the locations from which they or their ancestors originated. Between 1946 and 1948, more than 100,000 Armenians living in the Middle East (e.g., Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria) and in Europe (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, Romania) "returned" or chose to be "repatriated"—not actually to their original home territories but to a quasi-national space (not an independent nation-state): the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, which they had begun to accept as the homeland of all Armenians and as the site where Armenian national identity would be sustained. These Armenians were survivors of the genocide of 1915–1922 and could not return to their own or their parents' villages and towns, which were now part of Turkey. This "repatriation" of Armenians in the post–World War II period to a geographically different homeland

exemplifies the category of "return" Bisharat identified. Susan Pattie's chapter in *Homecomings,* which examines the "repatriation" of the Armenians from the village of Kessab in Syria, further elaborates this issue of return to a geographically different, quasi-national space (110–11).

Various chapters consider the connection between nationalist narratives, historical memory, and homecomings, closely examining the role of such narratives and memories in shaping people's decisions to engage in homecomings. The questions of why people engage in homecomings (i.e., the "forces and motives"), what types of difficulties they face upon return, and why they remain in their homelands even when their reception is hostile are central themes in the volume. By examining why individuals (or, in some cases, organized communities) choose to "go home," the chapters consider the diverse range of political, economic, and personal motivations that drive people to uproot their lives in order to (re)settle in what they consider to be their homelands.

Takeyuki Tsuda's chapter, titled "When Home Is Not the Homeland," examines the return of Japanese Brazilians to Japan in search of employment. As the title proclaims, the experience of the Japanese Brazilian returnees (*nikkeijin*—Japanese descendants born and raised outside Japan) was fraught with tension and difficulties; they were seen as foreigners and were subsequently discriminated against, alienated, and marginalized following their return to their ethnic homeland. While their parents or grandparents had immigrated to Brazil from villages across Japan, the migrants returned to urban areas, where they sought work as unskilled laborers in factories situated in regions where they had no kinship ties. Tsuda argues that although the Japanese migrants viewed Japan as their "homeland" (i.e., "a place of origin to which one feels emotionally attached"), they never saw it a "home" (i.e., "a stable place of residence that feels secure, comfortable, and familiar") (125). Brazil, on the other hand, which the migrants never considered a homeland, was transformed into home in many respects, and Brazilian cultural artifacts (films, magazines, etc.) were sought out by the *nikkeijin* in Japan. By highlighting the disjuncture between people and their homelands, Tsuda maintains that in the current period, home and homeland have become different places for migrants, so that a person might leave his home to return to a homeland. Such experiences lead people to continually reconsider and negotiate their understandings of home, homeland, belonging, and identity.

The difficulties encountered by the return migrants in Japan are similar to the experiences of other return migrants discussed in *Homecomings*. For instance, Anders Stefansson's chapter on the return of refugees to Sarajevo focuses on the hostile manner in which returnees were treated by the "stayee" population (i.e., people who

did not leave during the war), who viewed them with envy while accusing them of having fled the difficulties brought on by the war and of betraying Sarajevo in its darkest days.

Stefansson analyzes the reasons for this hostility and the strategies employed by returnees to rebuild their lives and homes in spite of resistance and discrimination from stayees. Even the term referring to refugees, *pobjeglice* ("those who ran away scared for no reason"), implies cowardice and reflects the degree to which the refugees were treated with mistrust and scorn. Stefansson argues that returnee–stayee social relations constitute a central and multifaceted element in the experience of homecoming, an element that affects not only public, nationalist discourses but also the continually evolving relations between returnees and stayees.

Hostility and antagonism from locals were also experienced by the Armenian repatriates from Kessab, Syria, who decided to uproot their lives and move to Armenia immediately after the end of World War II. Susan Pattie examines the motivations that led the Armenians to engage in a *nerkaght* (repatriation) and argues that while some popular interpretations point to the repatriates' being motivated by poverty or political conviction (i.e., belief in Communist principles), the primary motives of the Kessab Armenians were in fact patriotism and the belief that they were going to strengthen, even to save, the underpopulated homeland. They believed that if Armenians did not repatriate, thereby increasing population numbers in Armenia, Stalin might annex parts of Armenia to neighboring Georgia or Azerbaijan. Pattie explains how their enthusiasm and patriotism were severely tested by the hostile reception they encountered upon arrival, though in this case the source of hostility was dual—social, emanating from ordinary Armenians, and political, emanating from the paranoid suspicions of a Stalinist regime. In some cases, newcomers were accused of spying or other anti-Soviet activities, and a large number (around 20,000) were exiled to Siberia in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Like return migrants to Bosnia and Japan, the Armenian newcomers were discriminated against and called derogatory names. The term *akhpar* (a mispronunciation of the word *yeghpayr*, which means "brother," in the Armenian dialect spoken in the Western diaspora) is still commonly used in Armenia today as a derogatory term. Although it once referred only to the newcomers, since the mass emigration of newcomers from Armenia to the United States and Western Europe, *akhpar* is now also commonly used by Armenians living in Armenia to refer to all Armenians living in diaspora.

In discussing the return of political émigrés as well as virtual returnees, retirees, and roots tourists, Eva Huseby-Darvas examines the "abyss of mutual misunderstandings" between natives and returnees (78). Her chapter is unique in that she considers the

virtual homecomings of long-distance nationalists alongside other forms of permanent and non-permanent return. With reference to Benedict Anderson's work on long-distance nationalism, Huseby-Darvas examines how Hungarians living in the United States preferred engaging with the homeland from afar and at their own convenience, arguing that this allowed them to be of greater assistance to the homeland. While that may be so, their virtual homecoming also allowed them to circumvent the difficulties generated by permanent settlement, all the while providing them an opportunity to maintain that link with the homeland. In examining the motivations of those who chose to return to Hungary, Huseby-Darvas argues that while political motivations played a part in the decision of a small number of political émigrés, for the majority return was influenced by personal or familial circumstances. She describes the misunderstandings that arose between returnees and locals and argues that these were in large part due to stereotypes of the other that led to misunderstandings and tensions.

What is interesting in all of these cases (Tsuda, Stefansson, Pattie, and Huseby-Darvas) is that the discrimination and hostilities were not due to phenotypic differences of the returnees but, rather, to their real or perceived social and cultural practices, to linguistic and material differences. Similar experiences of hostile reception are also discussed in the chapters by Andre Levy, Lisa Anteby-Yemeni, and Fran Markowitz, who examine the homecomings to Israel of Jews living in Morocco, Ethiopia, and the United States respectively. In contrast to the aforementioned cases, discrimination toward the Moroccan, Ethiopian, and Black Hebrew returnees was more often than not due to racial or ethnic differences in addition to linguistic or cultural factors. All three authors describe the struggles of the migrants and the complex processes of "desocialization" and "resocialization" (Levy) they had to endure in order to find their place in Israeli society. Levy contends that Israelis of Moroccan origin are overrepresented in the lower socioeconomic strata of their society and feel discriminated against because of their ethnic background. The Ethiopian returnees, meanwhile, were initially welcomed by many Israelis, who saw them as the "Biblical Jews" and as the descendents of the "lost tribe." But, as Anteby-Yemeni explains, although the Israeli imagination was initially fascinated by the Ethiopian immigrants, over time this fascination was replaced by an attitude of disinterest, indifference, and, in certain cases, outright racism toward these returnees. The utopia that had been constructed by the Ethiopian Jews, she adds, was shattered by the harsh realities of resettlement, which led to disillusion and anger. While some of the returnees began to dream of Ethiopia, none, quite tellingly, ever returned, and all the Ethiopian immigrants, as well

as the Moroccan and Black Hebrew returnees, consider Israel their home and wish their children to integrate into the social, political, and economic life of the country (Levy; Anteby-Yemeni; Markowitz).

While the aforementioned homecomings were more or less permanent, some of the chapters in *Homecomings* examine temporary homecomings, including roots tourism (Holsey) and research trips (Behar). Many of these movements, which are also considered homecomings by virtue of being included in the volume, are brought about by the yearnings of people searching for home, yet they do not culminate in actual uprootings and resettlements. Should they, then, be considered homecomings? Before addressing this question, I must turn to another common theme that is addressed by many of the chapters: the role of nation-states in relation to homecomings.

Several of the authors consider the policies, attitudes, and discourses of host and homeland nation-states and how these affect the actions and lived realities of returnees (Stefansson; Huseby-Darvas; Levy; Pattie; Tsuda; Anteby-Yemeni; Markowitz). The authors point out how states can encourage or inhibit return migration through their discursive stances as well as through their policies and laws. In discussing the role of states, Markowitz warns against over-essentializing the state and seeing it as an absolute hegemonic structure. She calls for a more nuanced approach that recognizes the power of states but also acknowledges the role of individual agency. In some cases, such as those of the Bosnian (Stefansson) and Tigrayan (Hammond) refugees, the decision to go home was affected more by state policies than by individual agency. It was also state policy that allowed for the return of the Armenians (Pattie) and provided incentive for the *nikkeijin* to return from Brazil (Tsuda). While the former policies refer to permanent settlements, Huseby-Darvas's discussion of the practice of *hazacsalogatok* ("offering the temptation to return") by the Hungarian government and private entrepreneurs indicates that some state policies are also aimed at encouraging tourism and investment by diasporans, which may or may not necessarily lead to homecomings.

In considering the power of nationalist discourses, Levy examines the competing state discourses of belonging (i.e., Morocco's, Israel's, and France's) that led most Moroccan Jews to move to Israel. His discussion of the visits of Moroccan-born Israelis to Morocco, in response to the opening of the borders by King Hassan II in 1986, demonstrates how individuals' experiences are mediated by different nationalist narratives (again, Moroccan, Israeli, and French) but also how individuals adapt and manipulate those discourses to legitimize their actions. Meetings with Moroccan Jews who had remained in Morocco led to some unsettling encounters for the migrants, which, Levy argues, led the Israeli Moroccans to evoke a nationalist

discourse based on the dichotomy of homeland and diaspora in order to affirm that their chosen course of action (return to Israel, defined as the homeland) was the only reasonable course.

Evaluation

Through the cross-cultural exploration of return migrations, *Homecomings* makes a very valuable contribution to studies of migration, diaspora, and "nomadology" (Malkki) by considering how ideologies are transformed into social projects and the reasons why people, whether they are political exiles/émigrés, war refugees, or diasporans, decide to "go home." The various chapters demonstrate the complex interrelationships between memory, identity, nationalist discourses, state policies, and individual agency. The editors' decision to include all manner of return migrations and movements as "homecomings" is aimed at providing a multifaceted perspective on return migrations. While this makes for very interesting reading, in the end I found the defining of all these different cases as "homecomings," and the lumping together of the repatriations of war refugees and the permanent resettlements of diasporans or political exiles alongside heritage tourism and research visits, somewhat problematic. Referring to these disparate occurrences as "homecomings" threatens to diminish the significance of the former (i.e., refugee returns, permanent settlements) while exaggerating the meaning of the latter (i.e., roots tourism) and points yet again to a tendency in contemporary anthropology to privilege mobility over the sedentary (Tölölyan). Tölölyan contends that the privileging of routes over roots and of the mobile/nomadic over the sedentary has gone too far. There is an implicit assumption that sedentarism—the decision to stay—is a mark of stasis and inertia that does not require the sort of investigation and analysis that mobility does. Yet in the current era, when nomadism and a "generalized condition of homelessness" (Said, qtd. in Malkki 53) characterizes contemporary life, and when migration has increasingly become another "life choice" for many, it is important also to examine why individuals and groups "stay put" even when life in their homelands becomes excruciatingly difficult and sometimes even violent. A collection such as *Homecomings* is valuable in that it highlights the persistent importance of home and sedentariness to great numbers of people all over the globe without denying the continuing value of mobility to others.

Although the editors claim that "diversity is a central feature" of the volume, apparently in order to justify including so many different types of movements as homecomings, I would argue that it is one thing for people to uproot their lives and move to another country and another thing entirely to visit as a tourist or researcher. Regardless of whether tourism is part of a roots or heritage tour,

both traveler and hosts recognize that the visit is temporary and that the traveler has no intention of settling and establishing permanent residence. These travelers who are "going home" are sojourners and, to some extent, interlopers, searching for particular emotional or spiritual experiences from the homeland that they hope will validate their current identities and choices of residence. On most such occasions, the relationships between travelers and hosts tend to be hospitable, and, although transgressions on both sides are noticed, they rarely lead to hostility or discrimination of the kind experienced by the permanent returnees described in the volume (Huseby-Darvas; Pattie; Stefansson; Tsuda). For instance, the chapter by Bayo Holsey, very well researched and fascinating to read, focuses on the roots tourists from the United States who travel to Ghana to visit the slave forts and "relive" the experience of their ancestors. While Holsey evocatively, indeed movingly, discusses the experiences of these tourists and how they are perceived by local Ghanaians, she also mentions the existence of a 1,000-member-strong community of African American who have permanently settled in Ghana. While this exploration of the roots tourists is immensely important in its own right, a contribution that examined the experiences of the permanent (re)settlers to Ghana would have been equally welcome, especially if accompanied by a juxtaposition of the two. Perhaps this was not part of Holsey's research remit or of interest to her, yet it points to another topic that has not been well researched: the experience of African Americans who have permanently emigrated from the United States to settle in Ghana or in other African countries.

Similarly, the engaging piece by Ruth Behar, the book's last chapter, offers an interesting account of Behar's experience in filming the documentary *Adio Kerida* ("Goodbye, Dear Love"), but should we really refer to a research visit to make a documentary film as a "homecoming"? In one loose sense it may be, but if *any* form of return is considered a homecoming, there is a danger that the term may lose its analytical rigor and focus. One could, of course, argue that heritage tours and resettlements are variations on the same theme; if this is the case, then the book could have also considered, for example, imposed or involuntary homecomings (i.e., deportations), which are becoming more common in the wake of September 11 and the War on Terror. Not only are suspected terrorists being deported, but in the United States, even resident aliens (i.e., Green Card holders) can be deported for committing non-terrorism-related felonies. For instance, according to the Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act (H.R. 1279) and the Alien Gang Removal Act (H.R. 2933), both passed by the US House of Representatives in 2005, the list of crimes that make non-citizens, including lawful permanent residents, subject to mandatory detention and deporta-

tion has been expanded. If individuals are determined to belong to a designated street gang, they are subject to deportation regardless of individual circumstances. Since many of the Central American youths who are either members or alleged members of youth gangs came to the United States as infants or children, they consider the United States their home; often, the countries to which they are deported (i.e., Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) are foreign for them. These deportations raise many questions about citizenship, belonging, identity, and, of course, national security that are emerging in the post-9/11 era. Therefore, another topic of research, which certainly builds on some of the chapters in *Homecomings,* could be how homecomings (voluntary as well as involuntary) figure in the national security policies of states.

Finally, an underlying theme that appears in many of the chapters and could profitably be considered further is how actual homecomings or diasporic longings are depicted in films and novels. Why have return migrations received scant attention in the academic literature, while simultaneously receiving greater attention from writers and filmmakers? Several of the authors mention books and films that examine the issues of homecomings and diasporic longings for home. For instance, Stefansson refers to Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* and Milan Kundera's *Ignorance;* Holsey mentions Arthur Hailey's *Roots,* while Huseby-Darvas examines how the questions of return and longing of Hungarians are treated in the films *American Rhapsody* and *Valami Amerika* ("Some America"). The volume ends with Behar's essay on how she came to make a documentary film about Cuban Jews. Other films I have seen (and there are many more that I haven't seen) that explore the themes of return, diasporic longing, and identity are the Academy Award–nominated *East–West,* starring Catherine Deneuve, which examines the return of Russian émigrés to the Soviet Union in the 1940s; Atom Egoyan's *Calendar,* which deals with the themes of Canadian-Armenian return, identity, and belonging; and the very-low-budget Armenian film *Journey,* which is about an Armenian woman living in New York who returns to Armenia. A project that examined the representations or depictions of homecomings and diasporic longings in films and novels would contribute, as *Homecomings* has done, to our understandings about migration, diasporic life, and how ideas (political and otherwise) are transformed into social projects.

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