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Literary Theories

Imagined Homeland and Multicultural Canada: Reconfiguring Nation in Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees

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Abstract: This paper critiques the work of Uma Parameswaran titled *Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees*, as an advanced examination of the concept of diasporic identity and how the ontological restructuring of nationhood can be understood in a multicultural construct. The story places the immigrants in an in-between interstice between the collective memory and the modernity of the current world negotiating the attachments to the affective homeland and incorporating into the sociocultural realities that Canada can offer. Using the concept of an imagined community by Benedict Anderson and the concept of hybridity as developed by Homi Bhabha, the research question seeks to argue that nation in the novel is not a fixed geographical location nor an essential ethos but a cultural artefact that is created through mnemonic practices, language play and the everyday ritual. The transplanted boulevard trees--trees which, nonetheless, grow well--are an effective allegory of the subjects of the diaspora: they grow, despite being deprived of their roots to the ancestors, new ways of belonging. The novel critiques reductive views of national identity, providing a different approach to the concept of nationhood in the form of a fluid, negotiated, and hybridized notion of national identity through the narrative portrayal of intergenerational tension, cultural preservation, and adaptive praxis. Finally, the paper confirms that Parameswaran redefines the country as an inclusive, transnational space in which the continuity of culture and transformative evolution are simultaneous, and that provides a subtle profile of understanding diasporic belonging in the overall scope of contemporary nation-state discourses.

Keywords: Diaspora, Imagined Homeland, Multiculturalism, Nationhood, Transnationalism.

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Uma Parameswaran's *Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees* (1987) presents a insightful

meditation on migration, belonging, and the shifting meanings of nationhood within a diasporic context. It was set against the backdrop of multicultural Canada and the novel studies how immigrants negotiate attachment to an “imagined homeland” while simultaneously participating in the sociocultural realities of their adopted country. Rather than portraying nation as a static geographical or political entity, Parameswaran reconceptualizes it as a fluid and affective construct shaped by memory, language and everyday practices. Through the metaphor of transplanted boulevard trees—rootless yet capable of flourishing, the novel offers a compelling image of hybrid identity. Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s theory of the “imagined community”, Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and the “Third Space,” this paper argues that Parameswaran redefines nation as a negotiated, transnational space where continuity and transformation coexist.

Imagined Homeland and Diasporic Memory

Benedict Anderson famously defines the nation as an “imagined political community” because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, yet in their minds they share a sense of communion (Anderson 6). In Parameswaran’s novel, the homeland of India exists precisely in this imagined dimension. For the immigrant characters, India is not merely a territorial entity but an emotional and mnemonic space sustained through recollection, storytelling, and cultural ritual. The homeland is reconstructed in domestic interiors, festive gatherings, and intergenerational conversations.

Memory in the novel functions as an active force. It preserves language, religious practices, culinary traditions, and mythic narratives, which become anchors of identity in an unfamiliar environment. However, this preservation is not without tension. The remembered homeland is selective and idealized; it becomes a symbolic refuge rather than a concrete reality. The characters’ longing is directed not toward a present-day India but toward a remembered India shaped by nostalgia and displacement. In this sense, the homeland becomes “imagined” in Anderson’s terms not fabricated, but narratively constructed through shared symbols and affective ties.

At the same time, Parameswaran avoids romanticizing nostalgia. The novel suggests that the homeland itself is subject to transformation and that diasporic memory inevitably reshapes what it seeks to preserve. The act of remembering becomes creative rather than purely preservative. Thus, the imagined homeland in the text is not a static origin but a dynamic cultural resource that migrants draw upon to articulate their identities.

Multicultural Canada and the Rewriting of Nation

If India represents the imagined homeland, Canada represents the lived present. The novel situates its characters within a multicultural society that officially recognizes diversity yet subtly demands assimilation. Canada, as depicted in the narrative, is both welcoming and disorienting. It offers opportunities for economic stability and personal growth while simultaneously exposing immigrants to cultural alienation.

In this context, nationhood is reconfigured. Rather than replacing one national identity with another, the characters inhabit a layered sense of belonging. They are neither fully Indian in the traditional sense nor entirely assimilated Canadians. Instead, they negotiate what might be described as hyphenated identities. The multicultural framework of Canada enables a certain degree of cultural retention, yet it also produces generational divides. The younger generation, exposed to Canadian schooling and social norms, often questions inherited traditions, while the older generation seeks continuity with the past.

Parameswaran portrays this intergenerational tension not as a conflict between authenticity and betrayal but as evidence of nationhood's evolving character. The younger generation's adaptations do not signify a rejection of heritage but rather its reinterpretation. In this process, Canada itself becomes part of the imagined community. The nation is no longer singular or exclusive; it becomes a composite space shaped by multiple histories and affiliations.

International Journal of English Literature and Hybridity and the Third Space

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity offers a productive framework for understanding this transformation. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that cultural identity emerges in the "Third Space," an interstitial zone where meanings are negotiated and new forms of subjectivity arise (Bhabha 56). Hybridity disrupts the notion of pure, originary identities and reveals culture as inherently dialogic and relational.

In *Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees*, the immigrant characters inhabit precisely such a Third Space. Their identities are not simply additive (Indian plus Canadian) but transformative. Cultural practices evolve through translation, adaptation, and reinterpretation. Language, for instance, becomes a site of hybridity. English, infused with Indian idioms and sensibilities, serves as a medium of negotiation. Similarly, rituals are modified to fit new contexts, producing hybrid forms that reflect both continuity and change.

The metaphor of the boulevard trees encapsulates this condition. Transplanted from their original soil, the trees nonetheless grow and flourish in a new environment. They are “rootless” in a literal sense, yet they remain “green,” symbolizing vitality and resilience. This image challenges essentialist notions of identity rooted exclusively in ancestral land. Instead, it affirms the possibility of growth through displacement. The diaspora subject, like the tree, adapts without entirely severing ties to origin.

Hybridity in the novel is not portrayed as loss but as creative potential. It enables characters to inhabit multiple cultural spaces without being confined to any single one. This fluidity destabilizes rigid definitions of nation and opens up the possibility of a transnational identity.

Gender, Domestic Space, and Cultural Transmission

An important dimension of nation reconfiguration in the novel lies in the role of women as cultural mediators. Domestic space becomes a crucial site where national identity is preserved and transformed. Women often sustain rituals, cuisine, language, and storytelling traditions, thereby transmitting cultural memory to the next generation. In doing so, they participate in what Anderson describes as the everyday reproduction of the imagined community.

However, Parameswaran also portrays women as agents of change. They negotiate employment, social networks, and educational opportunities in Canada, challenging patriarchal expectations rooted in the homeland. Thus, gender intersects with diaspora to produce new forms of subjectivity. The female characters’ navigation of public and private spheres further complicates the notion of nation, revealing it as both intimate and institutional.

Through these portrayals, the novel critiques reductive views of national identity that equate authenticity with rigid adherence to tradition. Instead, it suggests that cultural survival depends on adaptability. Preservation and innovation coexist within the diasporic household, reflecting the broader dynamics of multicultural nationhood.

Intergenerational Dialogue and Adaptive Praxis

The novel's depiction of intergenerational dialogue underscores the ongoing negotiation of belonging. The older generation's emphasis on cultural continuity sometimes clashes with the younger generation's desire for integration. Yet these tensions are productive rather than destructive. They create a dialogic space in which identity is continuously redefined.

Adaptive praxis, the practical adjustments made in daily life becomes a key mechanism of nation reconfiguration. Whether through bilingual communication, participation in Canadian civic life, or hybrid celebrations of festivals, characters embody a lived form of multiculturalism. These everyday acts demonstrate that nationhood is not solely determined by state boundaries or legal citizenship but by shared practices and affective bonds.

In this sense, Parameswaran's novel anticipates contemporary debates about transnationalism. The characters maintain connections to India while establishing roots in Canada. Communication, travel, and memory sustain a network of belonging that transcends territorial limits. Nation thus becomes relational rather than bounded.

Reimagining Nation-State Discourses

By presenting nation as fluid and negotiated, *Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees* challenges dominant nation-state discourses that privilege homogeneity and singular allegiance. The novel suggests that belonging can be multiple and layered. Diasporic subjects are not anomalies within the nation; they are integral to its transformation.

The metaphor of the boulevard trees ultimately gestures toward a model of inclusive nationhood. Growth in a new environment does not require erasure of origin. Instead, it entails adaptation and resilience. Parameswaran's redefinition of nation aligns with multicultural ideals while also exposing their complexities. The narrative affirms that cultural continuity and transformation are not mutually exclusive but mutually sustaining.

Conclusion

Uma Parameswaran's *Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees* offers a nuanced exploration of diasporic identity and the reconfiguration of nation within a multicultural context. Through the interplay of imagined homeland and lived Canadian reality, the novel dismantles essentialist notions of nationhood and proposes a fluid, hybrid alternative. Drawing on Anderson's theory of imagined communities and Bhabha's concept of hybridity, this paper has demonstrated that the nation in Parameswaran's text is neither fixed nor singular. It is a cultural artifact continually reshaped through memory, language, and everyday practice.

The boulevard trees stand as a powerful allegory of diasporic belonging rootless yet thriving, displaced yet resilient. In reimagining the nation as an inclusive, transnational space, Parameswaran provides a subtle yet profound commentary on contemporary debates about migration and identity. Her novel affirms that diaspora does not signal the loss of nation but its transformation, opening new possibilities for belonging in an increasingly interconnected world.

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