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The Odyssean Dilemma: Homelessness as Home and the Search for Ithaka

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The country of Morocco: A country of hospitality, good food, and wonderful tea! God willing, I will return one day.

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Abstract

This research project aims to explore the concept of "home" as expressed in the analogical Homeric figure of Odysseus in his journey to Ithaca. The research involves an inquiry into the meaning and reality of the concept of home in the context of both the Moroccan culture and the lives of displaced persons who find themselves located in Morocco. Engaging existing definitions of migration and a concept of homelessness expressed by Niettzche, the theoretical research involved in this project provides a conceptual framework from which I examine the set of interviews obtained. The interviews conducted with both Moroccan nationals presently living in Morocco and migrants currently living in Morocco, are foundational to further analysis of fieldwork conducted at the local Catholic Cathedral while teaching an informal English as a second language class to a group of Sub-Saharan migrants. The central questions of the research are: what does "ithaca" consist of? How can we understand it and how does it inform the livelihood of the population of displaced persons? How can the experience of displaced persons inform a more complete understanding of the concept of home?

Introduction

Sketch this image in your mind: a lone figure, standing on the bow of a ship, white spray flies above the roaring mirk of the violent tides below, a dark and unknown expanse stretches before an image best evoked by Homer's wandering Odysseus, a warrior returning to his home of Ithaka weathering the unknown that has intruded between himself and this destination. The figure is an adventurer, a traveler, a seeker guided by the waves, stars, and the force above. The image is innately hopeful, one of the vitality of the human spirit and the dynamism of the voyager. A second image: a multitude of persons fighting the blue-green sliver of water between the Moroccan and the Spanish territories while sharp darts of silver-black death shower them. The two images draw similar themes: resilience, a quest, a necessity that pits the seeker against untenable odds and unprecedented dangers found within the unknown. At the end of 2020, there are a record 89.4 million people living in displacement (including refugees, asylum seekers, displaced Venezuelans and IDPs), a number up from the 84.8 million recorded in 2019 (IOM Chp.1, p.4). Some, although not all, face similarly drastic instances in their journey away from their country of origin. Picture in your mind the many nationalities and circumstances that drive this multitude of persons from their homelands. Alongside this image and this statistic consider the words of Kenyan-born Somali poet Warsan Shire: "no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark…no one leaves home unless home chases you fire under feet hot blood in your belly."[1] Every number within those millions has a narrative tied to their small data point that encompasses some form of the challenge of this Odyssean journey. Each displaced person has left an Ithaka under uncertain and shark-like terms.

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[1] https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warsan-shire-home

Homer's epic figure draws an illustration mirrored in the struggles of countless migrants who find their way to Morocco. Forced from their homes from an array of causes--economic to viscerally violent--specifically the Sub-Saharan migration population in Morocco have battled a similarly diverse assortment of odds to reach their current location. For many of them, Morocco is not the hoped-for final destination. As the young members of my English class at the local Catholic Cathedral shared, many hope to reach Europe or the United States. Morocco is an inbetween stage, a place of transit, or so they hope. The testimony of several migrants throughout the NGO encounters over the course of the semester in addition to my own research illustrate how for many, however, this place of transit transforms into a place of stasis. The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of this displaced population using the framework of this Odyssian figure. Just as Homer's fleets of Greek warriors found themselves far from home, migrants find themselves far from their own "Ithaka," the homeland of Homer's voyaging protagonist Odysseus. The literary trope of a traveler distant from home manifests itself through the concrete circumstances of many displaced persons. Throughout visits to NGO's in Morocco, there has been a constant recurrence of migrant issues that center around the reality of their displacement. As a researcher, my initial positionality when encountering migrants, refugees, and similarly uprooted people, is looking at their experience of departure from their homeland. Such a context begs the question: what does this starting point, the homeland, consist of? What/who are the communities that displaced persons associate themselves with in both their past and present? Using the Homeric visual, what is their "Ithaka"? As one Congolese woman phrased it: I will examine the experience of the migrant living with "homelessness as home." Where and what does the "Ithaka" of the displaced person in Morocco consist of? My study begins with an examination of the narratives of several Moroccan nationals–their personal stories and those of

their extended family–within this context as a starting point, how can "ithaka," the "home," be properly understood in such a way that spans the experience of both the displaced and the sedentary person?

       Whenever someone asks me where I am from, I take a moment to decide how to answer. My interest in this specific topic began with this very personal experience. My intent with this study was to build an understanding of the topic outside of my own experience. The spark of the research endeavor came from a conversation during the Southern excursion in which a professor was talking about their family's location and the tendency of family members to remain in close geographic proximity. The mention of the vitality of family in close proximity made me pause to consider the role of a central "home." Hearing the experience of different migrants throughout the program, a sense of community-specific location, recurred within testimonies. Having come from a relatively stable economic background and immediate environment, I found myself reflecting on the appeal of the sense of a depth of the connection that keeps family members close to their origins geographically. In the United States, American families often end up spread across the 3,531,905 square miles of the nation.[2] It is a normal occurrence for college students, generally in the middle class socio-economically, to consider their college options extending many miles away from home. Grandparents and extended family members will often live several days' journey away. I have experienced this American dislocation in a very particular way. People ask me where I am from and I simplify the answer: my family lives in North Carolina as of a year ago, I am from the small town in Northern Indiana of South Bend. However, this is still not the complete picture. Quite similar to many Americans, I have called various cities "home" throughout my childhood. The line of locations consists of: I was born in Washington D.C., seven years into my life my family moved to Chicago, six years we relocated to South Bend and

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[2] Statistic from https://statesymbolsusa.org/symbol-official-item/national-us/uncategorized/states-size

now they are in Durham, North Carolina. Each move had positive economic reasons. My family always moved for a "better" location and source of income without any pressures of necessity. So, as I encountered the Moroccan tendency to remain within at least reasonable proximity of their origins, I had cause for reflection. Further testimony from refugees encountered at NGOs made the question I ask of myself become one that needed to be asked of those in such disparate circumstances. My personal question of the meaning of "home" took on an external dimension as I began to wonder how I might step outside of myself, to the extent that this is possible, and examine the term "home" from the perspective of those who have been stripped of the comfort of their origin by the pressing insistence of external factors. For a refugee or migrant who finds themselves under the influence of negative circumstances that suggest, even when they do not necessitate but rather incline one towards, a move, how does this question change? More critically, how does a potential answer for this question about the content of "home"change in accord with the circumstances of displaced populations? Have I gone as far or as in-depth as I had hoped? I certainly have not, but I hope you will find glimpses of your own experience within my findings and further make the connection I have between the desire for a "home," a place to belong, and the real and pressing concerns of displaced populations across the world.

The largest data source within my project consists of the population I began my research with, the non-migrant population of Moroccans on Moroccan soil. There are two populations I am examining with this question of the meaning of "home:" those who have been displaced, the migrant community previously exposed to some form of duress, and those who remain located at or near their place of origin. The purpose of this research project is to examine individual stories and explore common themes in order to come to a greater understanding of the reality of the given concepts. I began my research hoping to look at how organizations themselves implement

or construct concepts of community and belonging among the communities they attempt to serve. However, the path of my research did not lead in quite that direction. A mixture of individual interviews provide a framework from which the concepts can be examined and analyzed in context of the fieldwork done at the Cathedral and throughout the semester as the program facilitated engagement with local NGO's. This project is intended as a point of intersection between areas of volunteering, activism and research proper in which I explore the content of the concept and reality of the "home" for displaced persons. The project aimed to ask the questions: What does "Ithaka," what does the human concept of home consist of? How do the narratives of displaced persons inform and generate such an understanding? What is the situation of displaced and migrant populations in regard to a concept of "home"?

Literature Review or Critical Definitional Semantics

The 2005 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Migrants defined a migrant as "a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a *remunerated* activity in a State of which he or she is not a national" (Avis, 2017, p.3). This definition was further clarified as one which covers "all cases where the decision to migrate is taken *freely* by the individual concerned, for reasons of 'personal convenience' and without intervention of an external compelling factor'" (Avis, p.3). The issue of such a definition and its consequent clarification reside in the degree to which an "external compelling factor" can be considered as such. UNESCO, in contrast, has defined a migrant as "any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country" (Avis, p.4). The UNESCO definition here includes the social dimension of a person's movement. Under this definition, the interaction of the individual with their foreign environment is considered

alongside the physical change in location. The political and legal definitions of a migrant, however, are debated and remain ambiguous on an international level. The role of the foreign national in a country considering (1) the situation/circumstances that caused their relocation and (2) the activity they are engaged with in said foreign country are points of arbitration within this definition.

In the past, the term 'migrant' has also been defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as "any person who is moving or has moved across an international borden or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary of involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is" (Della Valle, 2016, p.2). This definition addresses the key controversies regarding the implicit specifications inherent to a given situation. So, migrant as a stand-alone term covers the habitation of an individual in a country other than their country of origin, a country in which they are a foreigner. The 2005 UN convention differs from IOM in positing a decision made by the individual that is "*without* [the] intervention of an external compelling factor." Such a distinction is tied to categorizing those subject to external coercive factors within the category of refugee, asylum seeker or a similar yet distinct term. The dynamic of international tension regarding such a definition is clear in the specificity of such a definition to make a statement consisting of negative statements ("regardless of…").

The wandering specifications present within the many distinctions clarify the central global political issues surrounding the topic and a more recent definition found within the IOM's *Glossary on Migration* fully encircles the broadening of the meaning of this term:

Migrant: "An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence,

whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently,

and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well‑defined legal categories

of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are

legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of

movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international

students" (IOM Gloss, p.132).

This definition acknowledges the competing degrees of specification and offers

"migrant" as a loose term within which many levels of distinction can be made. The scope of the

term consequently is expanded to allow for legal qualifications specific to certain subsets of

migrant populations. The purpose of this foray into the semantics of migration is to determine

which terminology would best be used to qualify individuals and groups come across in the

course of this research project. I have set out two informal terms of simply "the migrant" and the

"historically sedentary." Given my sample populations, however, neither term is mutually

exclusive or solely applicable. So, a few further definitions are in order. Terminology regarding

the categorization of the refugee, the displaced person, forced migrant, and the "distressed"

migrant offer further clarification amid the search for specificity. The latter of these terms

provides an interesting study into the hesitancy of the global research and political community to

tie the situation of a certain group of vulnerable migrants to a negative and possibly too

delineated word. The possibility of denigrating the position of persons who find themselves in

such circumstances is to be avoided. However, the possibility of the utility of such a term also

ought to be considered.

While global institutions such as IOM hesitate to conform any migrant population to the

term "distressed" migrant, researchers have used the term in clarifying studying. The hesitancy

around term specification sometimes adds additional layers of complexity to already existing issues. One definition of distressed migration used by a UN document from 2016 is: "Movements from the usual place of residence, undertaken when the individual and/or the family perceive that there are no options open to them to survive with dignity, except to migrate. 'Distress' migration is motivated by extreme economic deprivation, natural and environmental disasters, or forms of gender and social oppression perceived to be intolerable" (Della Valle, 2016, p.2). This definition binds the "distressed" migrant to external situations which act as coercive agents to initiate a change of location. An offense to the migrant's human dignity, resulting in intolerably oppressive circumstances, elicits the change. The term introduces a certain amount of subjectivity and allows "the notion that some people move because of a sense of anomie and psychological distress, loss of dignity and self-worth or compulsion" (Avis, p.19). Such an implicit aspect of this categorization allows a more humanistic space within the semantic puzzle for migrant populations.

This definition coincides with the more neutrally termed designation of the "displaced person." The IOM defines a displaced persons as ones "who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either across an international border or within a State, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human‑made disasters" (IOM Gloss, p.54). This term includes both the internally and the externally displaced person who is forced by external forces, coercive influences, to leave and potentially relocate their livelihood. The focus of such a definition is on the cause of the initial removal from the person's home. Such a definition, in the context of this study, can be used both in reference to the place of origin and the place of residence of an individual. The data finding regarding a

distinction between two such categories that can be termed "home" will be discussed in a later

section of this data. Critical to this term is the coercive nature of the catalyzing factor. A further

definition that highlights the same experience of a certain subset of migrant populations is the

category of those who have experienced "forced migration." This term simply aligns the

migratory movement with this coercive influence and admits of a diversity of specifics. For,

forced migration, as the IOM currently defines it is "a migratory movement which, although the

drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion" (IOM Gloss, p.77). Such a

definition merely illustrates the complexity of the diverse drivers that global organizations

consider when determining the degree or presence of compulsion within a migrant situation.

A study on the desire for "elsewhereness" among French migrants to Morocco by

Catherine Therrien and Chloe Pellegrini termed two categories for European migrants fitting into

the categories of "lifestyle" and "quest" migrants. Without a doubt, there is a sharp contrast to be

made between the initiating circumstances of the French national who leaves his country in

search of the prosaic "better prospects" and heightened economic means and the situation of the

Congolese national who finds themselves trapped between insufficient economic resources,

violence, and internal conflict. This particular example I came across through interviews in my

fieldwork highlighted the importance of determining the specific degrees of above definitions.

As the French national I spoke with noted, it is much easier for Europeans to come to Morocco

in order to obtain jobs of a higher level that is open to them as Europeans. The degree of

qualification necessary to obtain a desired job is comparatively lower in Morocco than in France,

he explained. There is a certain presupposition that they are more qualified than even, at times,

the Moroccan applicants, this person implied. While the former situation of the French national

is considered one of migration, it is along entirely different initiating circumstances than the

Congolese national who faces certain compulsive forces through the persistent violence and manifest cultural challenges I will discuss later in this paper. Central to the discussion of migration is this question of "freedom of movement." Those I will refer to as displaced persons are those who do not have freedom of movement as discussed above or at least have freedom of movement that is impeded or influenced by significant external factors.

Inna Viriasova provides another important reference point within this theme in her article on refugees in context of the Nietzschean-Foucaultian thought on homelessness and the freedom of self care. For Nietzche, "Homelessness ushers in the end of modernity by pointing at a break with ontological certainty" and the modern age's overturning of religious certainty is replaced by nihilistic void concerning origin and destiny (Viriasova, 2016, p. 226). The Nietzschean concept of "homelessness" is expressed as the completion of the freedom offered by this break from historical traditions. Homelessness in these terms is the natural state of the human being. This form is realized in the person of the refugee, Viriasova argues, in terms of an "aimless wandering that takes place as a result of a willful break with the city…an act of self-overcoming: a practice of relation to oneself that springs from 'will' and 'experience'" (Viriasova, 2016, p.227). The individual is freed from oppressive conditions not merely as a victim but rather as the protagonist who leaves their homeland under conditions that allow an expression of their total freedom. Embracing an "ethic of self-care," the refugee realizes her freedom in leaving and has the possibility of achieving what Viriasova and Neitzche see to be the true state of the human being. Viriasova hopes to counter the "sedentarist metaphysics," in the words of thinker Liisa Malkki, or the "regime of "homesickness," according to Nietzsche, which is understood to be " a sedentary longing for the long-lost stability of the modern world, where displacement is perceived as a disruption of normalcy" (Viriasova, p.224). Consequently, the homelessness of the

refugee could be cast in positive rather than negative terms where self-care replaces the paradigm of homelessness as a lack. This "ethic of freedom" eloquently elaborates on the wealth of the "gift" offered by the refugee to a non-refugee community as "their desire for something more, their refusal to accept the way things are" (Viriasova, p.224). Removing the stigma of mere struggle for survival, this lens offers a perspective from which the refugee is not simply fleeing but also bears their struggle against complacency, against oppression, to the communities they encounter after the departure from their homeland. Central to the formulation of this argument is the Nietzchian ideal that "leaving the firm ground of an old home behind is essential to discovering inner freedom" (Viriasova, p.228).

While Viriasova's argument provides an extensive paradigm for the acceptance of the refugee within a community and articulates very well the presence of the refugee as one who bears a gift in these terms to the foreign community, the complete overturning of the desire for this concept of "home" is not sufficiently addressed. The critique of such an argument made on the Nietzchean-Foucaultlian terms lies primarily in the fieldwork I undertook. While "homelessness as home" is a phrase one of my interviewees used specifically in reference to her situation as a migrant, and perhaps even a refugee, the complete ambit of Viriasova's argument does not provide sufficient framework for the complexity of the human experience. This question of the inner freedom raised by Nietzche does offer some grounding for an understanding of the situation of displaced persons and even the definition of "home" itself, which is ultimately a part of this research project. However, the proposition of an ontological homelessness that ultimately cannot be addressed does not account for the existence of such a desire. When talking with my interviewees, I realized that the role of community within the paradigm of "home" is essential. Others in the immediate community or family are automatically tied to the concept of home. So,

while an ethic of self-care and consequent self-realization that Nietszche envisions offers

substantial formulation for alternative ways of viewing the refugee-community interaction, it

fails to address the fundamental human desire for this sense of belonging. Even within the

proposed paradigm of homelessness and self-care as the ideal flourishing of a human being, there

remains the issue of humanity's continued "homesickness."

At the crux of society's aversion to the refugee, Viriasova concludes, is the confrontation

with the reality that "the human itself is alien" and we are all consequently foreigners (p.230).

This reconfiguring of the term opens a hopeful path towards a more just society but it also

attempts to erase an ontological distinction that can have a purpose. The meaning of a distinction

that has been used to make barriers is erased unnecessarily as a means of fighting the barriers it

has created historically. An overturning of the word "foreigner" in this way might be better

understood as a return to a common human nature. Expressed in positive terms, it is not simply

that we are all "foreigners," but rather that there is a dignity inherent to each human being that

transcends the distinction in cultural-political-social origin. The term foreigner consequently

does not need to be considered entirely without meaning–it points to a difference within the

world's functionality–but rather can be located within a different framework. This framework of

a world of sojourners in a foreign land reinforces the image of the Odyssean figure mentioned at

the beginning of this paper. Such a visual gives a point of context for a point of commonality

within the human experience. The Nietzchian argument would have the "ithaka" erased from the

entire paradigm or rather placed within the person herself. The self-care model obviates the

presence of "ithaka" as physical or even social point in the distance and places the parameters of

the self as the means of fulfillment of this longing. Rather than a place or setting, the model

proposes the self as the "ithaka" that can be reconciled with the world once the original

disposition of connection to a location has been severed. While certain aspects of this configuration ring true in the lived experience of the individuals I talked to–in particular, there is a way in which "home" is internalized–, it also does not compensate for the necessity of community, the self and the other, and the reality of Ithaca's permanence on either the horizon or in the present.

Research Design and Methods

The data obtained through my research consists of the interviews conducted with three individuals and fieldwork at the local Catholic Church of St.Peter's Cathedral. The intent of this dual source of information is to allow the individual interviews to act as a filter and method of analysis for the more limited narratives and experiences involving the fieldwork at the Cathedral. Originally, I was hoping to interview the Cathedral attendees alongside additional sources from local NGOs, but due to the unprecedented constraints of an early departure from Morocco, certain leads were not brought to completion. However, the interviewees that I did engage with were found through previous connections throughout the semester: one a Moroccan sociology professor with experience in the NGO sector, a Moroccan from Rabat with family ties in other cities, and a Congolese migrant working and raising a family in Rabat. These three informants were asked about their personal experience of a sense of "home" and the origins of their immediate and extended family. Each interviewee provided specific insight into one aspect of the myriad of concepts and experiences connected to this foray into the conceptualization of the human experience. The first two interviewees provided insight into an experience of "home" shaped by the Moroccan culture and heritage. Their immediate context and upbringing formed the experiences they narrated and provided my starting point throughout my research. Examining their experiences, I hope to elaborate on a contrast between the situation of what I will call the

"historically sedentary" person in contrast to the displaced person. As I will explain later, even the use of these terms and my attempt to "contrast" falls short of the complexity of the narratives as both displacement and proximity to origin are interwoven throughout all the narratives. The final interview provides a basis of personal testimony regarding the situation of one who has been influenced by external factors to travel outside of their native country in hopes of the prosaic "better prospects."

Participants were informed of the intended scope of my project at the beginning of each interview. In a slightly different manner, the organizers at the Cathedral program were informed of my research intent alongside my volunteer interest. The interviewees were obtained through connections made throughout the normal course of the semester pre-ISP. Although I ultimately only performed three interviews, my intent was to fully utilize connections with various NGOs. However, the language barrier and then time constraints limited such a possibility.

My American citizenship offered a barrier and a path throughout my work. The social dynamics inherent to my status as an American could be seen in several of my research encounters. Various reactions and phrases used by those I interviewed, both formally and informally, made me aware that their responses to my questions were–shaped is perhaps too strong of a word to use here–at least influenced by the questioner, myself. Two instances come specifically to mind that illustrated this difficulty within the research process. Within one conversation with a Moroccan-born resident of Rabat, I came across their eagerness to share their own admiration for the American university system and implementation. Our conversation drifted briefly into a reflection on this person's perception of the American college education in comparison to the Moroccan. The comparison that was made dwelt simply on even the facilities available at many American universities. The side-step from our conversation was interesting

and a helpful challenge in itself as I had to redirect my own attention back to the purpose of my research. However, it also made me wonder to what extent the admiration of American universities in general extended to my presence in Morocco as a beneficiary of the American university. I became aware of how my interlocutor was careful not to critique the U.S., as perhaps a matter of interpersonal politeness. The testimony I received from them, however, may have been influenced by this external perception of an improved American education. While my main interest was on Moroccan culture and this individual's experience, the reminder of my own presence within their country as a foreigner revealed that distance between myself and that which I wanted to understand. There is always a natural distance between the seeker of understanding and the knowledge that is being sought, but in this instance it became clear that there was also an intervening barrier of my own positionality. The testimony I received was not necessarily negatively affected by this change, but it was certainly directed in a slightly unnatural direction. There was a certain sense that I was being reassured of the competence of my homeland's system of education contrasted as superior to that of Morocco. This perception on my part may have not been entirely accurate but my positionality within the interview did not lend itself fully to an open dialogue.

The second instance in which my American citizenship offered somewhat of a barrier was in relation to the migrant population I came in contact with at St.Peter's Cathedral. My engagement with the community at the Cathedral consisted of several English-language classes I was able to teach with other School of International Training (SIT) students. While talking with several of the other volunteers, I gained insight into the variability of the sub-Saharan migrant situation. The program offered a small bag of food, some clothing, a blanket, and recorded and attempted to connect the migrants coming through with the resources of local NGOs. On my first

day volunteering at this event, I was in conversation with two Congolese women, both under twenty-years old, about their circumstances and what brought them to the organization. They were both working as volunteers with the program and we exchanged some information as we assisted the processing of some thirty under-resourced migrants through the event. At a certain point in our conversation, one of the sub-Saharan male volunteers made a comment about the United States, which the women translated from French for me to understand, and how he perceived it as a dangerous and racist country. The statement was made not directly to me but clearly he was interested in my response to such an opinion. When I responded that this was somewhat the case as in many countries, he asked the women to ask me how one gets into the United States. This curious progression of interactions went from a statement about his negative perception of my country to an inquiry about entering it in the next sentence. Upon hearing my response that I did not know the details of this process, he asked if I or one of my American friends would be willing to marry him so that he could gain access to the United States. As an American, he first perceived me as somewhat of an authority or at least a source of information on the legal aspects of entrance into the United States. Testing the boundaries of such a perception, he then jumped to my presence there as a point of legal access to the country. The short exchange made me increasingly aware of the perception of my own presence in such a setting as an American. While not an immediate barrier, the exchange also highlighted my own positionality within the circumstances of my interactions.

My presence at the Cathedral to teach several English classes came about rather unexpectedly as a result of personal contacts I made within the Catholic community. Originally, I inquired with the priest at the Church of St.Francis, a Catholic community with a fair amount of English speakers, about volunteering opportunities within the Diocese of Rabat. He directed me

to the pastor of the Cathedral of St.Peter's who, in turn, informed me of the program that took

place every Wednesday and Saturday. When I arrived at the program one Saturday morning early

in the last month of my time in Morocco, I was unsure what I was going to do or how I would

communicate even with the volunteers and coordinators. As I made my way into the basement of

the Church, I found a few familiar faces from the weekly Catholic services I had been attending,

and was able to inquire about the possibility of volunteering with them in the following three

weeks. After introducing myself to the coordinator, I learned that the program was not

specifically associated with an organization. While the Catholic NGO Caritas helped fund the

program and the Diocese of Rabat hosted the weekly events, this program was unaffiliated with

any specific group. When asked about the organization of the program, the coordinator clarified

that it was "not a Catholic" but rather a "humanitarian" program. Within the walls of the

Cathedral basement, an interesting assortment of people came together to facilitate this outreach

program: a few of the volunteers were sub-Saharan migrants, others French nationals living in

Morocco, a religious sister originally from India, and a religious brother from Eastern Europe.

This collection of individuals provided a point of contact for under-resourced migrants within the

Rabat area. The purpose of the program was simply to provide what the volunteers were able to

provide to help the migrants seeking resources. So, when I arrived and asked how I could get

involved, the coordinator immediately asked if I would be willing to teach an English class in

addition to the Darija and French classes other volunteers were teaching. As the migrants filed

through the program that day, the coordinator informed them of the opportunity to take an

English course that would be offered starting the coming Wednesday. In the course of the three

classes I ended up preparing and teaching, each time I had around five students with two or three

who returned for ⅔ of the classes. The students' ages ranged from sixteen to twenty-two with

varying levels of comfort with English. Starting them off with introductions in English, I learned

that most of them were from Guinea Conakry. A handful of the students appeared to be familiar

with each other and it seemed that there was an existing community they associated with each

other. When asked why they wanted to participate in the class, the students unanimously agreed

that they were each hoping to go to Europe or the United States.

Findings

Throughout the course of my research, certain themes recurred in the content of the

discussion of each individual's experience of "home," community, and belonging. The starting

point for each of my conversations was to outline the basic biographical details of each

individuals' life in terms of origin, current habitation, and family whereabouts. The three

interviews highlighted the commonality of certain underpinnings of the human experience

regardless of circumstances and current state of what I call the sedentary or displaced. The

themes that persisted throughout the narratives were as follows: the interplay of safety and

danger, the dynamic between the private and the public spaces and the presence of a threshold,

the dissociation of "home" from the place of origin, the internalization of the concept of home,

and the role of family as community in composing the meaning of home. Each individual that I

talked with, alongside more informal conversations I had at other points in the research process,

reinforced certain common experiences which refine the concept of "homelessness as home" and

the human being as a stranger with a certain longing for the Homeric Ithaca.

As poet Warsan Shire notes, "no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark"

such that a visceral and shocking cause is needed to elicit the relocation of an individual. The

experience of Christine highlights such a reality for those who could be termed displaced persons

or forced migrants. The Congolese native I interviewed, Christine, shared her own journey away from home motivated by an array of factors ranging from political violence, to feeling unwelcome in her immediate family, to not desiring to feel a stranger in her homeland. Born to a mother from the South and father from the North, she described her life in her own country as one characterized by not being sufficiently of one geographic and cultural location or the other. After leaving her home city, she remained for some time in a community with many Southern Congolese, but at a certain point political unrest caused all of her roommates to flee to find shelter among their family in the South. She stayed in the city in constant fear of violence from the armed police forces. With her husband acting as a translator, she shared that "at the end of the day, it's her country [Congo], her home, her family, but she can feel like a stranger." This feeling of being a foreigner in her homeland and the pressures of the many factors around her caused her migration to Morocco. In her homeland, her very values conflicted with what she saw around her. Alongside the feeling of foreignness, there was a sense of security, of safety, she was seeking in her new surroundings.

The sense of security evoked by the word home was eloquently expressed by Professor El Mokhtar Harras when he expressed that "home is the place where I live, to which I feel emotionally and affectively attached….*where I feel protected*." The ethos of protection is the counter to the sense of danger evoked by Shire's image of the rabid betrayal of the home turned volatile. There is a relationship here between the outside and the inside world, the public and the private spheres of life. For Christine, she had to leave her homeland in order to seek this out. This sense of being protected can easily be overturned in the situation of those who are displaced by external coercive threats. Asmae El Laouzi, my third interviewee, shared the narrative of her grandfathers: one who was exiled from his lands in Marrakech by the French, the other who left

his extended family also in Marrakech because of a situation of inter-familial strife. In both cases, Laouzi shared that they were marks of the struggle and suffering that the move caused down to the next generation. In the case of the grandfather exiled by the French, she shared that the consequent generations were raised with a certain anger constantly present in their household. While she considers the Sale-Rabat area her home, she also recognizes that she is not from this locale but rather from the city of her grandfathers, Marrakech. The transformation of the familiar into something unknown and hostile is the severing from the city of origin that Nietzche proposes. When the refugee who has been set free according to the Nietzschean model arrives in a foreign land, they affront the sedentary community by "bringing to the fore the fact that 'the human is itself alien' " (Visiorosa, 2016, p.230). Yet there is a dynamic within the freedom of this realization of the alien nature of humanity that is missing in Nietzche's model but found in the space between Christine's recognition of the hostility of her own land and Harras' delineation of the protective nature of the home paradigm. Christine finding herself alienated does not embrace the alienation as a good in itself but rather turns to an alternative that provides the opportunity to seek another form of this safety.

Integral to Harras' formation of the public/private dynamic of the home is the concept of the threshold that demarks the one segment of environment from the other. For, he regards the threshold as the house as that which "acts as protection from the eyes of outsiders." There is even a sense that this is a mutually generated protection from Harras' experience in which the home "protects me and I protect it from intrusion, pollution." In this experience, the protective nature of the home is formulated in a relationship between the individual and the home itself in which the individual is a protagonist. So, Christine's move away from her original home fits this criteria in the sense that she takes it upon herself to provide a set of circumstances in which she can

mutually benefit from this protective aspect. While dealing with an immense array of circumstances, Christine explained that a part of her decision to leave was the impending birth of her daughter. On reaching Morocco, she found a sense of safety and has remained here for the past several years.

For all three of my interviewees, the place of origin was a critical point of context still distinct from their habitation and even what they would term "home." Harras made it very clear that his understanding of home extended only to his immediate family, his household. His family in Tetuan, and the location of the city that raised him, are "very present" to his heart and his mind, but the parameters of the home do not extend beyond the threshold of his own wife and child. Tetuaon remains his place of origin, where he would say he is "from." The city of his childhood in is the one that he remarked "marked my life" and left a permanent impression. Similarly, Laouzi described the situation of her family as one inextricably linked to extensive connections throughout the generations. Her grandparents, she shared, have whole networks of friends and family both in Marrakech and in the Rabat-Sale area who know her generation simply because of her blood connection. She shared that she only recently became acquainted with the extended family in Marrakech, as a result of a healing of old family hostilities, but that extended family members she had never met before had known of her existence for years. Upon meeting her extended family, she shared that she was welcomed as one who was already familiar although she had never met these people before. She described a deep connection to her roots in Marrakech simply through the reality of her grandfathers' history despite her own unfamiliarity with the specific family members. Christine also expressed that Congo was still the place of her origin and her family remains there, but home is something that she has taken with her. Coming

to Morocco because she would rather be a foreigner somewhere than "be a stranger in her own country," Christine acknowledged a remaining ineradicable connection to her homeland.

The internalization of home that Nietzche proposes as the recognition of innate alienation was mirrored to some degree in Christine's experience. While there were a lot of religious and political pressures that made her life as a woman difficult, Chrisine found that she did not feel at home because of differences in values from her surrounding environment. She expressed a certain internalization of home as a turning to her own values when she said that "inside values…imagination, home is in the head." As an artist her creative work started as a way to shelter herself from her frustrations with the community but then, over time, it changed into a way for her to "feel at home." She found shelter that grew beyond a simple protective barrier in her artistic work. So, home has a creative, a generative aspect to it in her experience. Her manner of talking about the inner life as an artist changed however when she mentioned another place she began to call home after this initial turning to her creative work. Once she became pregnant, she decided that "my daughter is going to be my home." Beginning to build her life in Morocco with her daughter was then the "beginning of a feeling at home," a feeling she had been lacking in her homeland.

Central to each narrative and reflection on the idea of home was this connection with others, with family. For Laouzi, "family is always key," and the blood and familial connection that spans generations creates an irreducible sense of belonging. As Christine expressed it: "it is not about geographic place…it is now and here…the concept of home is who you live with…and what you create with the people." Home, consequently, requires an encounter with the family and also has a generative aspect to it. Expressed more simply also in Christine's words, home is the "feeling of having a family and to make it grow." In the interview with Harras and Christine,

I asked participants to recall a moment in which they felt most at home. Each response was heavily tied to the presence of the family that is being generated. Haras responded with the experience of "being at home with my child….after he was treated [for cancer] we felt much closer as a family." In his case, a traumatic event cemented a feeling of home that was inextricable from a sense of family. The bond of those within the thresholds of his physical home denote the central ontology of home. Similarly, Christine responded to the question with a small laugh and a large smile directed at her husband with the revelation that she had felt most at home when she first met him.

Conclusion

Starting with the personal experiences narrated in the interviews, my research found within these stories a connection can be seen between the place of origin, family, and the concept of "home." The themes found elaborate on a common desire, a common need, between both the displaced foreigner and the sedentary national. The common threads illuminate a narrative that people share regardless of circumstances. A large component of this common human experience is the emotional connection between the individual and the "home." Returning to the Homeric visual, there is a critical moment in *The Odyssey* where Odsysseus encounters Penelope, his wife, after many weary years of travel. After a bloody encounter with the many suitors who overtook his halls, Odysseus is tested by Penelope through her reference to a shared secret and then they fall into each other's arms.[3] The literary moment is such that it is not until this final scene takes place that the protagonist is finally home. The moment of human encounter is the climax of the return to Ithaca. We can use this literary encounter as a microcosm within which

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[3] For full a full explanation of the scene see:
http://www.journeysofodysseus.com/odysseus%20and%20penelope%20reunited.%20page%202.htm

we see the research I collated reflected. My research found that the concept of "home" is indelibly tied to an emotional connection to other people, to such a moment of encounter in which a familiar face, a familiar point of origin is encountered.

Christine's words: "you just [are] born somewhere, you will die somewhere, but in the meantime you are a stranger and not a stranger because we all belong to the same planet and we'll be going back to the earth when we are dead," encapsulate the reality of the alien nature of the human experience shared by the displaced person and the sedentary person alike. This study proposes a model of understanding the concept of home that includes this alien nature of the human person not so as to erase the difference between the foreigner and the native but rather to demonstrate the commonality of the human experience. While all humans share this foreignness, there remains a desire for a place of origin, a desire for "home" that is centered around the relationship with the individual to those around them. This desire is common to the displaced and the sedentary person alike but expressed and seen in a particularly poignant way in the experience of the displaced person. The emotional-social dimension of the experience of "home" underscores the reality of the displaced person who lives with "homelessness as home" distinct from the sedentary national yet sharing also this common human desire.

Limitations of the Study

Several of the challenges mentioned at the beginning of the study function dually as limitations on the research as well. My own hesitations at the beginning of the research period hindered my own access to interviewees. Given the intended trajectory of the project, the scope would have been significantly improved by beginning to interview subjects over the course of the second week of the research period. However, a certain personal hesitation impeded my work as I started with the search for translators while doing a literature review and tried to narrow the

scope of my project in accord with the timeframe and access to resources. Throughout the paper I have attempted to indicate shortcomings as they occurred in the research process. Namely, the limited data sources overall with the narratives of only three individuals personally interviewed.

Recommendations for Further Study

Preparation done in the pre-ISP phase of the program can be a real asset to your work. I would have liked to have made more intentional connections during the NGO encounters the program hosted. I was not originally intending on focusing on migrant populations so I was less intentional about my interaction with migrant-specific NGOs. Looking back on it, I would advise students to follow up on every interest they come across throughout the program. Time flies all the way through to the end and although leaving a week and half earlier than expected expedited that experience for me, it is nonetheless a short period of time. Connections I made outside of the SIT partners were also crucial to my research. Although providing less specific data, the time I spent volunteering with the Catholic Cathedral was essential to my understanding of the migration patterns in Morocco. I initially looked into the opportunity for personal more than research motivations. However, I found that personal and research-oriented motivations often work very well together. I was originally hoping to examine the questions posed in this study through the lens of NGO activism as well. Another interesting facet of this topic that I was not able to look into is the role of NGO's in facilitating communities and the engagement of institutions in creating environments where migrant populations might find some sense of belonging. The specific roles of religious versus secular NGO institutions would provide a further aspect of study that could be examined.

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Appendix

Interview guide:

1. Where do you live now?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where were you born?
4. What are the consecutive locations you have lived in since you were born?
5. What brought about each move?
6. Where are your parents from?
7. Where is your immediate family currently living?
8. Where is your extended family? How close are you to them?
9. How long do you intend to live in this location? What factors would elicit a move?
10. What would be the hardest part of leaving, if said factors occurred?
11. How did you get to your current location? What factors keep you here?
12. What place do you call "home"?
13. What do you associate with that location?
14. What community is present in that location?
15. Has the way you have viewed that location changed at any point in time?
16. What, specifically, do you associate with the word "home"? What is the first things that comes to mind (location, community, culture)?
17. Do you feel that there is one place you "belong"?
18. What language/culture do you associate with that language?
19. Could you describe for me the moments you have felt most at home, had a sense of belonging, in your current circumstances (while in motion)?
20. Where did you feel most "at home" in your place of origin?
21. What ideas did you have about what leaving that place and coming to Morocco would look like?
22. What is your vision of Morocco now?