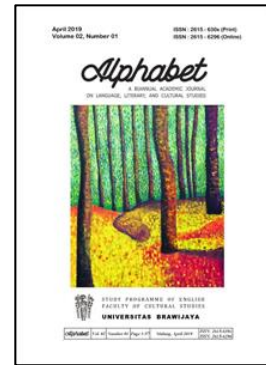


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American Dervish and Green Card: Unexpected Passengers in the Diaspora Literature?

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Abstract

The term *diaspora* has evolved in its use from referring only to the Jewish diaspora to referring to communities around the world that have spread beyond their cultural and historical homelands. The contemporary definition of the term includes what used to be the peripheral elements in the diaspora, i.e. the *unexpected passengers* in the diaspora vessel. In this article, I propose to ask about 1) how literary works by recent diaspora groups (non-Jewish diaspora groups) can be categorized as diasporic literature, and 2) what themes related to the diaspora experience they bring to the table. The study explores two works, i.e. *American Dream* by Ayad Akhtar, an American writer of Pakistani descent, and *Green Card* by Indonesian writer Dani Sirait. In the first work, *American Dervish*, one can find themes from post-9/11 Pakistani diaspora life in the United States with the special focus on the critical view of the diaspora community. Meanwhile, *Green Card* presents the story of an Indonesian man trying his luck as a migrant worker while maintaining his strong belief that his struggle in the foreign land matters more than his actual success in the pursuit. While having different causes for the spread of the communities to which the characters of the two works belong, both works appear to see the United States as the land of opportunity, the destination of the diaspora. These two works represent two cases of probably the most recent cases of unexpected passengers in the diaspora literature.

Keywords: diaspora, diaspora literature, Pakistani diaspora, Indonesian diaspora,

The second decade of the twentieth century saw the rise of the term diaspora in the Indonesian context. During his term as the Indonesian ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Dino Patti Djalal paved the way for the rise of the term, which culminated with the founding of Indonesian Diaspora Network and the congress of Indonesian Diaspora in Los Angeles on July 6-8, 2012 (Muhidin, 2015, p. 93). Four years before, an editorial piece on the rising existence of the diaspora published in Kompas ended with the question about the lack of recognition of Indonesian diaspora in the face of the rising ex-

istence of global diaspora. Following the 2012 Congress of Indonesian Diaspora, several congresses of Indonesian diaspora were held in different places and the term has been gaining traction in Indonesia and been subject to various responses. Essays by intellectuals and public figures offered studies and thoughts on various fields ranging from the economic aspects of diaspora (Prahadi, 2015) to negative reactions related to the virtual exclusion of migrant workers from the Indonesian diaspora discourse (Suashta, 2017) to arguably inappropriate use of the term diaspora—which is strongly related to the experience of biblical

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Jews—with the nature of migration of Indonesian people in different parts of the world (Sastrodinomo, 2018).

Such mixed reaction is not entirely surprising, considering that the term diaspora has also gone through a somewhat similar evolution. In the opening of his now classic *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, Robin Cohen comments on how much the term diaspora has evolved through time, currently involving peoples from various demographic groups that are now considered diaspora communities (2008, p. 18). What began as a Greek term, which literally means *to disperse*, to refer to the mythical dispersal of the Jewish community after the destruction of Solomon's Temple, diaspora has now gained popularity as a term to designate any national community that resides outside its homeland or ancestral homeland. Prior to Cohen's book, William Safran was bothered by the tendency to label any group of people outside their national borders as diaspora people. In response to this liberal use of the term, recent William Safran argues that this liberal use of the term diaspora amounts to an abuse. However, as Cohen also suggests, the term is potential to explain and understand the experiences of current transnational individuals, whether or not they share any characteristics with Jewish diaspora. This new definition will, in turn, affect our analysis and evaluation of literary works by writers who live outside their homelands or ancestral homelands. The redefinition of the term helps us see to what extent a literary work written by a member of a certain immigrant community fits into the definition of diaspora literature.

William Safran complains about the liberal use of the term diaspora that has gone far beyond its initial definition. Walker Connon (in Safran, 1991, p. 83) probably has the loosest definition of diaspora when he defines the term as “that segment of a people living outside”. For Safran, this tendency potentially makes “the term loses all [its] meaning”, which used to refer to the traumatic dispersion of Jewish people from what according to the Torah, the land promised by God to Mo-

ses and his people. Therefore, he proposes to redefine the term in order to make it compatible with the contemporary trends without depriving it of its useful aspects. Safran redefines the term to include all migrant communities that share characteristics, although not all, with Jewish diaspora as the *ideal type* (1991, p. 83). These characteristics include 1) dispersion from homeland or ancestral homeland, 2) retention of “memory, vision or myth about their original homeland”, 3) difficulty of being “fully accepted by their host society”, 4) assumption of ancestral homeland as ideal place of resident, 5) determination to maintain or restore the “original homeland”, and 6) persistent relation to homeland to an extent. Immigrant communities that share these features, for Safran, can be appropriately called diaspora communities (1991, pp. 82–83).

Meanwhile, Robin Cohen expands the definition of diaspora even wider. Cohen revises and expands Safran's above-mentioned proposition with three novel characteristics. By this time, these characteristics are no longer exclusively taken from Jewish diaspora. They are mere common features among diaspora communities found today. The novel features include 1) “expansion from a homeland in search of work”, 2) “a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism”, and 3) shared “empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement” (Cohen, 2008, p. 17). Instead of treating Jewish diaspora as the ideal case, Cohen offers five “ideal types of diaspora” of which the Jewish case is merely an instance: 1) victim diaspora (Jews, Africans, Armenians), 2) labor diaspora (Indentured Indians), 3) imperial diaspora (British), 4) trade diaspora (Lebanese, Chinese), and 5) de-territorialized diaspora (Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis) (Cohen, 2008, p. 18). What is significantly new in this typology vis a vis Safran's redefinition is the acknowledgement of those who *migrate* to other places with the *colonial ambitions* as a diaspora community. This further definition includes groups that have not been covered in the earlier definition of the term diaspora. In the words of Cohen

(2008, p. 18), this new definition includes what might have been previously referred to as *unexpected passengers*, such as those included in the category of trade diaspora.

The above-mentioned inclusion of voluntary migration is compatible with the adoption of the term in postcolonial studies. In *The Key Concept of Post-colonial Studies*, Griffith et al. define diaspora without any mention of the prototypical Jewish diaspora. The core definition of diaspora, according to Griffith et al. (1998, p. 69) is “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homeland into new regions”. Instead of the mythical origin, Griffith seems to be more interested in the constructive aspect of diaspora, such as the hybridity that results from this process, in addition to nostalgia and relationship with the homeland. Indeed, recently, recent scholarship in the field (Zhang, 2007, pp. 1–2) perceives diaspora not only as the migration process but also the “double relationship between different cultural homes/origins”, or the relations that happen in the host country between the immigrant in other cultures, including the host country’s culture.

Such a vibrant discourse as diaspora has become even more colorful when it is adopted to study a certain segment of literature known as diasporic literature. Diaspora literature itself is a term that has been variously used in the discussion of works about people living outside their ancestral homelands while preserving a connection of some sort, mental or physical, with the ancestral homelands. Further studies explore the epistemological significance of the term diaspora, including the one by Hyungji Park (2015) that aims to weigh on the appropriateness and epistemological significance of combining the term *Asian-American* and *diaspora* in referring to writings by American writers of Asian descent. Meanwhile, some other writers explore further into individual themes found in diasporic texts. In the introduction to *Diasporic Literature and Theory – Where Now*, Mark Shackleton (2009, pp. ix-xi) overviews the various themes in the diasporic literature today, such as the dwelling in nostalgia, the notion of progressive utopian-

ism, the lack of attention to female West Indian writers, and so on. Some writers go even further by even questioning the hyper canonization of works known as must-read postcolonial works in American universities, a phenomenon that is contradictory to the spirit of post-colonial studies, which aims to subvert canonization. This entire phenomenon shows the extent to which diaspora studies has evolved.

However, considering the grave concern about the evolution of the term diaspora and the probability of losing grasp of the initial touch with the concept of diaspora, a dialectic method is necessary in conducting a study on literary works associated with the diaspora. For that purpose, in this study, I propose to ask about 1) in what ways literary works by recent diaspora groups (non-Jewish diaspora groups) can be categorized as diasporic literature, and 2) what themes related to the diaspora experience they bring to the table. With this dialectic movement, the term diaspora shall not lose its origin while at the same time it can develop. Additionally, regarding the core value of understanding a diaspora literature, i.e. to pave the way for mutual understanding across cultures, diaspora literature also needs to embody this relationship or attempt to make that relation.

DISCUSSION

American-Dervish: Literature as a Criticism against the Diaspora

The South Asian diaspora in the United States comprises of immigrants whom we can put into the category of trade diaspora. According to Kamal Sridhar (Kachru, Kachru, and Sridhar, 2008, p. 516), there are three big waves of immigration by South Asian people to the United States. The first one took place during British colonization, at the end of the nineteenth century, in which people from the province of Punjab migrated to the West Coast of the United States to work in farms. The second wave was the influx of South Asian immigrants after the 1965 Immigration Reform which lifted the quota for people

from countries other than Northern European countries. Many of the South Asian immigrants from this second wave were skilled laborers or students who were to work in American companies. The third wave included “relatives of the post-1965 arrivals, who were not as highly educated, were non-professionals, and were employed in professions ranging from motel owners to blue collar workers”. This third group will be central to our discussion of the novel selected for this article.

This big diaspora community—3.44 million -strong according to the 2010 census — can be broken down into several groups based on their modern nation-state origins: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Bhutanese, and Maldivian. While all these South Asian diaspora communities have their own traditions and unique aspects, the Pakistani community deserves a special attention on a different level. Although the number of Pakistani immigrants in the United States is *only* the second largest after that of the Pakistani immigrant in the Middle Eastern countries combined, this group sends the highest remittance to their homeland, thanks to their professions. In terms of religious affiliation, however, the Pakistani immigrants who are almost all Muslim find a significant challenge both from within the community and from external factors. There is an increasing number of cultural representations of such challenges among the Pakistani diaspora, ranging from comic book to poetry.

American Dervish, a novel by Pakistani-American author and playwright, fits well in the category of diaspora literature. *American Dervish* addresses an audience outside its diaspora while at the same time criticizing the Pakistani diaspora community, from which the author comes. The novel is a *bildungsroman* that follows the development of Hayat, the narrator; however, Hayat’s development follows the life of Mina, a bright Pakistani woman who comes to the United States with her son to flee from her looming misfortune in her homeland. Having been physically abused by her ex-husband and his family and divorced

without any reason right after giving birth, Mina hopes the United States can make a good escape from the imminent threat of having her son claimed by her husband and a good opportunity to start life anew and guarantee her son’s education. She has the chance to taste the American dream and has a prospect of marrying an American man—Jewish by descent but is considering conversion. Unfortunately, a series of misfortunes take place and by the end of the novel, Mina dies after living through a harsh life of physical abuse and mental abuse by her husband with dervish-like acceptance, all for the sake of securing a good life for her son. The narrator’s consciousness as a Pakistani individual also develops along with the twist and turn of Mina’s life.

American Dervish captures well the demography of South Asian diaspora, especially the second and third waves. The novel is peopled by Pakistani professionals and their families. Most of these professionals include doctors, pharmacists, and specialists of various fields. In addition to highlighting the life of Pakistani professionals who have come to the U.S. following Immigration Reform, the novel also puts forward the figure of Mina, who migrates to the United States thanks to sponsorship by a relative (in this case Hayat’s mother, Mina’s best friend) who later finds an employment in a hair salon, thus representing a significant portion of Pakistani diaspora in the United States (*Pakistani Americans*, n.d.). Populated by characters that closely represent the demography of South Asian diaspora, the novel has a valid ground even for the critique against the idea of diaspora.

The novel depicts another common feature in the diaspora community, the collective memory of homeland, which the novel criticizes. For Pakistani immigrants in the U.S., homeland is a so far yet very close. This is because the community always recreates whenever an opportunity presents itself. In *American Dervish*, the physical location that resembles an ethnic enclave, where the collective memory of homeland is celebrated, is the

mosque; in the mosque, the members of the Pakistani diaspora in this novel meet. The other place where the collective memory of homeland is reenacted is the big gatherings, such as wedding ceremonies. Although the novel does not really have a scene of returning to Pakistan—which is quite a common scene in novels by South Asian American writers—the mosques and the wedding reception are strong enough to evoke the sense of hometown. This is the space where the members of the diaspora meet, conduct the things that they can do comfortably only in Pakistan. William Safran calls this kind of surrogate homeland a *virtual home*, a term he uses to refer to the summer camps organized by the American Jews in ‘safe rural US settings’ (Cohen, 2008, p. 12). However, in the case of *American Dervish*, these virtual homes are also the sites where what is aberrant according to the homeland culture is corrected. In *American Dervish*, these wrongs include the prospect of Mina’s marrying a Jewish man and Hayat’s reciting the Quran in English, instead of in the original Arabic.

Instead of celebrating these virtual homelands, the novel portrays the mosque and the wedding reception negatively. The mosque becomes a site where Quranic passages are misinterpreted. The imam or the religious leader confuses God’s disdain for the aberrant biblical Jews and the treasonous Jews in Muhammad’s time for God’s contempt for all Jews in any era without exception. To make things even worse, the imam goes on to argue that the atrocity of the Zionists is but another instance of the contemptuous nature of the Jewish people (Akhtar, 2012, p. 198). This anti-Semitic speech eventually leads to Nathan’s disappointment with the community, which he finds contradictory to the religion he has read and been considering to convert into. To him, this confirms the persistent anti-Semitism in the society, even the Muslim society. The Mosque, which is supposed to be a place where the diasporic Pakistanis find their makeshift homeland, becomes a place where misinterpretation takes place and hatred is preached. The depiction of the wedding scene

has the same effect, although to a lesser degree. Hayat, who has been working hard to memorize the Quran, is embarrassed in public when it is revealed that all this time he has been memorizing the Quran in English, under the guidance of his progressive aunt. Generally, a Muslim man or woman is considered a *hafiz* or a memorizer of the Quran memorizes the original Arabic, whether or not he or she understands the meaning. In this scene, Hayat’s memorization of the English translation of the Quran—which has also led him to think deeply of the nature of interreligious relationship—is juxtaposed to the *standard* memorization of the Quran by another Muslim teenager who does not even appear to believe in religion. The audience, ironically, appreciates the standard memorizer of the Quran. Again, this juxtaposition is a direct criticism for the tendency to celebrate the superficial aspect of religion as opposed to its spirituality and liberatory aspects. By extension, consistent with the criticism against the mosque, the novel also criticizes the wedding ceremony which provides the occasion for this incident. It is probably not a coincidence that the novel does not feature any homecoming scene—a scene which is quite common in diaspora literature. The novel itself, unlike the Pakistani diaspora community depicted in it, seems to be of the opinion that migration should only be followed up with other forward-oriented movements; instead of returning to the homeland, the next possible stage is adapting to the ways of the adopted land. We shall find further explanation for this soon.

Also related to the collective memory about the homeland discussed above is the ethnic group consciousness that is also subject to critique in the novel. Within the Pakistani diaspora, religious heritage is what binds them all together—Pakistan itself is a country established as a space for the Muslims of British India. It is natural that this aspect of identity is inseparable from the Pakistani individuals. But that is also a subject to suspicion in *American Dervish*. Hayat the narrator himself comes from a Muslim family that does not appear to care much for the daily practice of religion.

Practically, the only practicing Muslim in Hayat's household is Mina, who is not even a biological member/ part of the family. While not practicing the religion on a regular basis, Hayat's mother, Muneer, is concerned about Hayat's identity as a Muslim (thus Pakistani). She does not appear to be knowledgeable about Islam; ironically, however, her personal opinion about Muslim men, whom she deems unable to *treat their woman well* (Akhtar, 2012, p. 61), is valid within the scope of this novel. Mina's ex-husband was abusive and Mina's new husband, Sunil, is a sociopath who at one point goes as far as brandishing his pistol before giving orders on the dining table (Akhtar, 2012, p. 333). Even the Ghaleb Catha, one of the most prestigious donors of the local mosque also beats his wife occasionally. This representation of Muslim men as violent—and one non-Muslim man who shows affection and respect—is so consistent that it looks like a caricature. The explanation for this can be found in the fact that this novel is about Hayat's journey leaving the religion, an action that is made clear when the novel opens when Hayat as a college student eats pork without guilt, even feeling liberated. Being a Muslim, as Hayat's father explains, means living “by rules others give you” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 318), from which he has been running away. This is Hayat's story about people that Hayat's father hates, a story of people who “don't understand why they came [to the United States], or what they came [to the United States] for” (Akhtar, 2012, p. 319). Only if we see this story along with its complete frame, seeing it as a troubled witness of the diaspora experience, that we can appreciate this novel not as a confirmation of any negative stereotypes of Muslim men but as a story of an individual who has a unique life.

The Pakistani community in *American Dervish*, as commonly found in various real-life diaspora communities, is also portrayed to have an apparent troubled relationship with the host country, both its community as well as its system. The members of diaspora communities, who hold on to the customs and systems of belief carried over from their

homelands, often find it difficult to accept the American customs and systems. This is especially the case with first generation immigrants who have been raised and educated, going through the formative stage of their lives, in their homelands. However, their rejection of the U.S. systems is problematic, as this diaspora group consists of people who come to the United States for a better life opportunity, thus implying their view of the superiority of the United States. In *American Dervish*, we can see the manifestation of this tendency in the majority of the Pakistani community members. The most apparent example can be found in the mosque community, here represented by the male members. In a dinner table scene—which is a classic site for ideological debates in many literary works—the men discuss capitalism. However, instead of pinpointing the fundamental problems with capitalism, the discussion is marked with religious sentiments, such as mistaking Weber's ‘protestant ethics’ for Christianity as the origin of capitalism (Akhtar, 2012, pp. 210–212). Their contempt for capitalism stems from, and is justified by, their faith. The complication happens when the discussion turns to the subject of interest—which the most successful immigrant, Ghaleb Chatha, claims to have been invented by Jews. Ghaleb Chatha, a successful businessman who owns several pharmacies, has himself use interest loans to make his success possible. Questioned about the fact that he has also benefited from interest loan, Ghaleb Chatha claims that it is the only way to survive and feed his family in the United States, not acknowledging his own desire for wealth. This scene is representative of the community's attitude towards assimilation with the host country. The reader can find smaller examples of this insularity throughout the novel, including Hayat's mother's insistence on not letting Hayat attend an *ice cream social* because it is organized by a church next to Hayat's school. This is different instance of insularity, coming from an open-minded woman married to an assimilative husband who wants to run away from his background as discussed above.

In addition to the treatment of diaspora issue related to the Pakistani diaspora community, *American Dervish* also portrays the host country's harsh treatment of the diaspora members. While the novel focuses heavily on the Pakistani diaspora community, the novel also presents a few depictions of the relationship between the diaspora people and the mainstream American society. The one incident that stands out is one about Jason Blum, a Jewish schoolmate of Hayat, who is bullied by his friends in a very nasty scene that one can call juvenile delinquency as much as outright racism (Akhtar, 2012, p. 133). The students in this heavily Christian mid-west public-school bully Jason, probably because he says something to the effect that 'Jesus had a death wish' as opposed to the common belief among the Christians that the Jews of Bethlehem reported him to the Romans. This one incident, ironically involving a member of another diaspora community instead of the narrator's own diaspora community, serves to acknowledge the fact that the challenge to assimilation might not be only from the diaspora communities themselves, but also from the reluctance of the host society to accept newcomers from a different culture, especial those coming from a different faith system.

With its combined depictions of immigrants who come to the United States hoping for better lives, of their constant recreation of the homeland in the distant land, and of the tension between their value system and the host country's system, *American Dervish* is a strong example of a diaspora literary work, although it does not appear to be one that celebrate the diaspora experience. Its treatment of the Pakistani Muslim community and the theme of assimilation is comparable to *Portnoy's Complaint* depiction of a Jewish family. Not only does the novel portray the immigration of individuals from an old country to the new country and how their lives are affected in the new environment, it also espouses the spirit of the immigrants to root themselves in the new country, some by holding on to their values some others staunchly believing in a total assimilation.

Green Card: Literature as a Witness of the Diaspora

If South Asian diaspora communities in the United States are well-studied, Indonesian diaspora is rather unheard of in the American context. In fact, diaspora as a term to refer to Indonesians or people of Indonesian descents in the United States is quite new, making headlines around the 2010s prior to the Congress of Indonesian Diaspora in Los Angeles in 2012, as discussed above. The phenomena of Indonesian immigrants living outside Indonesia, however, have been around for centuries, such as the forced migration of agricultural *coolies* from Java (then under the Dutch East Indies) to Suriname, the interisland migration of people from Sulawesi to the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as people from the migration of people from Sumatra and Java to Malaysia (then under British East Indies) in the early twentieth century. The more recent cases of Indonesian diaspora are those who were abroad during the failed *coup d'etat* of 1965 and were unable to return to Indonesia due to their affiliation with the Communist Party of Indonesia, which was charged, according to the recently-debated official history of Indonesia, as the perpetrator of the bloody *coup d'etat* and its aftermath (Hoadley, 2005, pp. 10–11). This last group fits into Cohen's ideal type of *de-territorialized diaspora*. Most of the members of this particular generation of Indonesian exiles live in China and European countries.

In the United States, there are currently about 60 thousand migrants from Indonesia. However, unlike many other diaspora communities who have their ethnic enclaves, such as China Towns, Little Indias, Tehrangeles, and other places where groups of immigrant communities live together, Indonesian immigrants in the United States do not have a specific area where they share a space as such. However, Indonesian immigrants in the United States also share the common features of a diaspora community, i.e. the emotional and material connections to their homeland. They reportedly send money to Indonesia, which also contributes to the economy. In fact, one

of the most important topics in the Congress of Indonesian Diaspora was to encourage more participation of Indonesian diaspora in the national economy. With regards to the emotional attachment to the homeland, I happen to have also witnessed in person—as a member of Indonesian community in Northwest Arkansas—the eagerness with which people of Indonesian descents or first generation immigrants from Indonesia celebrate Indonesia’s Independence Day every year, make regular visits to Indonesia (which for Cohen can be an alternative to returning to the ancestral homeland for good), and attend various gatherings for religious and personal events, as is common among South Asian immigrant communities.

To date, no literary works by members of the Indonesian diaspora with stories of immigrant experiences have made a significant presence in the United States. In other places, we can find Dewi Anggraeni in Australia and Karin Amatmoekrim in Suriname. However, literary works about diaspora experience in the United States by people of Indonesian origin or ancestry can be found in the Indonesian language. This body of literature also includes works that portray the strong emotional attachment between the diasporic Indonesians and their homeland, such as Dani Sirait’s *Green Card*, Kuntowijoyo’s *American Dream*, Iwan Setiawan’s *9 Summers 10 Autumns*, Umar Kayam’s *Fireflies in Manhattan*, and several others. However, the mere fact that they are written in Indonesian—and thus presented to Indonesian readership—prevents them from being perfect equivalents for diaspora literature in the United States. According to the definition of diaspora literature that I previously proposed, Indonesian literature in the diaspora can only be diaspora literature to a certain degree, unlike Arab American or South Asian American literature. Thematically, Indonesian literature in the diaspora fits into the category of diaspora literature, as they talk about the dispersion (by force or voluntary), the persistent memory about home, idealization of homeland, ethnic group consciousness, distinctness from host countries, and so

on. In terms of the relationship to the different culture(s) in the host country, however, Indonesian literature in the diaspora cannot be considered diaspora literature. It does not attempt to make any relationship to the host country, unless probably when they are translated and published by American publishers. Among this body of literature, *Green Card* is a new comer that potentially contributes something new in the discussion of diaspora literature.

Green Card provides a window to see an uncharted territory of the Indonesian diaspora in the United States. The novel follows the story of Rafli, an Indonesian man of late twenties who is so determined to make a better livelihood that he jumps off a cruise ship, leaving his immigration documents in his employer’s possession, to work and stay for good in the United States, albeit illegally. Realizing that his only salvation is the status of permanent resident, he takes a difficult option: a sham marriage with a green card holder who almost makes his resources run dry. The story ends with Rafli’s returning home to Indonesia, after failing to get the coveted Green Card. Rafli’s story mirrors the fate of the undocumented immigrants from Indonesia who have been living under the radar, hiding from the American immigration authorities and reluctant to associate with people from the Indonesian embassy. This novel serves as a reminder that there are stories about people who fight for difficult life but are eventually forced to succumb to reality. And this reminder comes at the right time, when Indonesian book market is flooded with the so-called *motivation literature*—novels, memoirs, or autobiographies that are explicitly aimed to motivate their readers and teach morals. The novel begins with an introduction in which the author invites the audience to read the lives of Indonesian people struggling in their day to day life half the globe away from their homes.

Green Card portrays the demography of Indonesian diaspora in the United States and, more importantly, injects an authentic Indonesian spirit to the idea of diaspora. Rafli’s determination to earn a living in the United

States is made possible not only by the desire for a better life, but also fueled by a tradition of the people living along the coast of Sumatra: making a life in a foreign land, or *merantau* (which literally means *to wander* or *out-migration*). *Merantau* is believed to be a necessary stage in the life of male members of ethnic groups in the region. Rafli himself, while ethnically Javanese, was born and grew up in the island of Sumatra, which makes him follow this tradition. Rafli is determined to live far from home, no matter how hard it might seem. For Rafli, the United States is not his first *rantau* (destination for the migration). He has tried to luck in Batam, an Indonesian island just across the strait from Singapore, an attempt that did not go well for him. This awareness and acceptance of the potential difficulty of living away from home and his dream of earning more money than he can make in his homeland eventually leads to his determination to take any means necessary to reach the American soil. Rafli's diaspora life is different from the other members of the Indonesian diaspora who are typical diaspora characters, professionals, refugees, and intellectuals. There is an almost spiritual dimension in Rafli's immigration.

Similar to the Pakistani immigrants of *American Dervish*, the Indonesian diaspora of *Green Card* also has its own ways of creating a makeshift homeland. *Green Card* shows the collective tendency of Indonesian societies through a small restaurant in Queens called Warteg Java. In Indonesian, *warteg* refers to roadside food stalls where people, mostly the working-class, have meals or drinks and spend a long time chatting. Some people, such as rickshaw drivers or taxi drivers, even use food stalls as a place to wait for their customers. Among the Indonesian community in *Green Card*, Warteg Java serves as a meeting point for Indonesian immigrants, especially those who work in informal sectors, doing manual labors. Warteg Java is also a place where Rafli finds solace and solution. When his fake wife has been apprehended by the authority for the fake marriage, which makes Rafli literally a partner in crime, Warteg Java is the place

where he and Wahyu, the best friend whom Rafli has met for the first time in Warteg Java, weighs his options. This takes up an entire chapter called *Saving Rafli*, which eventually leads to Rafli's going to Philadelphia to find a possible hideaway from the authority. The nostalgia of homeland is fulfilled, for the low-class Indonesian immigrants, through the presence of Warteg Java, which has a strong air of a communal space where people meet for the conversation, information, and probably solution of their problems. The Indonesian Mosque, with an imam who saves Rafli from a police officer who now has the authority to check one's immigration documents, also serves as a virtual home, to use Safran's term. Unlike *American Dervish*, which describes places of this sort negatively, *Green Card* celebrates these places as a home away from home.

However, although the portrayal of diaspora life of the low-class immigrant is almost celebratory, *Green Card* does not treat an established life in the diaspora as the final goal. The novel ends with Rafli's failure to achieve his dream of living in the US and eventually return to Indonesia. However, there is something else in it. While it is crucial for him to earn more money than he can make in Indonesia, it does not mean that the failure to achieve it makes his life a failure. It seems that the effort to realize that dream, the journey or *merantau*, is an end in itself. *Merantau* is the actual rite of passage that enriches a person. This explains why Rafli is not so much heartbroken when he eventually has to leave his dream of obtaining a Green Card and returns to Indonesia.

If only. If only. Yet... Rafli reminded himself that this is a rite of passage that he has to go through. He had to go home now, not as a defeated warrior, but as a man who had done all he could to achieve his dream, by all means necessary (Sirait, 2014, p. 232).

For Rafli, going to the United States alone is good enough. The fact about Rafli's illegitimate ways to obtain a permanent resident

card also indicates the novel's impartiality about immigration. The fake marriage plot fails badly after Rafli has given Erina, his fake wife, thousands of dollars, the money that he could have saved and sent home. His other plan, i.e. applying for a political asylum by claiming to be an Acehnese, people from a province of Indonesia that was under military operation during the time of the novel, never materializes because of Erina's apprehension for sham marriage. *Green Card* cares more about Rafli's integrity than his success by violating the law of the land. The final scene is so telling of this attitude:

At John F. Kennedy International Airport, Rafli looked at the fake Green Card in his hand, the card that he had been keeping in his pocket all time. He felt that super card. Then, in a blink of an eye, he flicked it off, aiming at a trash can, and walked off towards the entry gate (Sirait, 2014, p. ?).

For *Green Card*, Rafli has fulfilled his duty to try a foreign land, has completed a stage in his life, although it turns out that this land does not accept him, just as Batam that has not given him what he wanted. Rafli is off to yet another journey, another *rantau*. Casting a fake green card to a trash can is a dramatic scene that is almost caricatural to represent the realization of a more authentic way of life to which the man character needs to return.

Opposite Poles of Diasporic Experiences

Both works discussed above share several traits, including the presence of shared homeland and reaction towards acculturation. *American Dervish* delves into the problems commonly faced by second and third generation immigrants from Pakistan in the United States. Pakistani Americans, mostly considered trade diaspora, in this novel appear as such with depictions of their successes in their respective trades. The community chosen for this group includes well-off families that also go further by helping their relatives from back home to come to the United States to also try their luck. However, problems that these

characters experience are inseparable from the elements that are common in their Pakistani homeland. As discussed above, such problems include the more patriarchal society (which is not unique to Pakistan) and exclusivist interpretation of Islam. To the main character who seems to believe in acculturation and abandonment of cultural baggage, such problems are supposed to be done with. Seen from the resolution of the conflict in the novel, as discussed above, it appears that the novel tends to argue that a critical distance from the tradition of cultural homeland is necessary in the diasporic experience. However, this is not to say that one should purge their cultural baggage. The term *American dervish*, which is also the title of the novel, represents such embrace of the culture of the adopted land and preservation of values from the cultural homeland.

Meanwhile, *Green Card* offers a different story of diasporic experience, in which nostalgia for the homeland prevails over the ways of the adopted land. After narrating the struggle that the main character has to wage to achieve his dream of becoming a legal permanent resident in the United States, the novel closes with returning to the core value that underlies the concept of outmigration in Sumatran societies. At the end of the day, the novel might argue, what matters is the process of living away from the homeland. It is not a financial success or cultural success that matters, it is the fact that one has lived in a foreign land and taken all efforts to survive that is truly valuable. Thus, for this novel, the homeland is strongly present. The presence of a café for Indonesian people is important to orient the diaspora. It serves as a home away from home.

These two works represent two different spirits among people in the diaspora. On the one hand, there are two who migrate not because of any impending cause but because of the presence of opportunity to lead a better life. On the other hand, there are those who chose to migrate because of the prospect of a better life although they neither have an impending cause nor secure the capability for it. The former of this group appear to be ready

to delve into a further embrace of the ways of the adopted land. As for the latter, they appear to still hold tight to the values of the homeland, thus embodying nostalgia and having little stake at the ways of the adopted land. This latter group is open to further definition of diaspora.

CONCLUSION

The term diaspora has evolved widely, from its original use to its new meaning in the global era. If initially it referred exclusively to the mythical dispersal of Jewish people after the destruction of Solomon's Temple, diaspora can now, as used in the media, refer to practically all communities outside their homelands. Social scientists, however, have proposed to redefine this term in order that it does not lose its importance while making it useful for the postmodern context. William Safran turns to the Jewish diaspora as the ideal type of diaspora. For Safran, a transnational community qualifies as a diaspora when it shares several characteristics with the Jewish diaspora. Meanwhile, Robin Cohen stretches Safran's compromise even further by using the current diaspora communities as ideal types, therefore including those who involuntary leave their homelands for better lives. I am inclined to use Cohen's proposition as a fundamental feature that a diaspora literature must have. However, since diaspora is comprised not only of the process of migration but also the double relationship with the various other culture(s), as recent theories propose, then diaspora literature must also embody the relationship with other cultures outside its diaspora community, in addition to portraying diaspora experiences. Based on this conception, *American Dervish* and *Green Card* can be described as works with diverse qualities as diaspora literature. *American Dervish* is unquestionably a diaspora work, although it offers a strongly critical portrayal of the Pakistani diaspora. As for *Green Card*, it is not fully a diaspora literature, although it carries diaspora themes. The fact that it is exclusively addressed to the Indonesian audience in Indonesia makes it lack the relationship that a full-

fledged diaspora literature needs to have. However, they all can help us perceive the multifarious experiences and problems of individuals living in the United States in a way only they can do. They all help us know imaginatively the 'unexpected passengers' of the diaspora vessel in the American context.

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