

Re-visioning the Diasporic Dilemma: Narrating 'Home' and Composite Identities

Abstract

The notion of 'Home' is central to the diasporic signifying practices and the process of transnationality. An immense critical analysis has been devoted to analyse how diasporic transnational migration unsettles the notion of home in all its modality and multiple attachments in the different level of mobility, location and dislocation. The composite identities which are evolved as a result of diverse diasporisation is a ceaseless process in which the diasporic individuals fail to streamline themselves in any of the cultures they have experienced before triggering the emergence of a disconcerted space of multilocational belonging. The paper is an attempt to recapture these shifting cultural and transnational connections which impact and shape the framework of identity formation subverting the fixed and stable notion of diasporic community that dramatically challenges the reductive dialectics of methodical homogenization.

Keywords: Identity, Home, Diaspora, Space, Belonging, Deterritorialization

Introduction

In its most inclusive connotation diaspora involves the displacement of numerous communities across the world from their original geographical location to another land elsewhere in the globe. The resulting spatial movements emphasize the centrality of the commitment to the homeland as a prime informing feature in the identity formation of the diasporic individuals. Human history is replete with the horrors of displacement and endless quests for home in a new cosmo-cultural configuration. The dislocations and displacements with a keen 'homing desire' help develop in the diasporic subjects an urge to reproduce the way of life in a new setting that is elemental to their homeland which inaugurates in the diasporic consciousness a sense of utter rootlessness in the nostalgic recapitulation of a remote past.

Aim of the Study

The research aims to relocate the variable forms of relationality between and across diasporic formations in the framework of transhistorical representations generating a confluence of narratives reproduced through composite configuration of individuality which exists as a cutting edge of cultural translation and negotiation to conjure up ambivalent images of homeland as the need for reimagining the possibilities of belonging.

Review of Literature

James Clifford in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* takes travel and its difficult counterpart translation, as envisioning a complex modernity. He narrates a world ever more connected yet heterogeneous, which emerges as an unfinished series of questions and negotiations, struggling to escape the inescapable tasks of translation through cultural encounters. Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* reviews the concept of identity which is viewed as a creative condition for negotiation and articulation- an in-between space of cultural translation. Thus, diasporic transformations resist a sense of cultural impurity and inaugurate a fluid rhetoric of cultural reproduction. Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* seeks to emphasize the non-essentiality of the cultural content in the specificity of diasporic positions and attempts to situate this in a postmodern condition of cultural translation in the framework of a relational and strictly anti-hierarchical structure. Rosemary Marangoly George in *The Politics of Home* addresses



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the disparate relocations that are accomplished in fiction written in English by evaluating the shifting contours of 'home' in such narratives. Stuart Hall's essay on "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" attends to the problematics of identity construction in the postmodern diasporic world. Hall begins the essay with deconstructing the cultural stereotypes of the black subject. Hall, in his essay, describes two definitions of "cultural identity"- the first emphasizes commonalities amongst a group in terms of essentialist representation and the second definition lays emphasis on the similarities with differences amongst an imaginary cultural group, bringing out the socio-historical contingency of identity and belonging.

Text

Formation of homes in a diasporic space entails a haunting spectrality of reminiscences which is allied with the hope of reconfiguring the psycho-geographical boundaries of the inner landscape through the ways of negotiation and reinvention. The location of the diasporic individuals, therefore, is presented as a phantasmal condition "where the political unreality of one's present home is to be surpassed only by the ontological unreality of one's place of origin" (Radhakrishnan 175).

Anh Hua in "Diaspora and Cultural Memory" develops a multicultural model of diasporic counter-memorialization to examine the diverse patterns of remembrance in migrant communities. Hua argues that the displaced diasporas are endowed with a dual perspective of interactive existence between locations and find "the politics of diasporic spaces" as "contradictory and multi-accented" (195) which are thoroughly "heterogeneous and contested sites differentiated by gender, class, sexual orientation, generation differences, language access, historical experiences and geographical locations" (204). The urge to construct new set of norms to live in a new home then acts "as a catalyst for self-recovery and community building" (Hua 203). In such a diasporic contemplation memory can serve as a survival strategy to sustain social justice, by recalling the forgotten or suppressed to bear witness; yet, it is a strategy that needs seeing "the past as conflictual, evidence as problematic, all questions as suspect" (Matsuda 15). The diasporic subjects are thus caught between ambivalent dynamic desires for an unseen paradise with its own firmly grounded cultural paradigms which is lost or powerless to be reborn and an urge to be assimilated completely with the newly evolved cultural norms of an alternative home.

The notion of home is not a fixed entity and depends on the struggling individual's shifting definition of the inner or outer barriers and the kind of territoriality that has crept into his/her life. The main focus of this study then is to explore these discursive dispositions in the presentment of home and homeland which becomes a transcendental code to be invented and reinvented over and over again by a subjective fabrication and refurbishment of identity. Similarly, Mohamad Hafezi develops and distinguishes two types of categories for the notion of home. The first dislocation which he labelled as

geographical is based on rigidly demarcated physical boundaries evocative of mystified and glorifying accounts of the past which he safely termed as "exilic", the second, he rightly calls "diasporic" which is rather transnational in dismantling the shadowed lines of estrangement and becomes "a constructed space in the present through contacts, memories and activities" (8). Home in this sense may be re-assembled through transactive interaction of past, present and future. For the exilic writers, memorialisation of home "create a ground of creativity and invention exactly because of its remoteness, intangibility and inaccessibility" (Hafezi 135) for they are haunted by an enamoured hope of return to the homeland till they find it disappointing to discover that their remotely imagined portrait of homeland is far gloomier than their present home in the new location they ever dreamt of. Exilic home or identity in this case is mimetic reproduction and re-enactment of a modified version of reality that is elemental to the detached homeland which results in a distorted and fantasised representation traced in the exilic authors.

Conversely, diasporic sensibility is characterised by a "weakening of memory and a dispersion and rupture of identity, twilight of oblivion. Therefore, an ethics of exile is conservative, while an ethics of diaspora is progressive, i.e. open to the possibility of change and non-mimetic" (Hafezi 147). Hence the exilic subjects of diasporas nourish a solidified image of the homeland evolving a stigmatised presentation of precedent, ancestral home unlike the diasporic subjectivity which is languorously liberated from the shades of absolutist prejudices resorting to the formulation of fluxing, disintegrated sets of images of the fluctuating past that encompasses and involves a universal, humane, deconstructed sense of belonging.

These wistful trans-historical projections conjured up an array of refabricated homing possibilities. Since, memory has a crucial role to play in ensuring access to the remote past in restoring the lost identity, diaspora memory texts are replete with socially constructed images and metaphors of the past, imaginary homes and diasporic desires. The term diaspora traditionally evokes imagery of rupture, the relentless ways by which immigrants construct, reconstruct and deconstruct the self-images of their homes and identities in the new cultural set up they inhabit. It is the process by which they abandon with anxiety the old ways of life and adapt themselves to change, painfully learning and internalizing a new way of life and culture. Immigrants having uprooted themselves from their older societies, thus, absorbingly endeavour to reinvent new homes recalling other homes miles away.

Defining diaspora, in this global context recently has been made increasingly complicated because of the mass mobilization and dispersion in large scale, and multiple dislocations and displacements worldwide. However, all notions of diasporas involve the idea of identity and belonging which are constructed in disparate ways flexibly in relation to the space the displaced individuals wish to

reconstruct. As James Clifford writes in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, “multi-locale diasporas are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary” as they tend to consciously misconstrue a “principled ambivalence about physical return and attachment to land” (246-48). This points out to the fact that such diasporic formulations include shared feeling of alienation and homogenizing identification with a spatial collectivity. The first generation diasporic sensibility comprises a strong nostalgic re-enactment of home which Steven Vertovec defines as “diaspora consciousness” that is “marked by dual or multiple identifications” (450). Hence, there is a presentment of the diasporic individuals as experiencing “decentred attachments, of being simultaneously ‘home away from home’, ‘here and there’” where majority of people live the life of multiple identities “that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Vertovec 450-51). The second generation shared a ‘transnational consciousness’ rather than diasporic because they are not rigidly fixated in a singular space of identification or experienced major traumatic dispersion and helped effect an inclined movement towards a transnational identity formation. Hence, the second generation challenges the essentializing properties of home and identity and maintains little or no attachment to any place choosing to be global nomads transcending the constricted nationalist space. As forcefully put by Arif Dirlik in *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism*:

The new Diasporas have relocated their self there and other here and consequently” borders and boundaries have been confounded. And the flow has become at one homogenizing; some groups share in common global culture regardless of location while others take refuge in cultural legacies that are far apart from one another as they were at the origin of modernity. (352)

The diverse forms of displacement over the globe have projected different transactive interactions which permeates the experiences of diasporic individuals in the transgressive dialectics of border-crossing. Bhabha in his *Location of Culture* revisits the concept of identity which is viewed as a productive condition for negotiation and articulation- an in-between space of cultural translation. Thus, diasporic transpositions endure a sense of cultural impurity and resort to a fluxing shift of cultural representations (2). Bhabha in *Location of Culture* develops the model of “third space” (56) as an act of pure enunciation of cultural fragmentation. He focuses on the spatio-temporal dimensions of cultural analysis which defies the logic of synchronicity assumed by the traditional method of cultural evaluation. The evolution of the ‘third space’, therefore, destroys the symmetrical representation of cultural formation as fixed and static. It deconstructs the historical identity of cultural identification as homogenizing, unifying and absolute force. For this reason, Bhabha contends that the in-between third space occupied by the diasporic individual is stuffed with creative possibilities, “It is the

space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence” (*Location of Culture* 12). Thus diasporisation challenges the territorial form of nation-state and questions the rubrics of nation, nationalism and cultural homogenization:

The marginal or ‘minority’ is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity- progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past- that rationalize the authoritarian ‘normalizing’ tendencies within culture in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. (Bhabha *Nation and Narration* 4)

In a similar vein, Patchett’s paper “‘Corpus Cartography’: Diasporic Identity as Flesh and Blood” evolves a dualistic concept of diasporic identity as based on the dichotomy of homeland/hostland dialectics which recognizes the persistence of dislocated composite identity which can be the site of multiple fragmented possibilities (1). Patchett devises the definition of a ‘Corpus Cartography’ as a discursive structure of the body’s situatedness which poses a rhizomatic challenge to post-modernity, “thus contemplating the potential for a new way of thinking about diasporic identity” (65). Patchett uses the concept of rhizomatic cartography to demonstrate the degree of diasporic conditionality by which the body as corpus can be measured by the mind. Negotiative permeability of diasporic identity is, therefore, defined by the principles of connection that comprises only lines, but not points or positions: “I am taking corpus to mean both performative body acting out the discursive conditions of diaspora, as well as the body in circuitry within which subjects in a diasporic group must perform and embody multiple and connective lines of flight (Patchett 52).

Diasporaization has long been a part of human civilization and entailed the creation of multiple identities and affiliations. The intermingled condition of cultures opens up new routes and modes of speculation for the diasporic individual and collective identities which subverts the stereotyped experiences of uprootedness, displacement and dislocation. Diasporic situations inhabit liminal, interstitial spaces with an inter-subjective approach and outlook which reconstitute the dislocated diasporan as hyphenated, hybrid individuals. As different from the organic hybridity which is natural, it affects a self-reflective resufflement of existing properties which is the result of negotiative contestation among its informing elements. The fluidity of identity is thus reaffirmed as a contingent upon the refigurement and reconfiguration of the displaced identity. As remarked by Stuart Hall, in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, the diasporic sensibility is defined not by essence or purity but by the recognition of an evolving heterogeneity and diversity; hybrid and diaspora identities “are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (58). Displaced and uprooted from a

familiar engagement the diasporas are suspended between a mutilated memory of the past and a desire to recreate new memories for the future by a discursive encounter with an incommensurable presence. They give an open outlet to these simmering fragmentations by a constant movement from reality to fiction to invent new realities of life. The Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno astutely observes:

Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself. His language is expropriated, and the historical dimension sapped. The isolation is made worse by the formation of closed and politically controlled groups, mistrustful of their members, hostile to these branded different. (33)

Paul Gilroy in his discussion in *The Black Atlantic* assumes epistemic centralities of diasporic theory and is convinced of the ceaseless process of transcultural becoming that is evolved as a result of enforced migration or otherwise (1-40). Gilroy conceives the position of the black Atlantic as a theoretical vehicle for an exclusively transnational and intercultural approach which thrives on the constitutive fluidity of being and becoming, emphasising the significance of 'routes' or dynamism of movement rather than one of 'roots' or originary establishment in a remote land of identification (*The Black Atlantic* 87). The displacement, multiple dislocations and relocations challenge the traditional essentialist notion of cultural configurations as being fixed and unified, rooted in a specific cultural condition. By crossing the shadowed lines of delimiting borders, the diasporic individuals carry their transnationality to translate themselves into fresh cultural terrains of multiple possibilities in which identity is viewed as an evolving process of becoming. Through the metaphors of journey they conjure up new meanings for these cultural complexities recasting the sensory realities in the fragmented universe of disparate histories, nationalities and cultures. Paul Gilroy's model of a ship is used as presenting this dynamic transitivity of evolving diasporic existence. Gilroy observes "the image of the ship- a living, micro cultural, micro political system in motion effectively captures the transnationality and intercultural relations, the exchange of ideas and activism" (*The Black Atlantic* 24). This amalgamated sense of identification lands the diasporas in absolute placelessness which is amply reflected in their fictional projections that bear witness to this 'inbetweenness' or 'nowhereness'. The immigrant positions in this homeless conditionality struggle for a place in the new location which Uma Parameswaran describes in her paper "Contextualizing Diasporic Location" as a Trishanku-like existence in the liminality of space. Her allusion to the mythical king Trishanku who stays suspended between heaven and earth for his ambivalent desires invokes the image of a bifurcated locality as a symbol of diasporic disposition (135) as the individuals of diaspora want to locate a space that exists in

ceaseless continuity as well as in "selected discontinuities" (Mishra 441).

Gilroy's description of the diaspora as a space "marked out by flows" ("Diaspora and the Detours of Identity" 328) implies the global dynamism of disparate 'flows' of peoples, cultures, ideals, and institution which is developed into an all-inclusive notion of cultural citizenship in the dramatic politicization of transformative identity formation. As Gilroy puts it in "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity", diasporic consciousness "stands opposed to the distinctively modern structures and modes of power orchestrated by the institutional complexity of nation-states. Diaspora identification exists outside of and sometimes in opposition to the political norms and codes of modern citizenship" (328-329). The spatial configuration of the displaced thus ruled out the possibility of a real returning desire in the diaspora studies and argues against the ethics of return to the homeland seeking to promote the recreation of diverse cultural localities which requires a less stringent structure of relationship between dispersed communities and homelands. Dismissing the lure of the land from diasporization, Stuart Hall opines that it does not have to invoke "those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return" (57). Home is conceived not in terms of where one is from but rather where one's feet are. The diasporic dialectics thus rejects the notion of excessive emphasis on connection to the homeland and seeks to detach this idea from diaspora in favour of a non-essentialist narrativization of longing, belonging and origination.

The older diasporas seek to sustain a remote relationship with the homeland even with the knowledge that such a return is near impossible which "remained frozen in the diasporic imagination as a sort of sacred site or symbol, almost like an idol of memory and imagination" (Paranjape "Writing across Boundaries" 243). The new diasporas, on the other hand, has least access to the homeland and developed a displaced anxiety of belongingness which is beautifully reflected in the works of the diasporic authors. They celebrate not only an imaginative recreation of the motherland but also the justification of that diasporic displacement (Paranjape "Displaced Relation" 10). According to Hall diasporic identity formation constantly relies upon the acts of reproduction and transformation through difference and instead of being a site for relocation of an essentialised past, it opens up an immense possibility of cultural signification (55). Similarly, Samir Dayal in "Diaspora and Double Consciousness" traces the ambivalent allegiance of the individuals in the endless transformation and translation of the self; the assumed solidarity with the ancestral home on the one hand, and the summative sensibility of the desire for a new home on the other (54):

There is a strategic value in cultivating a diasporic double consciousness. First, it affords an interstitial perspective on what it means to be, say, "British" or "American"- a

perspective that allows for the emergence of excessive and differential meanings of "belonging" as well as "a para-sitic location (to use Rey Chow's term), ...entails an emancipation from a merely nationalistic or infranational pedagogical. Yet, it is not directed or "oriented" just towards the expressivity of the diasporic in the metropole. (47)

Focusing on the indeterminacy of the fluid positions held by the diasporic identities which disrupts the stable homology between racial, cultural and national identity Bhabha contends that this self-reflexive hybridity is an "insurgent act of cultural translation" (*The Location of Culture* 7) which exists as subversive potential to unsettle the hegemony of power relations as it explores the multiple possibilities of cultural negotiations and contestations. Hybridity, thus, offers an alternative organizing category for a new politics of representation which is informed by an awareness of diaspora and its contradictory, ambivalent and generative potential" (Bhabha *The Location of Culture* 10). Avtar Brah highlights the overlapping commonality of diasporic negotiations: "Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed and dissolved" (208).

Bhabha and Brah in multiple ways seek to expose the non-essentiality of political content and historical specificity of diasporic positions and tend to equate this with a postmodern pastiche culture pointing out 'diaspora space' as a highly contested site of cultural production which is relational and strictly anti-hierarchical:

... the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them' are contested...diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited', not only by those who have migrated, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous ... the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'. (Brah 205)

Vertovec regards this kind of transgressed localization as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation states" (447). He explores the five areas through which transnational connections could be achieved: social morphology, kind of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political transaction and reformulation of home or locality (447). Crang, Dwyer and Jackson describe about this conglomerated space which they elucidate as "constitutive of transnationality" (1) in which "different diasporas are characterised by different geographies that go beyond simple oppositions between the national and transnational, the rooted and routed, the territorial and the deterritorialized" (2).

Deluze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateau* recast this multiplicity of cultural representation with the rhizomatic theory of difference turning away from the concept of conceptualization in which the world is no longer viewed as being comprised of distinct entities- aggregative and integrative. Rather, this notion of difference becomes a condition for the possibility of phenomena:

Every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned. Every diversity and every change refers to a difference which is its sufficient reason. Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of difference: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, differences of intensity. (Deluze and Guattari 222)

This possibility of reconceptualization takes us away from a signifying register to a signifying system where multiplicity becomes an essential condition for inverting the traditional representational paradigms and fixative enunciation. There is therefore, no essence, no facts but only interpretation- a fundamental insubstantiality, impermanence and reinterpretations of all phenomena. Simon O' Sullivan represents this multiple trajectories inherent in cultural studies as rhizome, "a dynamic open system...that changes its nature as the number of its dimensions increases" (88).

Diasporisation in this cultural praxis, far from being ossified exists as possibilities of de-stratification. The cosmopolitan nomads have multiple locations, consolidations and affiliations, where "multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the flight or deterritorialisation according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities" (Deluze and Guattari 9). Deluze and Guattari do not present the rhizome and the root as incompatible dualities, rather it is the natural quality of rhizome to be broken and it is the nature of the root to ceaselessly produce rhizome: "A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch or else it is a microscopic element of the root tree, a radical, that gets rhizome production going" (15). Diaspora as a form of cultural studies then involves exploring potentiality of becoming- the realization of an existing entity of self-overcoming. As Sullivan argues "as such the molecular- the rhizome- is a kind of guerrilla war against representation. A war with no winner and in which the taking of sides is always strategic and pragmatic" (92).

Diaspora like rhizome defies the dimensions of oversimplification- on one hand, it focuses on the lines of articulation of sedimentarity, strata and territories, on the other, it attends to the lines of flight, movements of deterritorialisation and de-stratification. Thus, it is the territorialisation which constantly replicates the possibilities for deterritorialisation. Deluze and Guattari analyse this "principle of asignifying rupture" as set "against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure" (9). A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old

lines, or on new lines" (Deleuze and Guattari 9). Every rhizome in this irrepresentational disruption "contents lines of sedimentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, signified, attributed etc. as well as lines of deterritorialisation down which it constantly flees" (Deleuze and Guattari 9).

Arjun Appadurai further problematizes the spread of culture across the globe by small groups and communities in an attempt to 'reproduce' themselves afresh and their cultural forms- "it is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity markers) can become slippery" (44), where both points of departure and arrival are always in a constant cultural flux. Rosemary Marangoly George's *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century* explores these multiple dimensions of home which transcend the stable physicality of belonging and becomes "an imagined location that can be more fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography" (11). Davies like George analyses the representational politics of home-making which is argued as a contested space for re-writing of the self in which the significance of writing 'home' is viewed as a critical connection in the articulation of identity:

Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home, become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still, home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation. (84)

Conclusion

Reviewing and relocating the familiar dichotomy between 'roots' and 'routes' Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora* dissociates diaspora from the conceptualisation of homeland foundationalism arguing that it promotes "a critique of the discourse of fixed origins" (180) and dynamic intercultural relations. The reconceptualisation of 'home' and 'homing desire' thus within this 'deterritorialized' framework sees diasporic space as enabling the production and extension of new identities, subjectivities and affiliations that subvert the stability of nationalistic discourse. The second generation immigrants and diasporic writers for whom the homeland exists as a myth or collective memory is displaced by such an assimilative acceptance of hybridity and multilocality. Since the diasporic perceptions flow across the national and transnational boundaries, the people of diaspora develop an ontological episteme of existence that enable them to move beyond all 'home-making-projects' claiming non-essentialist configurations in the dialectics of diasporic space. The diasporic writers are endowed with a double perspective of performative negotiation in translating the symbiosis between two modes of experience which is adequately reflected in their literary works as a "device to decode the epistemology of diaspora"- a diasporic imagination that appropriates 'reality' not in the mode of absolutist

positions but an ever-fluxing process of becoming coloured by heteroglossic and polyphonic overtones (Dalai 8).

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