

# Significance of Home and Identities in Diaspora Studies

## Abstract

The concept of home is central to diasporic signifying practices and the process of migration. Recently, diasporic migration has unsettled the concept of home, in different levels of its mobility, location and dislocation. Individual identity that is developed as a result of diverse diasporisation is a continuous process in which the diasporic individuals sometimes drastically fail to assimilate themselves in any of the cultures they are familiar with, effectuating the emergence of an unsettled space of multilocational belonging. The paper aims to recapture these fluid cultural and transitional connections which impact and restructure the framework of identity formation defying the fixated and stabilised notion of diasporic community which seeks to thrive on the reductive logic of methodical homogenization.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Identity, Home, Movement, Space, Belonging.

## Introduction

The term 'diaspora' carries multiple shades of meaning in the present cultural scenario of the world. Diaspora includes the numerous displacements of communities across the world from their original homing location to another place elsewhere in the world. The spatial movements which the diasporic individuals undergo tend to emphasise the obligation to the homeland as an important feature in the identity formation of the individuals living a diasporic, nomadic life in the globe. History is replete with multitudes of such displacements and the resulting quests for home in different cultural contexts. These displacements and dislocations trigger in the diasporic subjects a strong 'homing desire' and an urge to reproduce and re-enact the modes of life in a new cultural setting that is relative to their homeland and the nostalgic recapitulation of a remote but enlivened past.

## Aim of the Study

The paper attempts to recapture the different modalities and complexities associated with the ideas of home and identity in a diasporic setting, focussing on the notion of identity as fluid and fragmentary re-enacting the essential drama of reinscribing and restaging an incommensurable presence in the vast spatial dialectics of diasporic mind and the reimagining of home in relation to these tentative re-configuration of identity that is never final or fixed.

## Text

Construction of homes in a diasporic ambience proffers a haunting spectrality of hopes and reminiscences which are allied with the idea of reconfiguring the psycho-geographical confines of the inner landscape through the process of negotiation and re-invention. The locations of the diasporic subjects, therefore, exist as an unsettled 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" (Radha krishnan 175).

Similarly, Hua presents a multicultural model of diasporic counter-memorialisation to look at the diverse modes of remembrance in migrant communities and groups. According to Hua, the displaced diasporans are gifted with a dual perspective of transactive existence between diverse locations and discover "the politics of diasporic spaces" as "contradictory and multi-accented" (195) which are systematically "heterogeneous and contested sites differentiated by gender, class, sexual orientation, generation differences, language access, historical experiences and geographical locations" (Hua 204). The impulse to recreate new set of standards to survive in a new location then works "as a catalyst for self-recovery and community building" (Hua 203). In such diasporic formation,

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memory serves as a survival strategy to maintain social sustenance, by retrieving the forgotten or dormant to bear witness; yet, it is a strategy which needs addressing “the past as conflictual, evidence as problematic, all questions as suspect” (Matsuda 15). Individuals living in a diasporic setting are thus stranded between ambivalent desires for an elusive paradise to regain with its firmly grounded cultural paradigms that is lost or helpless to be reborn and an instinct to be assimilated with the newly inculcated cultural norms of alternative homes.

Home is not a stable entity and firmly relies on the individual's shifting definition and redefinition of the inner or outer barriers, and the type of territoriality that has informed his/her life. Mohamad Hafezi distinguishes between two different notions of home. The first dislocation which he calls ‘geographical’ is based on stiffly demarcated boundaries and frontiers which are evocative of the mystified and glorifying descriptions of the past which he termed as “exilic”, and the second, he rightly calls “diasporic” that is rather transnational and seeks to dismantle the shadowy lines of estrangement and turns out to be “a constructed space in the present through contacts, memories and activities” (8). Home, in this regard may be re-structured through negotiative interactions of the past, the present and the future. For exilic writers, memorialisation of originary homes “create a ground of creativity and invention exactly because of its remoteness, intangibility and inaccessibility” (Hafezi 135) for they are deliberately haunted by an infatuated hope of return to their respective homelands till they disappointingly discover that their imagined portraits of homelands are far gloomier than their presently existing homes in the new locations. Exilic home or exilic identity in this sense is a mimetic re-enactment of a customized version of reality that is relative to the detached homeland which further results in a distorted or fantasised representation traced in exilic authors.

Diasporisation is characterised by a certain “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). The exilic subjects of the diaspora thus sustain a solidified image of their homeland which helps evolve a stigmatised presentation of the precedent, ancestral home unlike the diasporic subjectivities who are rewardingly liberated from the shadows of the absolutist prejudices resorting to the formation of fluxing and disintegrated sets of images of the ever-fluctuating past that encompasses and involves a universal, deconstructed sense of belonging.

Diaspora, in the global context, has recently become increasingly complicated as a result of the mass mobilization, large scale dispersion and displacements worldwide. However, all notions of diaspora engage the idea of identity and belonging that are constructed in multiple ways with regard to the space the displaced diasporan wish to reconstruct. As James Clifford incisively 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 seem to consciously misconstrue a “principled ambivalence about physical return and attachment to land” (246-48). This rupture points out that such diasporic reformulations embrace a shared feeling of alienation and identification with a spatial collectivity. For instance, the first generation diasporic sensibility involves a strong nostalgic enactment of homing practices which Vertovec defines as “diaspora consciousness” that is “marked out by dual or multiple identifications”(450). Hence, there is a representation of the diasporic subjects as experiencing “decentred attachments, of being simultaneously ‘home away from home’, ‘here and there’” in which most of the people live the life of multiple identities “that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Vertovec 450-51). The second generation, on the other hand, share a ‘transnational consciousness’ which is not diasporic because they are not strictly fixated in a singular space of exclusive identification and as such does not experience traumatic dispersion and helps effect an inclined progress towards a transnational identity formation. Therefore, the second generation diasporic individuals challenge the essentialising ingredients of home and identity and maintain little or no attachment to any single place and choose to be global nomads transcending the delimited 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)

Homi Bhabha in his work *Location of Culture* emphasises this ambivalent notion of identity which is reviewed as a productive condition for negotiation and diasporic articulation- an in-between but emphatic space for cultural translation. Diasporic transpositions, according to him, tend to endure a sense of cultural impurity and heterogeneity, and resort to a fluxing shift of cultural representations in diverse manners (2). Bhabha thus develops the concept of the “third space” (56) as a performance of pure enunciation of this cultural fragmentation. He addresses the spatio-temporal dimensions of cultural formations which subvert the dialectics of synchronicity assumed by the conventional mode of cultural evaluation. The evolution of the ‘third space’ destroys this symmetrical model of cultural formation as fixed and stable. It seeks to deconstruct cultural identification as a homogenizing, unifying and absolute force. Bhabha asserts that the in-between third space which is occupied by the diasporic individual is endowed with diverse creative possibilities, as being “the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence” (*Location of Culture* 12). Thus diasporic formations challenge the territorial logic of nation-state and interrogate the

rubrics of the nation, nationalism and cultural homogenization in any given context:

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. (*Nation and Narration* 4)

Analogously, Patchett in his paper "Corpus Cartography: Diasporic Identity as Flesh and Blood" seeks to evolve a dualistic notion of diasporic identity as rooted in the dichotomy of homeland/hostland model which suggests the persistence of dislocated composite identities which can be a recurrent site of multiple and fragmented possibilities (1). Emma Patchett rather devises the definition of a 'Corpus Cartography' as a discursive configuration of the body's situatedness posing a rhizomatic challenge to the post-modernity, and "thus contemplating the potential for a new way of thinking about diasporic identity" (65). Patchett employs the idea of rhizomatic cartography to discover the degree of diasporic conditionality through which the body as a corpus can be measured out by the mind. Negotiative permeability of diasporic identity, therefore, is clarified by the principles of connection which comprises only of lines, but not points or specific 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).

Stuart Hall in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" observes that the diasporic sensibility is characterized not by purity or essence but by the recognition of an informing heterogeneity and diversity; the diaspora identities "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (58). Uprooted and displaced from a familiar engagement the diasporans are suspended between the mutilated memory of the past and the desire to forge out new memories for the future by a discursive negotiation with an incommensurable presence. They openly address these apparent fragmentations by a continuous movement from reality to fiction to formulate new realities of life around them. Theodor Adorno thus 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)

The older diasporas nourish a remote relationship with the originary homeland even with the assertion that such a return is well nigh 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, have least or no access to their homelands and thus trigger a displaced anxiety of belongingness which is graphically reflected in the works of the diasporic authors. Not only they tend to celebrate an imaginative recreation of the motherland but also they are endowed with the justification of that diasporic displacement (Paranjape "Displaced Relation" 10). According to Stuart Hall, diasporic identity formation relies on the acts of transformation and reproduction through difference and rather than of being a space for relocation of an essentialised past, it opens up immense possibilities of cultural signification and negotiative transactions (55). Further, Samir Dayal in "Diaspora and Double Consciousness" recognises the ambivalent allegiance of the diasporic individuals in the constant transformation and translation of the dislocated self; the assumed cohesion with the homeland on the one hand, and the summative 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)

Avtar Brah and Homi Bhabha in diverse ways seek to render the non-essentiality of political content and diasporic historicity and equate this with a postmodern pastiche culture which points out a 'diaspora space' as a highly contested site of cultural production and representation that is always 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 views this transgressed localization as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation states" (447). He discovers five levels through which transnational connections can be accomplished- social morphology, kind of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, political transaction and reformulation of home (447). Again, Crang, Dwyer and Jackson define this amalgamated space 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 deterritorialised" (2).

Deleuze and Guattari in their work *A Thousand Plateaus* revisit this multiplicity of cultural reproduction with the rhizomatic theory of difference challenging the traditional concepts and conceptualizations in which the world is no longer regarded as being comprised of distinctive entities- aggregative or integrative. Instead, the idea of difference becomes an essential condition for the existence of the 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. (Deleuze 222)

Arjun Appadurai further controverts the scattering of culture across the globe by groups and communities in an effort to 'reproduce' themselves anew and their cultural forms and formulae- "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 arrival and departure are always in an invariable cultural flux. Marangoly George's *The Politics of Home: Post Colonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century* seeks to explore these multiple modalities of home and homing desire which inevitably transcend the fixated physicality of belonging and becomes "an imagined location that can be more fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography" (11). Davies analyses the representational model of home-making projects which is reviewed as a contested space for the re-writing of the self which emphatically highlights the importance of writing 'home' as a critical connection in the articulation and formation of identity:

Migration creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home, becomes 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

To conclude, diaspora with its multiple and conflictual range of cultural identities challenges the strict premise and contour of home which demonstrates the profound diversity and heterogeneity of the diasporic condition in the permeable patterns of cultural representation. The diasporic fictional manoeuvres, in this regard, are attempts to examine and retrace the mythic quests of disparate diasporas from immigration to acculturation in the re-contextualizing reposition of aesthetic valorisation, reflecting the cross-cultural translatability of diasporic conditions. Identity in a diasporic ambience thus becomes an unsettled entity marked out by the discontinuities of time and space, whereby through the ambiguity of displacement the diasporans are able to reconstruct the inner landscapes of their mind to perpetrate their sense of belonging, disrupting

the idea of the bounded rootedness and homogenized belonging.

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