

Vol. 8, Issue-III (June 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly, Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal



UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Jr. No. 768]

Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

www.galaxyimrj.com

ISSN 2278-9529

Problematics of Hostland (Routes) and Homeland (Roots): Interrogating the Diasporic Space

Dr. Narinder K. Sharma
Asstt. Professor of English,
DAVIET, JALANDHAR

Article History: Submitted-19/05/2017, Revised-16/06/2017, Accepted-21/06/2017, Published-05/07/2017.

Abstract:

Diasporic experience reconfigures one's sense of 'being' entailing a dualistic identification with the hostland and the homeland. It results in the making of an existential sandwich whereby the subject is disseminated in the two worlds simultaneously. As a result, it shapes an ambivalent and oscillating condition for the subject leading to certain excruciating spheres of existence viz. cultural duality, rootlessness, fragmentation, a sense of exile (chosen or forced) and finally identity-crisis caused by the dialectics of dislocation and othering. It is in this context that the present paper attempts to evaluate the hyphenated diasporic existence in the light of certain insights of Diaspora theory and postcolonial conceptual corollaries relevant thereto.

Keywords: Diaspora, duality, identity-crisis, dislocation, othering.

We thought...that there would be room in this new world for people like us, people who did not quite fit into the picture. We thought the world was growing wider, more inclusive. And now it seems it was actually drifting in the other direction.

—Jamal Mahjoub in *The Drift Latitudes*

'Mama, see the Negro! I am frightened! Frightened! Frightened!' Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but the laughter had become impossible.

—Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*

It is for those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination; diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons.

—Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*

I

Diasporic experience reconfigures one's sense of 'being' entailing a dualistic identification with the hostland and the homeland. It results in the making of an existential sandwich whereby the subject is disseminated in the two worlds simultaneously. As a result, it shapes an ambivalent and oscillating condition for the subject leading to certain excruciating spheres of existence viz. cultural duality, rootlessness, fragmentation, a sense of exile (chosen or forced) and finally identity-crisis caused by the dialectics of dislocation¹ and othering². It is in this context that the present paper attempts to evaluate the hyphenated diasporic existence in the light of certain insights of Diaspora theory and postcolonial conceptual corollaries relevant thereto.

The study explicates the problematics of the diasporic space underlining the duality of the hostland and the homeland. Being exposed to the onslaughts of racism and consequent existential humiliation, the experiential in-between, irreconcilable and contingent condition emits agony and chaos for the (im)migrants and thus unsettles their sense of a stable and coherent identity. Richards, in his essay "Framing Identities" remarks: "Racism fractures the ability to engage with others at a fundamental level by substituting a 'corporeal schema' with a racial epidermal schema... ." (10). Sartre declares: "It is the racist who creates his inferior" (93). In such circumstances, the homeland haunts the subject even more and causes acute bewilderment by way of altering one's sense of self-fashioning in a pejorative manner. However, on the contrary, such diasporic experience on the part of an immigrant also opens up the possibility of transcending such kind of duality and crisis. It grants him/her an opportunity to 'write against the empire' and thus co-opt a rejuvenated, negotiated and hybridized sense of one's identity deconstructing racism, difference and inequality of the hostland. Such a stance transforms reductionist notions of racial identity into positive racial values. Further, such a diasporic conjunction unfolds a better model of identity as compared to the one founded upon fixities of race and nation. It also opens up what Bhabha calls the 'Third Space'³ for the subject in question. This conceptual framework constitutes the critique of the paper. The next section aims at developing the theoretical premise of the critique expounding relevant insights of Diaspora studies.

¹ Dislocation occurs as a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location. The term is also used to describe the experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth.

² Othering refers to the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group. The term was coined by Gayatri Spivak for the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others'. Whereas the Other corresponds to the focus of desire or power in relation to which the subject is produced, the other is the excluded or 'mastered' subject created by the discourse of power. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects. In Spivak's explanation, othering is a dialectical process because the colonizing Other is established at the same time as its colonized others are produced as subjects.

³ Bhabha's notion of 'Third Space'—a hybrid location or a neither/nor condition (Trishanku)— functions as the liminal existence between two or more different cultures and national spaces that significantly impact the articulation of the specific intellectual and cultural discourses foregrounding the importance of existence at the in-between. It implies the indefiniteness of border existence and the concept of home.

II

Speaking etymologically, the term Diaspora comes from a Greek word ‘diasperian’ which can further be split into ‘dia’ and ‘sperien’ meaning ‘across’ and ‘to sow/scatter’ respectively. In general, it means to sow or scatter seeds widely. As a matter of historical fact, the Greeks moved across the world for expanding their business and trade. Therefore, it refers to their scattering/volunteer dispersion in the world. In this way, it also signifies the Greeks as the pioneers of colonization and Empire in the world.

Moving on, the term is also associated with the dispersal of Jews from Palestine and here the term impregnates religious, political and philosophical repercussions for Jewish people in particular. The word has been used frequently in the rabbinical writings to highlight the plight of the Jews living outside their homeland pocketing all kinds of insults and bearing all the pains and sufferings which such kind of uprooting has on the debit side. Understood in this way, it contributes significantly to fathom the problematics of exile, or assimilation and acculturation of the Jewish Diaspora throughout the world.

In the 16th century, the term gained another meaning as it became attendant to the Black African Diaspora highlighting the brute fact of the slave trade. Under this trade, West Africans were forced out of their homelands to be dispersed to foreign destinations for serving the civilized masters. It is a forced dispersal of the natives and highpoints their brutal and pathetic exploitation. Such forced scattering connotes trauma and tragedy for the natives for having wrecked their ethnic bond with the homeland.

Later, the Great Britain assumed the White Man’s Burden; moved out to civilize different parts of the world and hosts its flag on foreign shores. Thus, British Empire became an international phenomenon. Interestingly, the scattering of the colonizers also witnessed the arrival of the colonized from a variety of different places in the host country. Mcleod in his important book titled *Beginning Postcolonialism* remarks that:

Often these voyages put [the slaves] to work as servants in their British homes, or the use of South Asian Women as ‘ayahs’ by families employed by the East Indian Company during and after their return to Britain (205).

Importantly, such forced migration in the hostland also enabled the dispersed individuals to cross-identify with each other so as to carve an individual and social matrix of self-recognition while living on the margins in the host country.

Moving further, it is quite apt to state that after the Second World War, the formerly colonial nations witnessed the arrival of people from their ex-colonies in large numbers due to varied reasons, including labour shortage, to escape from political upheavals in the homeland or to explore better future prospects etc. Resultantly, the colonial nations (especially their metropolitans) became the vibrant centers of people dispersed from a number of countries/ex-colonies. And it is now that the ‘scattering’ turns out to be a ‘gathering’ of the dispersed migrants

in the colonial headquarters. Bhabha in an important essay titled “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation” designates such gathering:

...as the gatherings of exiles, and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of the ‘foreign’ cultures... . Gatherings of the worlds lived retroactively... . Gathering of the people in the Diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned... . (291)

The gathering motif has played a pivotal role in transforming the contemporary denominations of the term Diaspora. The diasporas have proved themselves to be a different site of late modernity, reconfiguring the world topology and nation-state. Since, nations and nation-states are the cultural products, its mélange with the exotic produces new communities and shakes up the power-center politics. Mishra comments: “Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport. Diasporas are people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen” (1). Of late, the term refers to the broad array of ethnic communities/racial minorities living in foreign lands hosting a variety of people viz. refugees, expellees, migrants, expatriates, immigrants, transnational/ deterritorialized professionals etc. In this sense, diaspora “...in itself suggests solidarity, numbers, Community” (George 182). However, such racial minorities do differ in multifarious ways and hence are representative of “...varied cluster of diasporas” (Cohen 1). However, such cluster shares a mutual framework too, and it is the acknowledgement of the old country—a yearning for the homeland, its language, culture, folklore and its inhabitants. Essential to such cluster are “...the issues like, homelessness and cultural collision resulting in the narratives of nostalgia, mixed loyalties, alienation, ghettoism, loss or renewal of identity, faith, nationality etc.” (Singh, “The Epico-Mythical Terms of Diasporic Studies” vi). Further, “...it is certainly in their otherness to the host culture that they know they are a diaspora community” (xiv). This mutual framework unites the varied people under the broad category of a diaspora to cultivate a sense of volition for a stronger and vibrant co-ethnic bond with those who share a similar state of being. Further, the diaspora space hosts “...the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (Brah 178). To elucidate and detail the varied corollaries of the term, reliance is placed on a Table reference as appended below:-

Table Reference:

Table: **Common features of diaspora**

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; |
| 2. | alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; |
| 3. | a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements; |

4. an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Source: Robin Cohen. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print. Table 1.1 (17).

The preceding table lays bare the multi-axial denominations of the term vis-à-vis its contemporary context. Not only this, he also gives a typology of diasporas and classifies the same into five categories, namely “...victim, labour, imperial, trade and deterritorialized” (Cohen 16). Nonetheless, the mutual framework affords a fervent bonding amongst the varied subalterns in the diasporic space. It is in this sense that Brah in her significant book titled *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* comments that “...distinct diaspora communities are created out of the ‘confluence of narratives’ of different journeys from the ‘old country’ to the new which create the sense of a shared history” (183). And thus diaspora “...offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire” (177). The diaspora communities exhibit “...a number of features, including the collective memory of a ‘homeland’, a sense of exile and loss and the persistence of homeland’s political and socio-economic identities” (Rai and Peter Reeves 2). At the same time, the Diasporas remain heterogeneous as well and accommodate enduring contesting space(s) within them signifying the dynamics of solidarity and heterogeneity.

Contextualizing the ongoing argument into the critique of the paper, it is worth accentuating that the experiences of dislocation/migrancy coupled with the dynamics of the contesting spaces within the Diasporas have poured out substantial postcolonial literature centered on the thematics of fragmentation, rootlessness and homelessness. The hostland offers a number of problems for the migrant whereby one is made to sense his/her exclusion from the mainstream. The migrant is mocked and discriminated against and is pushed to the

peripherilizing limits causing frustration and obfuscation. Such perilous, porous and dualistic existence in the hostland lures the migrant to *look back* for solace coupled with the modification in one's perspective of understanding the homeland. Rushdie in his vital essay titled "Imaginary Homelands" opines that the migrant is "...haunted by some sense of loss, [with] some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt...create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). Seen thus, the notion of home undergoes a transformation for the dislocated migrant.

Amplifying it further, it is worth considering that the migrants' *imaginary* home is significantly different from the home of (potential) retrieval—a factor which further problematizes the duality of the hostland and the homeland for the migrant. Notably, the notion of the homeland becomes fragmented from the experience of returning to the homeland. It is in this sense that a home becomes "...a mythic place in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 192). However, the migrant keeps such a myth alive also. Nevertheless, the migrancy reconfigures one's interpretive lens to understand the notion of home by inducing a dualistic hyphenation in the sensibility of the migrant vis-à-vis the diasporic space representing a tripartite schema, i.e., home, *away* and return. Not only this, migrancy itself assumes a sort of sovereignty and subsequently reformulates the migrant's understanding of his/her own self in relation to the homeland. It is in the light of this complexity of being that the migrant shuttles between the extremes of the hostland and the homeland, the present and the past and the familiar and the distant coupled with a fertile desire for cohering his/her existence by way of assimilation and acculturation in the hostland.

At this point, there is a need to explore the deeper recesses of 'home' so as to ripen and mature the ongoing critique further. No doubt, home has a distinct performative role in shaping our subjectivity towards our being in the world. An important French philosopher Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* remarks that home "...is our vital space, our corner of the world, our first universe" (4). In other words, it kindles a sense of one's place in the world and thus signifies coherence and stability of an individual. It is a welcome place for us and represents a wholeness of existence. However, it is worth reiterating that this notion of home undergoes subtle yet intriguing alteration for the migrant. The displacement on the part of the migrant transforms his/her sense of place (home). To put it in other words, the geographical distantiating reorients the idea of home by way of assigning it an imaginative undertone and rippling undercurrent. As a result of this, the migrant starts perceiving the homeland imag[Native(ly)] marked with a potent desire to conjunct the past with the present foregrounding an inherent duality therein. The feeling of being-elsewhere constitutes the gulf between the homeland and the hostland—the hostland being far-removed in time and space. It triggers the "...fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present" (McLeod 211). Accordingly, the migrant's situatedness stands as a metaphor of his/her displaced positionality in the realm of the diasporic space signifying his/her swollen imagi[Nation]—a new location of the homeland. However, the positional consciousness about the imaginary homeland is also replete with certain inconsistencies, holes and gaps in the migrant's memory. No doubt, the migrant experiences

intense directedness towards the homeland while living on the margins in the hostland, however, the migrant's memory has also faded out considerably. It equals what Rushdie calls "...broken mirrors, some of whose contents have been irretrievably lost" (11). Conspicuously, the original homeland cannot be retrieved in absolute terms now. This (sovereign) sense of migrancy gains a sort of autonomy and it exerts a substantial sway on the migrant's consciousness of his/her original homeland. It brings forth a duality-ridden ambivalent relationship with the homeland now. Perhaps, this is what the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus means when he says that you cannot enter the same river twice, for it is not the same river and you are not the same man. In the same way, the absolutist retrieval into the *original* homeland is an ontological impossibility. Hence, the notion of imaginary homeland becomes an independent site, for experiencing and living the duality of the migrancy imbued with the dynamics of being and *becoming*.

After conceptualizing the migrant's hyphenated perception of the homeland, it is apt to consider the problematics of the hostland also. Crucially, the new home in the hostland is an equally problematic phenomenon and thus it further destabilizes and disrupts the notion of the original home. The tangible (physical objects) and the intangible baggage (the belief systems of the homeland) with which the migrant arrives in the hostland are concomitant to migrant's *othering* in the hostland—though it isn't that simplistic. Viewed in this context, the arrival of the migrant is permeated with the pangs of exclusion and marginality at the hands of the dominant discourse of the hostland. For example, a migrant from Pakistan is assigned a new identity whereby s/he is discourses as *Paki* now. Henceforth, the migrant is confronted with the gigantic intangible borders existing in the hostland always baffling and demeaning the migrant in multifarious ways. Hence, the migrant is disqualified from the feeling of having a home in the hostland. It further deepens the migrant's feeling of *being-elsewhere*. Existentially, the migrant is unwelcome in the hostland and thus lacks home here. The migrant is not permitted to belong here. The perilous and porous existence of the migrant leads him/her to an intermediate/in-between space. Now, the migrant is neither here nor there and is suspended in the realm of the intermediate space—the ambivalent in-between. Thus, the migrant loses the sight of a coherent belongingness to either of the places. Pointedly, the ostensible well-knit, static and rooted notions of nationalism/ethnicity, experience a fundamental reconstruction by the migrant vis-à-vis the ambivalence of the in-between paving way for a radical [re]interpretation of the notion of home/place. Now, the dialectics of desire and derision haunt the consciousness of the migrant equaling Bhabha's *uncanny*⁴. Jayaraman observes that "Distanced and unhomed in the in-between space, the diasporic lives with a true sense of the *uncanny*" (56, emphasis original).

Before proceeding further, it is important to consider Heideggerian *Unheimlich* which literally means 'not at home' wherein an individual feels alienated, homeless and unsettled. Most importantly, Heidegger conceives *Unheimlich* as the more primordial phenomenon in

⁴ Bhabha's uncanny refers to the somewhat dismal state of (post)modern sense of belongingness and the sense of "home". However, in Bhabha, the state of the "unhomely" is not a state of lacking a home, or the opposite of having a home, it is rather the creeping recognition that the line between the world and the home are breaking down.

comparison to being-at-home signifying stimulating inferences. He is of the opinion that the foundation of our world is quite volatile and shaky. Further, the world:

...is a tissue of meanings that are fragile, *contingent* and subject to reinterpretation. No matter how solid our faith may seem, or how comfortable we may be with our lives, we are exposed to the possibility of anxiety. In fact, this possibility sets us apart from mere animals. This means that animals are tied to their "home" more tightly than we can ever be. We are capable of challenging our own interpretations, reaffirming them or revising them; in this way we build ourselves a home for the future out of our past. Dasein dwells historically. If we are authentically historical, we will not settle dully into the comfort of our world; we will welcome the homelessness of anxiety as an opportunity to [constantly] *reconfigure and reclaim our home*. (Polt 78, emphasis added)

Embedding Heideggerian *Unheimlich* into the present discussion of home, it is worth considering that the discussed radical reinterpretation opens up the potential possibilities of remodeling the migrant's identity so as to make sense of his/her situatedness in the hostland vis-à-vis 'the broken mirrors' of the homeland. In this context, the displaced positionality of the migrant unfolds a valuable possibility to the migrant so as to reinterpret the totalizing nature of the dominant discourses operating in the hostland and the homeland. As a result, the migrant enjoys a better position to see through the opacity of the said discourses and hegemonic structures confronting him/her. Consequently, s/he is able to comprehend the impurity of the deceptively pure, complete and totalizing notions of the home/nation. The realization reveals that such notions are somewhat incomplete and imperfect. As a positive corollary, it unlocks the immense possibility of a qualitative reconstruction for being-not-at-home on the part of a migrant. In this sense, the migrant assumes a subtle, authentic position to subvert the authoritative, fixed and totalizing notions of the home/nation for witnessing the 'clear light of the day' by way of a novel/hybrid self-fashioning vis-à-vis the requirements of the diasporic space.

Such an understanding enables the migrant to integrate his/her past, present and future by negotiating the homeland (roots) with the hostland (routes) privileging a fluid *yet* democratic and authentic validation of his/her being-not-at-home. In other words, it is a migrant's metaphoric journey from the roots to routes which enables him/her to address the transnational contingencies of existence. Gilroy—a noted theorist in Diaspora studies—in his seminal book titled *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* supports the stance by confirming that "...identity [is] a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (19) and is "...more concerned with the flows, exchanges, and in-between elements" (190). Markedly, it hybridizes the notion of identity as a *process* in relation to the crisis as a *phenomenon*.

It implicitly or explicitly refers to the ontological process of transforming 'being' into 'becoming'. Further, this transformative process of 'being' into 'becoming' facilitates the migrant's interpellation—though in a subtle sense—into the Diasporic space which is cardinally

guided by a fresh understanding of linguistic, historical, political, economic, cultural and ethnographic factors operant in the hostland. In Althusserian sense, "...to say that someone is fully *interpellated* is to say that he or she has been successfully brought into accepting a certain [being], or that he or she has accepted values willingly" (Notes on Interpellation: longwood.edu). Accordingly, it brings forth the intricate odyssey of what one is and what one becomes adumbrating a process of reconstruction of the rooted state of existence into the dynamic state of the in-between—the negotiated space in diasporic experience offering rejuvenation to the otherwise perilous and porous existence of the migrant. At the same time, such interpellation also explicates the responsible factors which contribute significantly in the formation of such a realization to cross over the crisis of being-not-at-home. On a specific note, it brings out that one's notion of home is inextricably intertwined into the economic, cultural, political, social, ethical and linguistic factors.

Thus, the preceding discussion explicates that the dualism of hostland and homeland plays a pivotal role in understanding and reconfiguring the challenges of the diasporic space. The argument of the paper highlights a consistent ambivalence vis-à-vis the experiential ontology of the dislocated migrant. Hall, a noted cultural theorist, in his essay titled "The Question of Cultural Identity" makes a very important observation in this regard and conceives the postmodern subject, "...as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity [rather] becomes a moveable feast...in the cultural systems" (275). It is all the more important to lay emphasis on the point that the realization of the in-between diasporic space is a categorical possibility and does not represent a rooted structure in-itself. Hence, the migrant may or may not opt for the negotiation of the dualism of the homeland and the hostland. S/he may not embrace the possibility of the hybridized identity—as warranted by the diasporic space—and hence may choose the *chaste* fixity and rootedness cultivating an overpowering ache to return to the homeland—the imaginary homeland to be more specific. On the other hand, the hybrid or Trishanku conception of one's being in the world endows a sense of double consciousness and mitigates the difference of physical and imaginative borders to host a point of convergence signifying cross-national, deterritorialized and cosmopolitan fervor in the consciousness of the migrant.

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