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The Concept of Home in Diaspora

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Abstract

The nature of diasporic communities is one of key areas of interests in diaspora studies. The concept of home in diaspora studies is a question of identity and belonging. The enthusiasm of migrating out of homeland, the resolve to maintain identities and the intention to extend solidarity with the local and the transnational encompass the diasporic experience. While the diasporic communities share a sentimental affection with the homeland with an eagerness to maintain their cultural identities some uphold the desire to

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return to their homelands. This essay is an attempt to investigate how varied diasporic experiences and the changing transnational interconnections impact and shape the concept of home in diaspora.

Keywords: diaspora, home, transnational, geopolitical, identity

Diaspora is an encompassing term that denotes people who are displaced from their native place through migration, immigration or exile. Diaspora as a movement can be explicated as an annexe from a discrete geographic locale that is inevitably linked to the homeland of the diasporic subjects. The crossing of border as geopolitical experience and reality encompasses dispersed population that intersects pluri-locale diasporic cultures. Diaspora implies a “dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries” (Briziel and Mannur 1). Hall informs us that the New World is to be comprehended as a location of manifold and unremitting displacements and a signifier of migration. Moreover all cultures of diasporic and diaspora can be seen as part of collective experiences that involves dispersion. Diaspora studies explore the importance and intricacies of diasporic movement and investigate the poignant subtext of movement that maps the motivation for dispersion. It also allows us to grapple with keener issues interrelated to dispersion, the idea of homeland and the impact of lost homeland on the host homeland. Diasporic space is a hybrid space motivated by historical changes. It can be observed that “in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and

collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated” (Bhabha 2). Therefore within the limited space that allows cultural exchanges and divergences the spatial venture of the diasporic subjects negotiates the identity that perpetually interacts with the diasporic cultural differences. However the “representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (Bhabha 2). Bhabha attempts to position history as not formed through time materially but as the variation of diasporic connotation that appropriates the subject’s dislocation following the process of dispersion. It can be distinguished as a process in time yet historically influencing the dispersion because the impact is boundless that signify the complete signification. This essay is an attempt to discuss the varied aspects of the concept of home in diaspora and how home influences diasporic experiences.

One of the important features of diasporic experience is “a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland” (Clifford 305). Can we attribute a single home/homeland to a diaspora subjective experience? Is there plurality of home/homelands? The concept of home in diaspora is intricate, complex and multifaceted characterizing plurality of ‘homes’ and plurality of ‘belongings.’ Walters explains that “The notion of diaspora can represent multiple, plurilocal, constructed location of home, thus avoiding ideas of fixity, boundedness, and nostalgic exclusivity traditionally implied by the word home” (xvi). The connection between diasporas and native place of origin is characterized by ambivalence and psychological apprehensions because the diasporic subject is torn-between two different homes.

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Moreover the “scattering leads to a splitting in the sense of home. A fundamental ambivalence is embedded in the term diaspora: a dual ontology in which the diasporic subject is seen to look in two directions—towards a historical cultural identity on one hand, and the society of relocation on the other” (Ashcroft et al 425).

Home and abroad are assimilated in diaspora where the home can be overseas and vice versa as they are not unavoidably fastened geographical limits. A constant apprehension arises between where you are from and where you are at which leads the diasporic subjects to form their own space. Chinatown in London is an instance of how the Chinese population form their familiar space to make themselves feel at home and create a sense of belonging at where they are—home away from home. It is natural to experience a loss of home at home which embarks upon a search for a location where the diasporic self could belong, a secure socio-political, cultural and intellectual space one could name as home. The varied and complex experiences of the diasporic self undergo feeling of inclusion and exclusion: “The notion of home therefore is much more complex than approaches to diasporas premised on the power of nostalgia would want us believe. It is intrinsically linked with the way in which the process of inclusion or exclusion operates and is subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It relates to the complex political and personal struggles over the social regulation of “belonging”” (Tsagarousianou 52).

Diaspora experience is a perpetual surge between ethnicity, ideology, economics and politics marking a disjunctive order. Arjun Appadurai studies diaspora as a definite movement of

people or ideas through five aspects. These five aspects elaborate on how they eventually bind to the concept of home. The interconnection between diaspora and home is still prevalent as they are influenced through ethnic, technological, economic, media and ideological dispersion. The correlation between diaspora and home is straightforward as all these aspects encompass human element which is central to the notion of home. Ethnoscapes involves the movement of people surpassing conventional cultural borders. The movement of the diasporic subjects from their homeland maintains the concept of home from the native that is lost but continue to interact with the idea of home existing in the homeland of their present host. The reason for such movement is the interaction between technology, capital and politics which constantly progresses and generates demand for labour. The demand for labour further influences the idea of home though the movement is strictly motivated financially and not technologically. The flow of capital and demand for labour create opportunities for the subjects to move across borders. The relation between media and diaspora, however, is intermittent as it replicates the notion of home and intervenes through the understandings of culture, identity and homeland that eventually can form fabricated and apocryphal experience through the manipulation of media. Homeland ideologies when come into contact with the ideologies of the host are shaped accordingly affecting the conceptualization of home.

Home is inevitably bonded in physicality, the homeland. Homeland corresponds to imaginary boundaries of nation states. Imagined boundaries, though, envelops the notions of nation, state, country and identity moves beyond the substantial elements: “Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place

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of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations" (Brah 192). Home as space is where it began and returns. Home as a secure place needs no elaboration for a native and connotes community. It is a place, in Spivakian terms, 'we cannot not want.' However the essential dynamics of nativism is intricate signifying locality and politically inclined state where an unhinged and contextual notion of community attains priority. Home is a place of relationships, bonding and a pool of collective memories that assume identity and nativity formulating a longing when dispersed. Home temporally is a historical function that collectively contributes to communal myths and personal memories. Home as the location of day today lived experience is a discourse on spatial locality, the location where sentiments of identity and belongingness proceed from the ordinary and unforeseen daily experiences. The association of family and neighbourhood indicates the social and psychic geography of space, a community envisaged to be warm and close giving moments of forceful estranged feelings. The inferences of home as diasporic subtext refer to an envisioning of an indigenous space. Home as an indigenous space connotes a context-specific. The idea that ethnic communities dispersed from their native lands aspire to return to homeland has underlines the realization that one lives in another homeland. Moreover, the nation/state concept at every level has emphasized the homeland myth ensconced in the popular imagination, to separate and ethnicise the cultural and political backdrop. Moreover home as a set of elements collective and sentimental protections was often schemed as a space of pastoral stability in a progressive diasporic context. The instability on the notion of

home apparently is on a confounding and exceptional dimension collectively and personally is either putrid or being progressively redefined.

The idea of home is key to the understanding of diaspora as it routes itself to the identity of the diasporic subjects. The “diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself—religious, ethnic, gendered, national” (Brazier and Mannur 3) to anticipate a comprehensive characterization of the idea of home. Hall observes that the diaspora experience is characterized “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (235). Moreover cultural identity of the diasporic subjects can connect in a plurality of homelands. The varied homelands impact the idea of home through an interaction between the plurality of homelands. Hall names it ‘presences’ influenced by Derrida’s concept of *difference*, that which is not represented in whole but in a perpetual state of comprehension and interpretation. The presences are deeply bonded with a particular specific homeland through which the diasporic identity is continually formed and reformed. However, he refutes the subsistence of one overriding identity, either historic or present, but a regular variation between plurality of identities. Within this constant state of flux and plurality of identities is the notion of home fixated through the presences in relation to existing diasporic presence. Radhakrishnan argues that diaspora contributed “ethnicity is always in a state of flux; far from being static, unchanging, and immutable...understandings of ethnicity are always context-specific” (119). He also maintains that the legitimacy of identity as being a diasporic subject is incomplete. Such a conception of identity is not to be discarded but should be

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envisaged as a position from which it heads off to a loaded arbitration of identity. The materialization of identity ensues within a determined comprehension of diaspora. The native homeland merges with the host homeland and through nous of identity from which the idea of home evolves. Therefore identity can be envisaged from a specific and global diasporic experience that relies on the framework “to rethink the rubrics of nation and nationalism, while refiguring the relations of citizens and nation states” (Brazier and Mannur 3).

Diasporic subjects preserve a collective memory romanticising their homeland and are entrusted to revitalize their homeland and connect their homeland with the host homeland. The physicality, history and accomplishments of their homeland engrave itself in the collective memory of the diasporic subjects. From a constructionist point of view the fluidity of identities are reaffirmed through deterritorialization and contextualization that are progressively reoriented through complexity. From this point of view the concept of home has become indistinct and “miasmic” thus challenging the fixity of origins underlining the homing desire rather than the aspiration for a homeland which is not one and the same. Consequently “homeland had become a homing desire and soon home itself became transmuted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical space” (Cohen 3). Home as “place of origin, or the place of settlement, or a local, national or transnational place, or an imagined virtual community, or a matrix or known experiences and intimate relations” (3) challenges the subjective notions of home. Absolutist understandings of belonging bring out the negligence on inner factions with ethnic communities or the cultural interactions between communities. Any discourse on antiracism and social mobilization of a transethnic nature stays outside the diasporic negotiations but maintain the reliance on home. Post-war interrogations provide “diaspora untenable as an analytical and

normative category” and express belonging to the traditional commencement of diaspora through an inconsequential normative burden. Therefore the basic direction and connection of diasporic subjects to their home and cultures through a “home-bound ethnic based orientation” (Soysal 2-3). Homeland as shaped by globalizing discourse elucidates attrition between a homeland and the diasporic subjects as it becomes overwhelming in a pluralistic, multicultural and hybrid world. To impose romantic notions on homeland calls for a nationalist rhetoric that binds the diasporic subjects to land and culture or the ingenuousness of the diasporic subjects to the ever altering global spaces in the contemporary world.

The concept of a homeland is permeated with a significantly interactive, romantically involving and reverential aspect that is universal. We can explicitly identify the feminine and masculine metaphorical renditions of homeland. Feminine versions of homeland are seen as nourishing and the masculine version of homeland accentuate belonging. Moreover home and homeland in diaspora studies are located spatially and territorially affirming myths of native land. When the idea of homeland is created through cultural bonds the notion of home is characterized by ductile homes where the revival of native land is relocated with fresh religious and cultural bonds. The features of a diaspora include the following: the natives dislocate from a homeland to other countries and are connected from their different spatial delineations by a common notion of their homelands. They also have a predisposed idea that they will never be received and acknowledged by the hosts and therefore formulate independent socio-cultural requirements. They yearn to return to their homeland upon favourable conditions and sustain their support for homeland which facilitates them to persist with activities in solidarity with their homeland (Safran 83-4).

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The aspiration to return to homeland is not a universal benchmark diasporic experience. Clifford observes that the Jewish diaspora is not founded in an actual homeland but a home extended through “cultural forms, kinship relations, business circuits, and travel trajectories as well as through loyalty to the religious centres of the diaspora.”¹ Moreover Jewish diaspora is not characterized by a yearning for a homeland but a recouping of the notion of home from that which is lost. Defining diaspora through an inevitable bond to homeland leaves certain weaknesses: the essentialist identification of an ideal homeland –hostland typology fails to identify the progressive and ductile nature of diasporas and the buoyant transnational contexts in which they materialize and obtain essence. The nostalgic homeland bonds, sometimes, move beyond importance to recurrence of stereotypical emphasis of ideal-type definitions. The return to homeland or the connection to homeland is more uncertain because the home space renovates beyond identification. Caught within modernization diasporas are influenced by the globalization where the return to homeland is severely impinged on. There is a circuitous route and no homecoming.

Diaspora experiences comprise transnational spaces of experiences and they are compositely amalgamating the practical outlines of homeland and hostland. The fixation to a homeland draws in ambivalent experiences through a definition of deriving from the homeland. Such “ambivalence in processes of diasporic identification is often due to the contrasting exigencies of a usually ‘monophonic’ official discourse and politics on the one hand, and a

¹ Clifford, *Further Inflections* 305

diasporic vernacular or plebeian culture—often more polyphonic and complex – on the other” (Tsagarousianou 58). The uncritical stance on the connection between homeland and diaspora also leads to the essentialization of points of derivation and exemplification of native socio-cultural elements. Therefore the dynamics of diasporas and the myriad creative possibilities from local and transnational contexts undergo impairment and disarticulation. It is also important, within the diasporic potential, to formulate and recognize identities to surmount ethnic identity. Cohen (1997) in his attempt to denote the above mentioned solidarity between the homeland and ethnic identity calls for a commitment and involvement in politics to communicate the plurality of constituents that could contribute to cultures that formulate the coherence through action. The differentiation between ethnic and diasporic identity is not diffused because of a collective and common origin but the inclination to employ themselves actively and progressively with the formulation of transnational imagination and correlations composing the “ ‘threshold’ from ethnic to diasporic identification” (Tsagarousianou 59). It is not only locating the negotiation of ethnic and diasporic identification but ascertaining the complexity of the processes of negotiation that surpass the restraints of ethnicity: “The estrangement of a community in diaspora – its separation from the ‘natural’ setting of the homeland – often leads to a particularly intense search for and negotiation of identity: gone are many traditional anchor points of culture; conventional hierarchies of authority can fragment. In short, the condition of diaspora is one in which the multiplicity of identity and community is a key dynamic” (Mandaville 172). The emergence of diasporic cultural politics offers fresh prospects for innovative locations of hope. Diasporic subjects, Danforth observes, do not entail upon the nostalgic endeavour to convalesce their identity but formulate their self-identity and a concept of home through a progressively forward looking attitude.

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