

REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA

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Lecture 28

Lecture 28: Understanding Diaspora and its Various Dimensions

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Refugees, Migration, and Diaspora. So, today we are going to discuss our understanding of diaspora and its various dimensions. So, when we talk about the romanticization of diaspora, it can refer to the idea that migrants have an idealized view of their home countries or, conversely, that locals have an idealized view of life abroad. There are certain factors which contribute significantly to the romanticization of diaspora.



Orientalist portrayals of Western superiority, perpetuated through media and academia, can support the local population's admiration of life abroad. Diasporic identities are based on shared memories and myths, as well as a sense of belonging to an imagined community. Migrants share memories, nostalgia, and narratives of places of attachment with each other and also across generations. So, this exercise of memory, these mnemonic practices, this passing down of memories, nostalgia, and narratives,

down the generations and also across, also enables and shapes one's identity in diaspora. The element of romanticization, or the constant yearning for one's roots, specifically the spatial locations, has become a phenomenon for different immigrant groups, right? So,

diaspora does not simply refer to a geographical dispersal, but it also defines the vexed questions of identity, memory, and home that such displacements produce, right. So, we are not only talking about what diaspora is—the phenomenon of geographical dispersal of a social group, but also the consequences of diaspora, what diaspora brings forth: the vexed questions of identity, memory, and home.

Van der Veer suggests that the element of romanticization present in every nationalism is even stronger among nostalgic migrants who often form a rosy picture of their country that they have left behind, and then they are able to imagine the nation where it did not exist before, right? So, the nation in the imaginary, in the imagination, is besides what it actually is, right? It is kind of wishful; it is what one wants to perceive it as, right? By referring to the essays of Günter Grass, Salman Rushdie observes that the literature of migration offers us one of the richest metaphors of our age.

Adding to Rushdie's point of view, Fiji Indian author Satyendra Nandan notes that the idea of a metaphorical being is perhaps truer and more authentic for a writer than for any other member of society. So, a writer is essentially a metaphorical being, according to Satyendra Nandan. Nandan further notes that a writer is almost always and everywhere either an exile or a migrant. And because of this distancing and distress, he may capture more vitally and vividly the very essence of our migratory experience. The continuance of a dialogue with the past in the form of plot, characters, and actions in fiction or nonfiction,

and through that process of writing, a constant looking back by diasporic authors through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth formations in their stories is, to a large extent, a consequence—an upshot of the notion of home. So, what is inspiring them here? What is propelling them here? The life force behind their writings, behind their plots, characters, narratives, fantasies, and myth formations is the notion of home and its authority as constructed over the mindscapes of diasporic individuals. And these factors are potential reasons for keeping the romanticized spirit alive.

So in order to recreate home life, through fantasy, through narrative, through myth, the home has to be kind of revived. The home has to be represented and brought back into the discussion through a romanticized story. In the case of the Indian diaspora, how they represent their Indian identity under diasporic conditions through recreation, continuation, maintenance and nurturing of their social and cultural uniqueness is often the product of their desires to connect with the country of their origin, their homeland. and with the other subcontinental diasporas that are present in the different regions of the world.

And thereby, it gives a true global unity and identity. So, basically, what motivates the Indian diaspora to write is basically connect with Indians from across the globe. Through recreating, through continuing and maintaining the discussion of the home, the desires, the memories are celebrated about the country of origin and they are deriving their own identity through that discourse. This discussion, this attempt at redefining or reproducing the home is also something that enables them to celebrate their Indianness in a foreign soil.

It enables them to celebrate their Indian culture, Indian origin in a foreign soil. In the words of Homi Bhabha, this is the celebratory romance of the past. Like I was saying, it is a result of the restrictions that migration has placed upon them. and the creative possibilities that it has offered at the same time. So, this entire phenomenon of migration, of displacement can be seen in terms of restriction or limitations as well as possibilities and new freedoms.

This romancing with the past, this tryst with the past is reflected in the creative output of the diasporic author and Jasbir Jain in this context comments that, I quote, it continues to depend on the bits and pieces of its origin to hold itself together in the face of the onslaught, rejection or domination by the other, by the world which both frightens and fascinates, unquote. So writing becomes a therapeutic process, a process of continuing one's existence, of piecing together the shards of one's memories, one's existence, one's past. And writing becomes also a process of vindication, a process of revenge. Defending oneself in the face of onslaught or the cultural justification that one is constantly having to give, that one is constantly producing in a foreign country, in the face of onslaught, rejection and domination by the cultural other, who is presumably also culturally superior, writing helps. Writing, narrating one's past, narrating one's origin, tracing back, you know, and trying to research, rework on one's roots actually enables a piecing together one's identity.

So this is a way of defending one's fragmented identity. Vijay Mishra suggests that this fascination with or for what has been left behind or with the very home's idea in relation to what is to be acquired in the host land is the consequence of the migratory displacement. In continuation to what Mishra says, Rukshana Ahmed suggests that this process of rumination, this process of mnemonic practice, memorization, retelling of stories, in turn makes the writer imagine home the way that he or she wants it to be. That is, to quote Ahmed, a romantic idealization that fossilizes memories and therefore it can also be referred to as the constant looking back syndrome, unquote. Right.



So like authors in the diaspora have called it, you know, looking back in order to be able to move forward. So the only way an individual in the diaspora can move forward is through this mnemonic practice, which becomes essential to one's existence, essential towards asserting one's belonging and identity, towards vindicating who one is, defending who one is. The return to a home or roots physically is also not always viable or possible because of other important incentives that are offered by the host land. In the very act of returning or turning back

at the past, looking back at the past, lies the problematic of losing identity and most important of all, losing the material opportunity that has been procured through hard work in the host land or places of migration. So, on the one hand, the host land is usually offering with a lot of material opportunities, a lot of opportunities in terms of better lifestyle and money and in terms of access to social and economic resources. So, it becomes almost impossible to go back to one's homeland, not feasible, not possible to turn back. So, one has to recourse, one has to resort to writing.

for the formation of a discourse that is standing on the edifice of, that is balanced on the edifice of romanticization. Next, we see that exoticization of diaspora is also a very common expression we are using in the context of diaspora studies. Exoticization of diaspora is the process of othering or making a diaspora group seem exotic or distant. For example, Asian Indian Americans may be exoticized for their accents, the way they speak English, their traditional dance or habits, the food they eat as well as the music that they play and enjoy. So, exoticization can lead to microaggressions.

Exoticization is actually an offshoot of racist behavior and racist way of thinking. It can very well lead to bullying and verbal disparagement, belittling of another social group. So, it can also make diasporic spaces feel unsafe and fragmented. Diaspora studies value the

stories that diasporas tell about cultural encounters, transformations as well as the emergence of new identities, new often hybrid identities. Now, James Clifford in his work *The Predicament of Culture* which came out in 1988 suggests the following.

The exotic is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem to be no distant places left on the planet where the presence of modern products, media, and power cannot be felt. Further, Kandice Chuh in *Imagine Otherwise*, which came out in 2003, suggests, I quote Chuh here: 'To imagine otherwise is not simply a matter of seeing a common object from different perspectives.' Rather, it is about undoing the very notion of common objectivity itself and about recognizing the ethico-political implications of multiple epistemologies.

Here, it is about knowledge formation and the status and objects of knowledge that underwrite alternative perspectives, unquote. So basically, coming out of this whole idea of having a common objectivity, a common framework that is one-size-fits-all, right? So that is very generalized. That can actually violate the individuality of different social groups, right? On the one hand, we have this, you know, presence of modernity.

We could, I don't know, we could call it the effect or the impact of globalization, right? where media products' power is percolating into all systems, our different systems of thought, our different practices, and there is a tendency to homogenize, to flatten cultures. And yet, on the other hand, when we call something exotic, it suddenly, you know, distances someone from us. In a way, we are saying that the person is unfamiliar, the practice is unfamiliar.

Exotic could actually be synonymous with weird, with strange, with something, you know, from which we are seeking some kind of explanation or justification. So when we call something exotic, we are not familiar with it, and it's outside of our knowledge system. And so it needs to justify itself. The image of the exotic is an important aspect of cultural representation, which is usually associated with the notion of cross-cultural encounters. It implies change, transformation, and appropriation of a culture in different socio-political and historical contexts.

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- **Kandice Chuh** in *Imagine Otherwise* (2003) suggests, “to imagine otherwise is not simply a matter of seeing a common object from different perspectives. Rather, it is about undoing the very notion of common objectivity itself and about recognizing the ethico-political implications of multiple epistemologies—theories about knowledge formation and the status and objects of knowledge—that underwrite alternative perspectives” (x)



As a consequence of the encounter between different systems of social signification, cultural exoticization takes on special significance in the transnational space and provides a common ground for conducting debates. And discussions over the representation of cultural otherness. How is cultural otherness conceived? How is the culturally other represented? That is very close to this whole idea of cultural exoticization, and it is a consequence, an upshot of different systems of

social signification coming together. And, you know, sometimes—most of the time—when they come together, it results in a kind of hierarchy or some form of conflict. So usually, a culture or social group that is socioeconomically more powerful tends to exoticize and, in a way, imposes power on the cultural other. And the other always has to explain and justify its practices, its habits, and its lifestyle to the powerful group. That is how it usually works in reality in a multicultural context.



And that is how it actually occurs in reality in a multicultural context. The cultural images of Oriental women, for example, have long been circulated in the West in terms of their

irresistible exotic features and have obtained a symbolic order of cultural otherness. These women—the way they have been depicted, the Oriental women, the way they have been depicted—actually symbolize cultural otherness. Cathy Song ironically describes in her poem about Kitagawa Utamaro's paintings of Japanese women, where the poem helps us perceive the internal politics of cultural exoticization and recognizes the complexity associated with the representation of the Other or otherness across different cultures or different cultural lenses. Since the early years of colonialism, cultural exoticization has been a common practice of Western opinion-makers, or we could say that their works have initially shaped knowledge about other cultures.

The Western opinion-makers who have navigated to other countries, to other places, have defined other cultures in extremely racist, problematic terms. The mysterious Oriental of Marco Polo, the noble savage of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the romantic South Sea Islanders of Paul Gauguin are some examples where the non-Western Other has been portrayed in quite a problematic manner—in ways that actually accentuate racism and cultural hegemony, and it justifies the inferiority of certain races compared to the Western population, as well as the inferiority of non-Western people in comparison to the white population. To a certain degree, exoticization involves the process of cross-cultural domination. For example, the signification of Asian exotic cultures, according to Edward Said, suggests—I quote Said—'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.'

So, according to Edward Said, the signification of Asian exotic culture suggests a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. To put it very plainly, when we say that the non-Western Other is a brown or yellow person, who is not very tall, who speaks with a certain accent, or who has Mongoloid features, we are not only describing these attributes or characteristic traits but also suggesting, as Said says, that all these traits make an individual inferior to the Western white man. So having short height, brown skin, Mongoloid features, and so forth are not ends in themselves.

They are not natural features in themselves. They actually mean—they imply, from the Western lens—that these people are the cultural other and, hence, they are inferior to, you know, the white man, and they are the white man's burden. Therefore, they need to be civilized, right? So, there is definitely this underlying racist tone that is present when we call something exotic, right?

Double displacement is a concept that can be applied to the diaspora experience, and it can refer to the complex relationship between an individual's identity and belonging in a new country. The notion of identity and belonging can be called into question by the experience of double displacement. Displacement, and then further double displacement, actually deepens the fractures or the fragmentations. Migration is an expression of shifting human-environment relations in response to certain changing risks and opportunities.

Double Displacement

- **Double displacement** is a concept that can be applied to the diaspora experience, and can refer to the complex relationship between an individual's identity and belonging in a new country
- The notion of **identity and belonging** can be called into question by the experience of double displacement
- **Migration** is an expression of shifting human-environment relations in response to changing risks and opportunities. Under modernist development regimes, the perceived environmental qualities of a locality have been used to justify state-led initiatives to encourage people to settle in particular places, in order to exploit favorable conditions and resources



Under modernist development regimes, the perceived environmental qualities of a locality have been used as a way of justifying state-led initiatives, which encourage people to settle in particular places to exploit certain favorable conditions and resources. So, this movement—this human movement—has a deep relationship with shifting human-environment relations. So, this movement has a connection with the shifting human-environment relationship. Usually, the movement is from a region of crisis, a situation of crisis, toward a situation of favorable conditions and opportunities, as well as better resources. Interestingly, while large-scale, state-led resettlement schemes are often designed in response to life-threatening risks

Without supporting the capacity of people to adapt to the everyday risks of deteriorating environmental conditions, So, when people actually move on a large scale to a new land as a way of saving themselves from an exigency—an exigent situation—but their capacity is not built to adapt to the new environmental conditions; And further, when we see that in the new land, there is reduced access to resources and limited employment opportunities, the livelihood precarity does not go away. So, one escapes. There are often situations where an individual escapes from an exigent condition, from an emergency condition back in their homeland, only to land in a new problem, in newer livelihood precarities.

So the precarity, the jeopardy persists; it continues in the new land. And this often results in double displacement. A person lands in a new place without being adapted to the new risks, to the new environmental conditions, and has very limited access to immediate resources, while employment opportunities are also limited. All these factors can actually result in further displacement, also known as double displacement. As such, the increased out-migration from resettlement sites should not always be seen as indicative of new adaptation pathways.

However, due to the largely involuntary nature of such migration, we understand it as an expression of the limits of adaptation in the new localities. Perhaps a social group, a group of people, has not been able to adapt to a new locality and hence has decided to displace further. So they have undergone the experience of double displacement. People's livelihoods after resettlement are particularly sensitive to new cultural shocks and stresses.

As the usual social, political, and economic strategies that they have been applying or relying upon in order to cope with and adapt to the environment may not be present or may not be applicable anymore. And in a new land, their coping mechanisms, their economic, political, and social strategies all need to be reshaped. They need to, in plain words—in a nutshell—they need to actually re-familiarize themselves. You know, they have to re-familiarize themselves, unlearn, and relearn a lot of things.

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- Interestingly, while large-scale, state-led resettlement schemes are often designed in response to life-threatening risks, without supporting the capacity of people to adapt to the everyday risks of deteriorating environmental conditions, and with a reduced access to resources and limited employment opportunities, livelihood precarity persists, often resulting in **double displacement**
- As such the increased out-migration from resettlement sites should not be seen as indicative of new adaptation pathways but, due to the largely involuntary nature of such migration, it should rather be understood as an expression of the limits of adaptation in the new localities
- People's livelihoods after resettlement are particularly sensitive to shocks and stressors, as the usual social, political and economic strategies that people rely upon in order to cope with and adapt to changes may not be present or may need to be reshaped.



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When a population is or a people cannot adapt to these new mechanisms, new coping mechanisms, they have to be doubly displaced; they have to further move to another new land. So, understanding why some people leave whereas others stay is therefore crucial in explaining the uneven nature of displacement. While some people can adjust to a new land, others find it difficult, and it enables us to address the limits and opportunities associated with the locally oriented coping and adaptation measures that people develop after their

resettlement. How people are, you know, applying new coping measures and adaptation measures—while some groups can use these mechanisms and they click,

they actually work in a new land. For another group, their mechanisms, their measures, their strategies may not work, and they may not be able to adjust to the environment and decide to move further. This study, therefore, provides important insights on the relations between resettlement and migration, and demonstrates the case of double displacement for that section of people who have been unable to adapt to the changes accompanying and following resettlement to a new land. So, they have not been able to adapt to the changes, the challenges, and the new situations that they faced.

while resettling in new land. Double displacement is a situation where people are unable to adapt to changes and they migrate due to environmental or economic constraints in most cases. It can occur in a number of contexts including (a) resettlement So, resettlement schemes can be constrained by environmental and economic factors leading to people being unable to adapt and therefore, they ultimately migrate again. For example, increased out migration after resettlement can be a form of double displacement.

The next factor is (b) post-disaster migration. People who have lost their homes and livelihoods due to a disaster may be forced to migrate abroad. For example, after the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, the Syrian refugees who were already displaced by war lost their homes and livelihoods again. So these are some of the factors that provoke, that motivate double displacement. With this, we come to the end of our lecture today.



Let's meet with a new topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.



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