

# **REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA**

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**Lecture 04**

## **Lecture 04: Understanding of Refugee Agency and Identities**

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on refugees, migration, and diaspora. So, today we will continue from our previous lecture. We will start with our understanding of refugees, space, and identity through a discussion on Aldous Huxley's work *Brave New World*. So, *Brave New World*, written in 1932, offers a profound exploration of a dystopian future where human society is intricately controlled and regulated.

So, the novel's depiction of a dystopian future serves as a profound metaphor for the sociocultural dynamics that migrants face, especially the negotiation of identity that they undergo, the resistance against cultural homogenization, as well as the psychological impacts of displacement that they experience. Huxley describes, you know, the process of sleep teaching or hypnopædic teaching or learning that is used, the hypnopædic learning that is used from birth to condition individuals to accept their social fate. This hypnopædic learning is compared to the integration processes, where migrants might be subtly indoctrinated into certain values or practices of the host society.

David Harvey states that the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies, and aesthetic values we desire. So, in the novel, the reservations are described as isolated areas for people who do not conform to the societal norms and so they are forced to live primitive lives. Migrants often find themselves in marginalized communities within the host societies, within the host countries, which are very much akin to the reservations; and these reservations can therefore act as sanctuaries of preserved cultures, then they can also be ghettos of exclusion.

At the same time, they can play the dual function of preserving a culture and also excluding a people. In the novel, the character of John the Savage finds himself caught



So, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin illustrates how the chronotope is essential for understanding literature's representation of time and space as unified and dynamic forces. Basically, a literary work, you know, churns out of the essence of time and space intersecting and, as a result, creates a unique meaning in itself. When a particular time intersects with a particular space, you know, for example, 20th-century London.

It has its own essence. It has its own significance and meaning. And literature grows out, emerges, or churns out of this particular spatio-temporal meaning, right? Or as a result of the dynamic forces that are involved when a particular time and a particular space intersect, right? And this intersection is known as the chronotope, and this is something we also see represented in literature.

Mikhail Bakhtin states that in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are thoughtfully fused into one concrete whole. So, spatial and temporal indicators intersect, and that is how one concrete literary whole meaning is conceived. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically visible. Likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.

The chronotope captures the essence of migration. where the journey, referring to space, you know, traversing through different spaces, that is the journey of the refugee or the migrant. And the migrant's historical and personal sense of time or timeline, that is the time. These two, the journey or the space, and the historical and personal timeline, These two dimensions or factors intersect to form a narrative of continuous identity formation, transformation, and cultural negotiations.

So, the identity of the refugee is essentially in a state of flux. What is the What by Dave Eggers is a novel based on the real-life story of Valentino Achak Deng, who is a Sudanese refugee and one of the lost boys of Sudan. The narrative traverses between his life in refugee camps in Africa and his later experiences in the United States. The camps

in the novel serve as critical junctures where past traumas and future hopes kind of meet. Camp becomes a meeting point.

Camp becomes a crossroad where future hopes and past traumas intersect. Time in the camps is marked not by the clock, nor by the calendrical sense of time. The camp is not, you know, operating through a calendrical or clock sense of time, but by the events of survival, waiting, eternal waiting, you know, and the anticipation of a new life ahead. Space is a confined parameter, on the other hand.

And space is thriving with narratives, different narratives from diverse refugees. So, space becomes a meeting point, a contact point of diverse refugees from diverse backgrounds, each carrying their own tales, anecdotes, accounts, and aspirations. Space happens through the spirit of these different stories, diverse narratives that each refugee carries with themselves. Refugee camps are not just physical spaces, but they are also temporal spaces where time seems to have become suspended forever for those living within them.

Refugees often spend years and years in the camps waiting for resettlement or return, repatriation. So, they do not find a state of permanent identity. They are constantly in a state of suspension for years together. Time in refugee camps often feels suspended or cyclic in nature. They are not calendrical, unilinear, progressing from one point to another very clearly, as days may blend into one another without any significant sense of progress, change, growth, or evolution, emphasizing a prolonged temporality that affects the psyche and social dynamics of the refugees.

Despite their transitory purpose, the camps often become long-term or sometimes even permanent homes for the refugees, affecting how these people perceive their future and their sense of stability, which is nowhere to be found. Now, Zygmunt Bauman's work on modernity and ambivalence explores how camps function as spaces and temporalities of exclusion and isolation, reflecting broader social ambivalence towards refugees. In this context, Bauman talks about liquid modernity. To quote Bauman, modernity is constantly on the move. It is in flight.

But this is not a flight from confinement, oppression, or hardship. It is a flight from a burdensome burden, unquote. So, Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity describes this constantly changing, uncertain world where all the traditional structures and concepts are undergoing some kind of change or are in a state of flux. Bauman views migrants as strangers who challenge any form of preconceived understanding or pre-

given understanding of stability and homogeneity in national communities. Their addition to the national community adds or changes meanings to the existing community.

So, this particular kind of interception or addition, or we could say destabilization of the homogeneous national community, often leads to social tensions and a sense of insecurity and unfriendliness. Hostility on the part of the host populations. And this hostility particularly arises from a more competitive scenario in the job market and out of the fact that the resources The important resources now need to be shared with the refugee population. Next, we see that Henri Lefebvre's theory explores how space is produced through social practices and power relations.

Lefebvre focuses on the interplay between spatial arrangements and social structures. So, lived space refers to the subjective existence of space, which is shaped by social interactions and practices. They are important in understanding the refugees' experiences in the camps. So, space, therefore, according to Lefebvre, is a social product. A process of production that is constantly evolving through social practices and relations.

There is no such thing as 'space is,' which shows some kind of stagnant, pre-given, permanent meaning. Space constantly 'becomes'. Space has a very discursive repertoire of meanings. In that sense, it is almost like a bricolage where new meanings can be deployed and redeployed, and newer significations can be added to the same space. Now, we have this concept of the triad of spatial practice according to Lefebvre's model, which includes three dimensions of space.

One is the perceived space, which comprises the spatial practices. Then the conceived space, which comprises the representations of a space concept. And here we can think of cartography or maps, the representation of a space. And in the postmodern condition, we know that the map precedes the geography. The map precedes the territory.

Right. And then. Thirdly, we have the lived space, which is the representational spaces. Through the lived experiences of the refugees, we have meanings emanating out of a space, meanings understood about a space, or meanings construed of a space. Then we see that analyzing refugee camps through Lefebvre's lens reveals how these spaces are produced and managed through reflecting political, economic, and social influences.

By asserting their presence and rights, the refugees and migrants can challenge and question the existing power structures of a given host society if they are not viewed as conducive to the privileges that the refugees expect. So, here we see that in a post-

colonial world that we live in, that we inhabit, the refugees are not only seen as helpless, defenseless, rootless people, but also people who are potentially capable of changing the meanings of a society, people who try to influence the society in a way that is conducive to their own privileges, to their own own benefits and own advantages. So, they are not only victims but also act as active agents in the host society who are trying to impose their own values, their own perspectives, their own cultures, and their own baggage of history that they carry with themselves.

They are not empty signs. They are, you know, carrying many histories and many narratives in them. So, they have their own burden to offer to the host society. And at the same time, the host society definitely has to, you know, offer its own burden onto the refugee and the refugee community is being shaped through both these opposing factors, the culture that they carry, that they inherit, and the host society's culture that is offered and sometimes enforced on them.

So, refugees and migrants often engage in acts of resistance within the spaces that they inhabit in host lands, thereby challenging the power dynamics that are forced on them or that they are expected to abide by or that they are expected to follow. These acts of resistance can take place in the form of protests, that is, refugee protests, community organizing, and cultural forms of expression. So, Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space examines how spaces are socially constructed and contested. This concept highlights the role of spatial practices in resistance and in the assertion of rights. Lefebvre's theory underscores the potential for refugee groups to reshape their environments.

Like I was saying, refugees are not only victims in a particular land or victims of circumstances, but they can also be enactors, enablers of new practices, of newer cultures, and actually, they can be writers or creators of, protagonists of a new history altogether, turning spaces of exclusion into areas of empowerment through an exercise of active agency and conscious choice of their own. So, both things are at play. They are victims of circumstances, but then they can also play as actors and practitioners, as bearers of a new culture in the host land. Doreen Massey introduces the idea of a global sense of place, emphasizing that places are interconnected with global processes.

Places are not isolated geographical lands in themselves. So, local places are influenced by global movements, including that of global mass migrations. Doreen Massey states, I quote, 'What is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity

or some untouched authenticity.' Rather, it is its particularity as a meeting place of social relations. And it is through this node of contact, these points of contact of different cultures, that new hybrid meanings emerge.

Migrants play a vital role in the labor markets, contributing to economic growth and development, and thereby, you know, forming their, increasing their stake in the new land. Migrants send remittances from the money that they earn back to their native countries where they may have some of their family members still living, thereby supporting their families in their homeland and local economies. So, here we see the essential role of the refugee population. Socio-spatial justice involves the fair and equitable distribution of spaces and resources within society.

For refugees and migrants, this socio-spatial justice refers to access to safe housing, access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. So, Massey's concept of spatial justice emphasizes the interconnectedness of social and spatial processes. This concept advocates for inclusive and equitable spatial practices which recognize the stake, responsibility, as well as the contributions of all, regardless of whether they are from the host population or the immigrant population. So, a sense of contribution, a sense of having a stake, responsibility, and right should be present in all the people that are contributing to the economy, that are participants in the economy. Implementing spatial justice effectively can significantly improve the quality of life of refugees and migrants, ensuring that their integration into the new host community is both fair and beneficial.

From here, we will move on to a new concept called Third Space by Homi Bhabha. So, Third Space is a term coined by cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha and later it has been popularized by geographer Edward Soja. So, Bhabha introduces the idea of Third Space as an area where different cultures meet and interact, which often leads to the creation of new hybrid cultural identities. The Third Space challenges traditional binary divisions in society and enables the complex formation of identity that cannot be easily categorized. Third Space refers to the interstitial space of cultural encounter in which the colonizer and the colonized, or by extension of this meaning, the empowered and the disempowered or less empowered, can negotiate,

And produce hybridity in culture. This type of culture subverts colonial domination by deconstructing essentialist identity and binary oppositions that are signified by the East or the Orient and the West or the Occident. So, this type of binary opposition between the Occident and the Orient or the West and the East is kind of diluted. Through the concept

of the third space, the third space therefore refers to a unique conceptual and physical space where the traditional binary distinctions of society/local/global, center/margin, object/subject, and so forth are disrupted, intersected, and redefined. In the third space, people engage with and negotiate their cultural identities, often creating a new hybrid identity which combines elements of different spaces.

This could be in terms of language, customs, and values. Edward Soja's third space is therefore a modern concept that combines the physical aspect of space, which is the first space, and the mental aspect of space, which is the second space, and as a result of these two dimensions meeting, the third space happens. The third space therefore encompasses both the real and the imagined, the objective and the subjective aspects of space. The third space challenges the traditional binary thinking based on spatial analysis by integrating the social, historical, and spatial dimensions of a space. It emphasizes the fluidity and multiplicity, the multi-layeredness of spaces.

I was talking about the palimpsestic quality of space in my previous lecture, a space that Or history, the cultural history of any space being a palimpsest in terms of different layers of history, you know, kind of piled or stacked on one another. That's how we have new cultural formations, one culture, one identity lying on the other. That's how histories, you know, grow out of histories. Spaces grow out of spaces.

Meanings grow out of meanings. So, Soja states, I quote, understanding third space is crucial for addressing the complex realities of migration in a globalized world, unquote. It was Soja's third space theory, integrating physical, social, and subjective dimensions of space, offering a comprehensive view of how spaces are experienced. Applying third space theory to refugee camps enables one to analyze how these spaces serve as sites of both adaptation to new culture and conflict because their own cultures also need to be retained and practiced. Applying third space theory to refugee camps enables one to analyze how these spaces serve as sites of both adaptation and conflict.

Adaptation or adjustment vis-à-vis the host culture and conflict where one wants to assert one's culture from the homeland, the native land. From where they have traveled. So, it is both the cultures that one wants to maintain, retain, adapt to the new culture of the host land, and also retain some aspects of the culture that they have carried from their home, from their native places. So, third space emphasizes the interplay between spatial arrangements and power dynamics, thereby revealing how these factors influence

refugees' experiences. It explores how spatial practices reflect and reinforce power structures.

Migrants develop hybrid identities which reflect their connection to both the origin and the host or destination societies. They often occupy marginalized spaces in the host society, such as informal settlements or the peripheries of urban areas. Homi Bhabha describes the third space as one where culture is a strategy of survival in both transnational and translational senses. So, transnational where a refugee body has traversed

From the homeland to the host land, and translational in the sense of, you know, translating their own culture, language, and habits to the host land, and also interpreting and translating back the culture of the host land, imbibing the culture of the host land. Right. So, transnational and translational in the sense that they have carried the refugee bodies, their own refugee bodies, from one nation, from one land to another in the geopolitical sense, and translational in terms of giving their own culture, their own knowledge system, their own habits to the host land and also imbibing the knowledge system, the local habits, the local culture that the host society has to offer, giving and taking the transaction, the translation of cultural, food, sartorial, and other mundane habits. So, an exchange in the transnational and translational sense.

So, next we move to Junot Diaz's novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. This novel provides a vivid exploration of the Dominican diaspora, especially focusing on the life of Oscar, a Dominican American, who navigates between his cultural identities and histories, both in the Dominican Republic and in New Jersey, USA. The protagonist Oscar and his family live in a diasporic third space where they are constantly navigating the socio-political and cultural tensions between the Dominican Republic and the United States. These tensions are reflected in their everyday experiences and identity formations. The novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, shifts between the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, portraying the characters' lives as influenced by both the history of Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship back in the Dominican Republic, as well as the contemporary challenges that the United States has to offer to the immigrants.

So, the double tension, one as experiencing the dictatorship, the dictatorship of Trujillo's regime, and on the other hand, the challenges as an immigrant in the US. So, this interface creates a third space where historical and geographical narratives merge, producing a unique transcultural identity. Diaz uses extensive footnotes throughout this

novel to provide historical context about the Dominican Republic. So, these footnotes enrich the primary narrative by inserting a layer of historical reality that influences the characters' lives and identities, thereby blurring the lines between the novel's narrative and historical discourse.

The novel itself becomes a third space where the reader navigates between the main text, the progression of the novel itself, and the layers of footnotes, histories, mini-histories that are added, you know, as parentheses, as a side narrative, a parallel narrative, each adding depth and perspectives to the understanding of migration and identity. So, the concept of the third space helps explain how migrants like Oscar and his family develop identities that are fluid, hybrid, and often conflict-ridden. These identities are not fixed but are constantly reshaped. Through the interactions between their past cultural experiences and the demands and realities that the new environment, the new land of the US, have to offer, right. Macedonian states, I quote, 'Belonging is constructed through the everyday practices and interactions that occur within local communities,' unquote.

Inclusive practices at the local level, such as cultural festivals and language classes, all these practices or all these initiatives promote a sense of belonging for the refugee community. These practices help bridge the gap between the migrants and the local populations. Local belonging involves integration into communities where migrants can form social ties and networks. And so, community support becomes crucial for the overall well-being of the migrant community. National belonging is tied to the concept of the nation-state, which, as we see, Anderson mentions in 'Imagined Communities,'

defines who belongs and who does not belong. So, the nation is a concept that defines, you know, people that define social groups in terms of belonging and not belonging to a particular geopolitical area circumscribed by the national border. So, migrants often struggle to be recognized as full members of the national community. They face cultural and legal barriers to national belonging in terms of language requirements and citizenship laws. These barriers reinforce their status as essentially the outsiders to the national community.

So, national narratives often exclude migrants and depict them as potential threats to the sense of social cohesion of a nation. So, the pressure on refugees to integrate and self-define underpins the overlapping space between citizens and refugees. The process of becoming a citizen from a refugee is ridden with this kind of constant sense of self-justification that a refugee needs to provide. So, citizenship in any postcolonial state is

polymorphous and hierarchical in nature. The label refugee opens a fresh political terrain upon which citizenship is to be negotiated in any post-colonial state.

For the refugee, it becomes a significant tool in gaining political influence and in bargaining concessions from the new state. So, from being refugees to becoming citizens, this is a journey marked by one's distance from camp life. The more you are dependent on government financing, the less resource-rich you are, the more you will be tagged with the term refugee. So, there are essentially two types of refugees. One is the self-supported, and another is the state-supported.

It is an administrative filter to separate the refugees as a resource-rich population and the population that depends on sponsorship, that depends on the welfare policies of the state. So, sustainable reintegration requires comprehensive support for a refugee, including access to safe housing, education, and employment. And then we see that for refugees or a refugee community's overall well-being, collaboration between home and host countries is essential. So, according to UNHCR or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, repatriation involves the voluntary return of refugees to their home countries, which is often facilitated by international organizations.

According to UNHCR, repatriation is not just about returning home, It is also mostly about rebuilding lives and communities. So, this process of rehabilitation or repatriation of refugees can be, you know, full of new threats. It can foster xenophobia and further discrimination back in their homeland, from where they had fled in the first place, from where they were ousted initially. If they go back to their homeland, they could experience xenophobia and discrimination once again.

So, refugee agency involves empowering the refugees to make decisions about their lives and their futures. Refugees should be able to advocate for their rights and represent their interests in various forums so that they feel, you know, a sense of belonging to the current communities, so they feel somewhat assimilated into the environment where they are staying after fleeing from their homeland. Advocacy groups and literary narratives, in this sense, play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of the refugees. And the refugees demonstrate resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity.

This is another salient feature of refugee communities. Their strategies for survival and integration in the face of different challenges, the manifold difficulties and challenges. They face right from their experience of being ousted from their homeland to the experience of, you know, coming to a new land and integrating with the culture. All these

difficulties, these challenges reflect their agency. And so we find that literary narratives offer nuanced portrayals of their challenges, their difficulties, their tribulations, and their triumphs.

And these literary documentations, the filmic documentations, and the memorial documentations on refugees promote empathy and respect, a more humanitarian perspective, and a greater understanding of the refugee crisis that we are seeing across the globe today. I would like to stop my lecture here today. Thank you.