

# **REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA**

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## **Lecture 05**

### **Lecture 05: Alienation and Affect in context of Migration**

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on refugees, migration, and diaspora. So, today we are going to discuss alienation and affect in the context of migration. We will understand terms such as affect and the different kinds of affect, as well as the idea, the very concept of alienation. So, alienation has multi-dimensional, you know, aspects.

Alienation encompasses disconnection from various facets of life, including one's self and identity, community, culture, and also labor. So, alienation can happen at all these levels. Alienation is a multifaceted concept which is influenced by a number of social, cultural, and economic factors. In order to understand alienation, it is important to confront the deeper questions of identity and belonging in a fragmented or fractured world. So, different theorists have explored different dimensions of alienation, which include the question of labor or the experience of labor, as well as the cultural, social, and spatial consequences of alienation.

The specific context, it could be labor. It could be, you know, alienation as a result of one's labor, alienation as a result of one's racial, cultural, or spatial belonging, which uniquely shapes the intimate, specific experience of alienation. And it helps us understand how alienation can operate differently in different given settings. Now, talking about the subtypes of alienation, there could be something called self-alienation.

It refers to displacement from one's own values and identity in order to survive in a given environment, and this eventually leads to an existential crisis. So, self-alienation is often discussed in the works of philosophers like Karl Marx and who examined how individuals can become estranged from their own labor and identity. Next, we talk about

cultural alienation. This is a feeling of detachment from one's own cultural heritage, and it is further worsened or exacerbated in diasporic contexts.

And cultural alienation has been frequently addressed in the discussions of diaspora and post-colonial theory by critics such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, who explored the complexities of cultural identity in transnational contexts. Next, we have social alienation. It refers to the estrangement from social groups and networks, which leads to isolation. Sociologists such as Émile Durkheim have studied the impacts of modernity on social bonds, how modernity as a phenomenon has impacted interpersonal relationships within a society. So, Karl Marx argues that workers become estranged from, detached from their labor and the products they create, which are something alien from their own existence, from their own identity, and ultimately they are estranged from themselves.

They are reduced to a part of their body. For example, a shoemaker who is making 100 shoes a day in an unthinking manner is detached from the labor. He is reduced to an unthinking pair of hands. He is nothing more than a pair of hands. So, there are four types of alienation.

Alienation from the product refers to the worker who does not own the product they create. Alienation from the process of work occurs when the work becomes a means to survival rather than something that brings fulfillment or engagement. Further alienation from others in competitive labor relations creates isolation. People are working in their own niche, in their own ghettoed situation, cut off from the environment. This is very much symptomatic of modern society, even postmodern society, where the connection is essentially severed.

And then there is alienation from self. Ultimately, this is the essence of humanity being lost in mechanized work. The holistic existence is somehow threatened, somehow thwarted. According to Karl Marx, I quote, 'The worker is related to the product of his labor as to an alien object,' unquote. So, the product is no longer something that the

worker has created mindfully out of volition, out of a spiritual attachment to the work. So the product of such labor, where the person is reduced to a couple of hands or limbs, hardly applying their brain, cognition, or will, is something organically separated from the doer of the work. The doer, the maker of the object, right. Next, Alfred Schutz devises the term 'life world' or 'Lebenswelt,' a term that Alfred Schutz has emphasized, and it refers to the importance of the life world. Life world refers to a shared social context that provides meaning to experiences.

This context, this life world or Lebenswelt, is lost; it falls apart when we are experiencing social alienation, when we are in a ghettoed condition, when one part of our body is not in alignment. Not in coordination with another part, where the mind is something, and the hand is something else. And I am completely, you know, cut off from the people who are co-working with me. It leads to fragmentation within the human, among the humans. So, life world, to quote Alfred Schutz, the life world is the taken-for-granted world of everyday life, unquote.

Social alienation refers to, therefore, disconnection. Disconnection which arises when individuals feel estranged from the social groups that constitute their life world. When we talk of intersubjectivity, we refer to a meaning, a relevance, you know, social relevance that is created through interactions and exchanges with others, and the moment there is alienation of any kind, intersubjectivity is disrupted. And, so is the Lifeworld or Lebenswelt. So, talking about the different impacts of colonialism, Franz Fanon explores how colonialism has alienated individuals from their original cultural identity.

So, individuals feel disconnected from their heritage and experience a crisis of identity as a result of, you know, the colonial legacy where, you know, a lot of values that they had bequeathed, that they had inherited from their ancestors, that had been bequeathed by their ancestors, are nullified. They are thwarted, right, and even treated as something very negative. That should be gotten rid of, right. Now, talking about Frantz Fanon and the black experience, Fanon, through his multiple works on the subject of the black experience, focuses on how racial identity contributes to feelings of inferiority and estrangement. So, in the words of Frantz Fanon, I quote, 'I am not a man; I am a black man,' unquote.

Right. His experience is not adequately pronounced or adequately described unless the skin color and the baggage of race and ethnicity are also taken into the loop of the person's definition. So a black man's experience is a unique experience in its own right. It cannot be conflated with every man's experience. So I'm not a man; I'm a black man.

It refers to the specific treatment of discrimination, racial hatred, and the baggage of blackness that a black person carries, something that one does not disown. It becomes a source of identity-making, identity assertion, right? So, Benhabib states, I quote, 'The claims of culture must be reconciled with the universal claims of human rights.' According to Seyla Benhabib, the claims of culture must be reconciled with the universal

claims of human rights. So, Seyla Benhabib discusses how cultural identity becomes a site of struggle for migrants in a new land.

In diasporic contexts, individuals experience a sense of dislocation from their cultural roots as they have to kind of unlearn and relearn a lot of new things. They are kind of uprooted and grafted. Into a new cultural environment. Also, the question of negotiating identity is involved in the diasporic context. According to Benhabib, identity negotiation is an active, dynamic process.

Individuals engage with various cultural narratives and choose elements that resonate with their own experiences. If we have a universal set of pre-given elements in a foreign culture, one person may affiliate or attach to certain habits and certain practices. Whereas another person may adhere to other values, practices, and codes of conduct. And this is also, this choice is something that is, you know, usually in alignment with one's own experience, with one's own culture, any habit from another culture that is closer to my own would be sooner and more easily adopted.

Right. Because this is how identity becomes a kind of flux. Something that is not stable, but something that is, you know, changing shape and color according to strategies that facilitate one's survival and living experience, lifestyle. Now, critic and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in order to explore the overlapping social identities in her work titled *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. This work helps us to understand the intersectionality of experiences of alienation and affect as influenced by intersecting identities such as race, gender, class, for colored women.

Who is from a lower socioeconomic strata, who does not have a very strong educational background, the marginalization, the alienation is at multiple levels, at the level of gender, at the level of class. At the level of ethnicity, right. So, such a person is facing her marginalization, which is very well explained when we see it through the lens of Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, right. There are intersections of several factors, and at the crossroads of all these factors, her particular experience of alienation lies. So different groups face unique challenges based on their social positioning.

This is what I have been trying to state. So, for example, I was talking about the migrant women who often experience compounded vulnerabilities. So, if I am a woman of color who is from a tribal group and who has very limited economic means and very little education, my vulnerability, you know, comes from different factors, and intersectionality actually explains my compounded sense of vulnerability in a very

meaningful way. So, while alienation is a disconnection from the immediate environment, affect This is another term that we are going to discuss today.

Affect is a pre-conscious emotional response which is stimulated by this sense of disconnectedness. So, alienation often worsens our feelings of anxiety, fear, and despair, and this is further emphasized in the case of the migrants. who are dealing with a new environment in a foreign land. So, migrants maintain relationships across borders, which can enhance their sense of identity, boost their sense of identity, and enhance their emotional resilience. So, how is this connection with the homeland made?

One could be through economic ties where a lot of migrants who are working abroad send remittances to their homeland, to their family. And this remittance becomes a chief source of livelihood, a chief source of money at home. And the other way of connecting with the homeland is through cultural exchange, blending of cultural practices which reinforce, which prop up their identity in a foreign land. Next, we have to understand the question of emotional labor vis-a-vis the immigrant experience. Migrants engage in emotional labor in order to navigate social expectations and experiences.

In order to maintain their relationships and their survival. And this process of having to explain and justify one's very basic habits, having to justify even one's surname, like Jhumpa Lahiri says, she felt mortified at the thought of giving pain to others just because they had to pronounce her supposedly difficult surname. She would be mortified at the idea. She would be so ashamed for having to give, you know, supposedly give trouble to others because they had to pronounce a difficult Indian surname.

So this is tantamount to, you know, this tantamounts to explaining and justifying who you are, even your basic habits, even your name. And it leads to emotional labor. You know, an extra bit of emotional effort, investment that goes towards maintaining relationships, even living up to the social expectations in a new land, and it definitely leads to emotional exhaustion to a certain level. It leads to emotional exhaustion to a certain level. Now, talking about affect, which is also seen as a response.

A collective or an individual response to life-changing experiences such as migration to a new land. So alienation we see can intensify emotional distress. Feelings of alienation can lead to depression and anxiety. On the other hand, if I have to quote from Brian Massumi, affect is a preconscious intensity that shapes our engagements with the world, unquote.

So, affects are neither under our conscious control nor even necessarily within our awareness. It is something more subconscious, if not unconscious. So affect can only sometimes be captured through one's language, right? So affect is pre-conscious.

It is not really identified unless it can be grasped through one's language. The affect theory, almost like a Freudian slip, you know, a slip of the tongue that reflects your unconscious or your subconscious. It is a dynamic field. So affect theory is a dynamic field of scholarship which explores bodies, worlds, and forces that move and motivate things into relational existence. According to Brian Massumi, affect is a threshold concept.

It lies at the crossroads of body, mind, and culture. So affect theory is an approach to culture, history, sociality, and the question of power, which primarily focuses on non-linguistic forces. Affect is raw and immediate. Whereas emotions are more processed, so an individual has some intervention, some interpreted responses as far as you know emotions or even the feeling of alienation is concerned. Affect is something more basic, more raw, and more immediate, more unexplained. When we talk of embodied affect, we are referring to emotions that are rooted mainly in our physical experiences. The effect that is resulting, as it is, you know, owing to some physical experience.

So, it refers to how bodies respond to environments. Affect theory deals with how affect shapes social relations and the power dynamics that are involved in migration. So, emotional landscapes reflect the interplay of nostalgia and belonging, which shape our cultural identity. So, some of the key emotional experiences are Vis-a-vis the diasporic communities, including the longing for home, nostalgia for the homeland, and its cultural practices.

And then we have two limbs, majorly with respect to the diaspora experience. One is belonging; the other is exclusion. This tension between these two feelings almost works in tandem, where one is either facing acceptance or facing discrimination. And sometimes they are facing both at the same time in different settings. So, in the same foreign land, one could be accepted in the professional circle but discriminated against in the neighborhood where they are living.

Or they are discriminated against in public places, such as in a shopping mall or in a cinema hall, right? However, they are accepted very well as far as the professional place is concerned. So, there could be a mixture of experiences as well. Svetlana Boym explores nostalgia as a complex emotional response that shapes our identity. So, Boym...

Discusses two kinds of nostalgia. One is reflective nostalgia, and the other is restorative nostalgia. Reflective nostalgia, according to Boym, is a nostalgic feeling that reflects on the past without necessarily desiring to reconstruct it. So, it emphasizes personal memory and the experience of loss. On the other hand, restorative nostalgia has a tendency, as the name suggests, to restore.

It is a way of resurrecting, bringing to life, and recreating the lost home, which is different from the original home, however. And bringing to life, resurrecting the cultural practices associated or connected to this concept of home. And so, restorative nostalgia is often associated with a desire for political or cultural restoration, right. It is a way of asserting one's own political or cultural identity. However, reflective nostalgia is less agenda-driven when seen in this sense.

It is just a way of reminiscing. Going back to the past through personal memory and personal, you know, just revisiting the personal axis of experiences, the different shades of experiences. Critic and scholar Judith Butler discusses the implications of grief and loss in the context of social justice and recognition in her work *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, which came out in 2004. According to Butler, to grieve is to be marked by the loss of a life. To grieve is to acknowledge the precariousness of life itself.

And to commit to the acknowledgment of that life as valuable, unquote. So grief is a way of, you know, seeing life through all its, you know, all its possibilities, its precarity. And accepting that precarity and still recognizing, embracing the life as valuable, albeit its precarity, albeit the losses, the susceptible ends that are associated with it. Embracing the life as valuable despite all the vulnerabilities that are attached to it. So, displacement often results in trauma.

This is a very common occurrence. So, displacement often results in trauma. So, this is a very common phenomenon, and trauma alters emotional states, sometimes permanently, and it could lead to long-term, sometimes perennial psychological issues. So, we have collective trauma versus individual trauma. When we talk of collective trauma, we are referring to shared traumatic experiences, traumatic feelings within a community which affect people at the group level in the form of group identity which

frustrates one's group identity and sense of solidarity. This is collective trauma. I quote George, collective trauma occurs when a group perceives its existence as threatened,

unquote. On the other hand, individual trauma refers to unique experiences of loss, danger, and dislocation faced by migrants. Bessel van der defines trauma as, I quote,

Not just an event that took place some time in the past, it is also the imprint left by that experience on the mind, brain, and body. So trauma, it has been agreed upon by different trauma scholars that trauma is a delayed experience. It does not happen at the moment when someone is facing the crisis. It comes back as a delayed, you know, repercussion or a delayed response to one's wounded experience. And it is sometimes believed.

In fact, traditionally, it is believed that trauma is a recurring cyclic setback that the brain experiences, the mind and the body face without any respite. So, there is no respite or escape from this vicious circle. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth, one of the foremost critics who has established the field of trauma studies, So, Caruth says that trauma is a wound that cannot heal due to its repressed nature.

Trauma is not something that is out there and immediately understood. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is not just an event; it is also a haunting that compels attention, unquote. So, Gabriele Schwab says, Study is the impact of traumatic experiences on memory and narrative. Trauma and memory are very close-knit twin concepts.

So, according to Schwab, to quote Schwab, 'Memory is the site of trauma, and trauma is the site of memory,' unquote. Schwab would argue that trauma and memory are interwoven, where the act of remembering can trigger traumatic responses. Memories, at the same time, are not static. They are continually experiencing, you know, undergoing different emotional states; they are influenced by different emotional states and different outward happenings and incidents.

So, memories are constantly changing their shapes and forms. They are influenced by different emotional states and outward factors and experiences. So, memory plays a critical role in the processing of trauma. Memory affects how individuals remember and interpret their past experiences, which in turn shapes an individual's identity and influences their emotional state and well-being. Traumatic memories may be, or rather they are usually fragmented, which leads to a sense of disconnection from the self and past experiences.

Theorists such as Judith Herman suggest that recovery from trauma involves the gradual reclamation of memory and narrative. According to Judith Herman, I quote, 'The trauma is in the past, but the effects are in the present.' So, like I said, even what Cathy Caruth

says is that the impact of trauma, the aftermath of trauma, seems not to go away. And there is no such question as outliving or surviving, outdoing trauma. According to traditional trauma scholars or trauma scholars,

Trauma critics, there is no outgrowing trauma because trauma keeps coming back in a cyclic form. Herman posits that recovery from trauma involves reclaiming lost memories and integrating them into a personal narrative. So, recovery would only happen when these memories can be integrated into a personal narrative. The journey towards recovery often requires facing up to, confronting certain very painful memories and rebuilding a sense of self, picking up the shards of oneself and moving ahead.

So, but to be able to do that, one has to face those painful moments from the past. If usually a trauma victim runs away from, you know, psychologically escapes from those painful moments, they are not able to face those moments, they develop their own escaping and survival strategies. Herman highlights the lasting effects of trauma that extend into the present and suggests that unresolved trauma can actually come back and interfere with our present life, our daily functioning, and even human relationships that we are sharing. So, recovery necessitates or involves acknowledgment and processing of the negative past experiences.

Only once one can face these experiences can one move ahead. Narratives help an individual make sense of their trauma. allowing them to reconstruct their identities, bringing together the pieces of their identity and moving forward. And therefore, it enables storytelling, narrative. This culture enables integration of fragmented memories.

Storytelling, therefore, has always been considered a therapeutic mechanism that enables individuals to articulate their experiences and emotions. According to Peter Lighthead, I quote, 'Telling stories is a way to wrestle with the past and make it intelligible,' unquote. So, Lighthead emphasizes the significance of narrative in understanding complex experiences that one often does not like to face. By telling their own stories, individuals can confront their trauma, reshape their identities, and find healing and curing through connection with others. To conclude, understanding

The interplay between alienation, affect, trauma, and memory is, therefore, crucial. In order to explain the interconnected experiences and complex emotional responses to migration. So, when we talk of migration, we are talking of all these things at the same time, at different points, in different situations: the question of alienation, affect, Trauma

and memory are all built into the question of emotional responses to migration. With this, I would like to conclude my lecture today.

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