

ROOTLESSNESS VERSUS DUAL IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF DISPLACED PEOPLE BY FOCUSING ON THE SELECTED WORKS OF PHILIP ROTH AND HANNAH ARENDT

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The displaced people often faces the problems like deracination, oppression, legal disabilities, an endless struggle with issues of identity and an often painful adjustment to a host land whose hospitality was unreliable and ephemeral. The concept of displaced persons implies a 'homing desire' which is not the same as a 'desire for a "homeland"' or an 'ideology of "return"' (Brah 180). Furthermore, as K. Gardner notes, the very migratory process inherently involves "acts of the imagination, in which home and destination are continually re-imagined, and thus forever changed" (35). 'Home' has always been a difficult concept to define because it has multiple meanings with differing levels of abstraction. For our purposes, we can point to four significant meanings of home: firstly, a geographical space or material home; secondly, a site where everyday life is lived, the 'lived home,' thirdly, a nucleus of social relationships and a point of identification, a cultural home; fourthly, a 'desired home.' Different meanings of home can be contradictory, while simultaneously bleeding into each other, within diasporic experience (Clifford 303-04). In brief, the term diaspora may be defined as "the collective forced dispersion of a religious or ethnic group, where the group's cultural heritage is nevertheless preserved and the historical fact of dispersion is retained in its collective memory" (Chaliand and Rageau 3). In addition, diaspora communities usually retain an idealized memory of the original homeland, and they often feel "alienated and insulated" from their adopted location in the hostland. (Safran 83-4). People living in a diasporic condition attempt to retain their heritage and ethnic identity by holding onto cultural memory, which is contained in the diasporic community's history, religion, language and also in the family unit. They often find

themselves sandwiched between two cultures. This paper is an attempt to explore the traumatic experience and cultural perplexity they undergo to retain their cultural identity and also to make themselves comfortable in the new culture. They constantly live in the dilemma of alienation or assimilation because on the one hand they enjoy the status of having dual identity and on the other they constantly try to find their roots.

Immigrants have to adopt the culture and practices of the host country. This process is known as Acculturation. Berry described it as the process of learning and adapting to a new culture. Acculturation process gave birth to Biculturalism. Bicultural individuals are those who have been exposed to and have internalized two cultures. For instance, a bicultural individual may have a blended or fused identity (e.g. someone who sees himself/ herself as a product of both Jewish and American cultures and accordingly identifies as Jewish-American) and also alternates between speaking mainstream English and Yiddish depending on the context. Berry describes four strategies of acculturation. First is Integration strategy or Biculturalism, it refers to involvement in both dominant and ethnic cultures. It can only be "freely chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity." ("Immigration, Acculturation" 10) Thus integration can be attained only through 'mutual accommodation.' Second is Assimilation Strategy, involvement in the dominant culture only. In it the individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures. Berry wrote, "When people choose to Assimilate, the notion of the Melting Pot may be appropriate; but when forced to do so, it becomes more like a Pressure cooker." ("Immigration, Acculturation" 10) Third is Separation strategy in which individuals give importance to their own culture only and avoid any kind of interaction with other cultures. Fourth is Marginalization, involvement in neither culture. In this individuals have little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relations with others. It is characterized by feeling of alienation and loss of identity. Acculturation can be stressful also, depending on the conditions within which one lived before immigration, the motivation for immigration and the separation of families. The term

Acculturative stress is used to refer to the unique stressors of immigration (Berry 2006).

Berry wrote:

The first factor on which acculturative stress depends is one's acculturation strategy: those who feel marginalized tend to be highly stressed, and those who maintain a separation goal are often almost as stressed; in contrast, those who pursue integration are minimally stressed, with assimilation leading to intermediate levels. (214)

If we take the case of Jews, Many early Jewish immigrants to America encountered the "melting pot" theory of American society, according to which all immigrants groups would surrender their identities in favor of a common American identity. However, the prevalence of this idea eventually diminished, giving way to the current trend of multiculturalism found in American society. But even then Diasporic people suffer from a fractured identity. Because holding on too strongly to one's sense of identity may cause feelings of alienation in the host land, which may also negatively affect one's self- perception.

Philip Roth is a prolific Jewish American writer who often tackles issues of identity in his works. He mostly portrays multiple characters that exhibit multi- faceted identities; arise as a consequence of living under the diasporic conditions. In his novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, Portnoy is admonished by a twenty one year old Israeli female, Naomi, after failing to seduce her. She lectures him on the negative effects of the diaspora, which Portnoy relates to his psychiatrist:

Those centuries and centuries of homelessness had produced just such disagreeable men as myself- frightened, defensive, self- deprecating, unmanned and corrupted by life in the entire world. It was Diaspora Jews just like myself who had gone by the millions to the gas chambers without ever raising a hand against their persecutors, who did not know enough to defend their lives with their blood. The Diaspora! The very word made her furious. (265)

His fragmented identity is the main reason why Portnoy finds himself in a psychiatrist's office in the novel. This multi-layered approach at interpreting Jewish identity helps to illustrate the fractured identity that many American Jews carry as a result of the diasporic condition. In *The Counter life*, conflicting views of Diaspora life are personified in Nathan and his brother, Henry Zuckerman. Nathan is an assimilated, secularized American Jew who feels comfortable in the diaspora, on the other hand, Henry is unsatisfied with his life in America and decides to flee from the diasporic condition, choosing to relocate to Israel and live in the right-wing, Zionist settlement of Agor. For Henry living in the midst of pressure, crisis, and contingency, the answer is Israel, where he has exultantly discovered that he is not "just a Jew," or "also a Jew," but "a Jew as deep as those [Israeli] Jews" (61). Having found the Jewish root of his identity, having abandoned personal gratification for collective action, he attacks his brother Nathan as a "decadent Jew" leading a self-involved, and therefore "abnormal," Jewish life in America (Dorsky 92). But in the same novel *The Counter life*, Nathan Zuckerman's Israeli friend, Shuki Elhanan, tells him basically the exact opposite, stating:

You think in the Diaspora it's abnormal? Come live here. This is the homeland of Jewish abnormality.... The fact remains that in the Diaspora a Jew like you lives securely, without real fear of persecution or violence, while we are living just the kind of imperiled Jewish existence that we came here to replace. Whenever I meet you American- Jewish intellectuals... I think exactly that: we are the excitable, ghettoized, jittery little Jews of the Diaspora, and you are the Jews with all the confidence and cultivation that comes of feeling at home where you are. (73-74)

This multi-layered approach at interpreting Jewish identity helps to illustrate the fractured identity that many American Jews carry as a result of the diasporic condition. Roth's Jewish-American characters are continually and precariously ill-balanced between retaining and abandoning their Jewish heritage in favor of a new American identity. Roth, as authorial commentator on the Jewish 'condition,' seems to suggest, through his characters and story-

lines, that to be wholly American and to be wholly Jewish actuates a perilous cultural split-personality.

Israel also appears as a setting in some of Roth's earlier works, such as *Portnoy's Complaint*. Near the end of that novel, Portnoy decides to make a sojourn to Israel. Portnoy relates that his trip took on an "air of the preposterous" because of "one simple but wholly (to me) implausible fact: I am in a Jewish country. In this country, everybody is Jewish" (253). Portnoy cannot help but be amazed. However, he soon finds himself feeling powerless and alienated in Israel as well: "I couldn't get it up in the State of Israel! How's that for symbolism, bub?" (258). Unlike Henry Zuckerman in *The Counterlife*, who reclaims his potency in Israel, Portnoy loses his. In Israel, As Nathan tells Henry's wife, Carol, Henry feels he "can be an authentic Jew and everything about him makes sense. In America being a Jew made him feel artificial" (154). Surrounded by the history and memories of the Jews, Henry believes that he has found his true identity. This is the opposite situation found in *Portnoy's Complaint*. Portnoy spends much of the novel attempting to divest himself of his Jewishness in an ill-advised attempt to join the ranks of the Gentiles, who he considers the true Americans: "... don't tell me [the Jews are] just as good as anybody else, don't tell me we're Americans just like they are. No, no, these blond-haired Christians are the legitimate residents and owners of this place" (146). Interestingly, even when Portnoy goes to the historical homeland of Israel he still perceives himself as an outsider, calling it a place "[w]here I also don't feel at home!" (271). Portnoy, like Nathan, has more or less successfully assimilated into the hostland, yet he still is unable to relinquish his Jewish identity, and his conflicting impulses result in a fragmented sense of identity. At one point, Portnoy refers to his adventure in Israel as "Alex in Wonderland" (256).

So it is clear from their examples that diasporic people often feel like they never truly belong, or feel marginalized, even in a multicultural society such as America and sometimes feel mutually marginalized in both the homeland and the diaspora.

Hannah Ardent, in her essay "We Refugees" written in 1943, describes her experiences as a refugee and stateless person, the experiences of the diaspora, their problems of assimilation,

identity and forced identity. She describes in detail what it means to be diaspora or wanderer and forced to leave one's home. She said:

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings.... We started our new lives and tried to follow as closely as possible.... We were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after six weeks in America, we pretended to be Americans. The more optimistic among us would even add that their whole former life had been passed in a kind of unconscious exile and only their new country now taught them what a home really looks like. It is true we sometimes raise objections when we are told to forget about our former work; and our former ideals are usually hard to throw over if our social standard is at stake. (110-111)

The fundamental lack refugees suffer and represent is that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever (*The Origins* 295). The concern is not their inequality before the law, but rather their invisibility before it: they have no status before the law. They are not merely oppressed by the law; they are insufficiently visible for anyone to have an interest in oppressing them. Their opinions are not merely not valued; they simply have no voice (*The Origins* 294).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1951, Arendt once again describes the depoliticization of 'dark times' as the loss of all framework and fellowship. She compares the condition of stateless peoples with that of ancient slaves dwelling in the private sphere and who despite their oppression belonged to a community. She demonstrates that the development of the 'rightless' condition of stateless people, meaning a 'loss of a polity itself,' resulted from the conjunction of two distinct processes, that of anti-Semitic rejection and imperialist expansion (297). A large reason for the fractured identities of displaced people can be attributed to the conflicting forces of assimilation and alienation felt in the host land.

As diasporic people with unique heritages, Jews face the prospect of undergoing assimilation. Some people, often in the younger generations, welcome assimilation and place a diminished importance on the Jewish aspect of their identity, if any at all. However, there are others who view the process of assimilation as a destructive force trying to erase their heritage, and they try to reassert their identity by tightly holding onto cultural tradition. As for alienation, many of the original Jewish immigrants to America felt estranged from their new homeland. They often reacted by either assimilating themselves or, once again, retreating into cultural tradition and finding residence in ethnic communities. The issue of immigrant integration underlies debates about dual citizenship in many receiving countries. Advocates argue that recognizing dual citizenship increases integration by granting immigrants' rights in their host country without requiring them to give up rights at home; critics counter that immigrants split their loyalties and thus are less integrated into the host society. Empirical studies suggest that dual citizenship increases immigrants' social and economic integration (Cain and Doherty 91).

So the fragmented sense of identity that often arises from living under the diasporic condition plays a central role in the lives and literature of displaced people. Because neither they could give up their Jewish identity and fully assimilate themselves in new culture by betraying their own self and of million others nor could they fully alienate their host land. It is also not possible for them to be both by adopting the clothes, manners and way of life of the mainstream culture and at the same time feel very much like a Jew because then their Jewishness will get a secondary status. Through their writings, which deal with confused self-identification, assimilation, and retained and forgotten cultural memories, these immigrants attempt to tackle the issues of identity that they have inherited as people living in diasporic state. This position of partial assimilation and partial marginalization as described also by Robert E park in 1950 resulted in distinct Jewish communities as well as isolation from their non- Jewish neighbors. These groupings of individuals are frequently labeled "betwixt and between" and neither fully assimilating to their host country or the country from where they came. Jews therefore walk a fine line between their assimilation into diasporic cultures and ethnic world whence they came. So this article has examined the

struggle for a sense of belonging that these individuals frequently undergo and their conflict to change the new space into their home. They often find themselves struck between the values and norms of their host country and that of their homeland. As it is said that there is a difference between place making and home making, cultural practices work as a mighty tool for them in their homemaking process. And wherever they are are reinventing, reconfiguring, and recreating their identity, there lies a true homeland.

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