

The Wandering Jew Phenomenon: A Post-Diaspora Success
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Abstract

For long, migration and diaspora have been perceived negatively, resulted from social and psychological turmoil. They are believed to produce devastating outcomes, as the loss of identity, cultural hybridity, psychological crises, and social instability. Theorists, as Homi Bhabha, believe that "unhomeliness", having lost the feeling of possessing a home, may also result in migration and cultural diaspora, as Robin Cohen argues. Yet, it is an illegitimate overgeneralization. I tend to propose a new perspective in this regard. I believe that specific types of diasporas have come to collaborate hugely in the progress of individuals epistemologically, psychologically, socially, and intellectually. I have drawn a comparison between the falsely undisputed notions of home, migration, diaspora, hybridity, and "unhomeliness" on one side, and on the other side this "Wandering Jew" phenomenon, which I have proposed. Moreover, this title has been deliberately adopted to refer to the negatively perceived notion of the myth of the Wandering Jew, that he is the everlasting sufferer. Contrarily, he might be the wisest, the ultimate 'uncaged', free living individual. This notion will be applied on V. S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, which aptly fits into this proposed phenomenon.

Keywords: The Wandering Jew, diaspora, homeland, identity, trauma, ideology.

1.1. The 'Wandering Jew' Phenomenon: An Introduction

Broadly defined, diaspora refers to the scattering of people from one place into a variety of destinations. For long, this term, diaspora, had been a reference to the exile of the Jews from the kingdom of Judah dispersed to various corners of the globe. Accordingly, the Jewish diaspora initiated after the first conquest of the kingdom of Judah and the destruction of the First Temple (586 B. C.) by the Babylonians, finally banishing and enslaving the majority of them, as reflected in the Bible (Evans, 2009, p. 2-4).

However, before the debut of William Safran, diaspora studies have been struggling in inconsistency and disorder. His articles in the 1990s finally gifted this field with a range of relative academic objectivity. Diaspora evolved to transgress the Jewish exile to refer to any voluntary or forced migration whose members tend to belong to the same ethno-national roots and are considered minorities in host countries (Safran, 2008, p. 75). Safran, moreover, categorized the most important features of diaspora to include relations with homeland, supported with continuing interest in the events of homeland. There should be a shared national memory, romanticized and glorified among the members of diaspora. There should also be historical, linguistic, religious identification with homeland. Politically, the members of diaspora abroad must lobby on behalf of their country to achieve certain political goals, as in the case of the Jews in the U.S. Additionally, diasporans have the duty to join their homeland's military, participate in its election, marry homeland citizens, and send their dead for burial in homeland, as in the case of Iraqi diasporans (Safran, 2005, p. 78-9). Robin Cohen, another illuminating diaspora theorist, proposed a comprehensive typology of the different manifestations of diaspora. There are, according to Cohen, five primary types of diaspora: victim diaspora, labor diaspora, trade diaspora, imperial diaspora, and cultural diaspora (Cohen, 2001, p. x). Independently, each type has undergone a long span of history of intellectual debate and theoretical conflict. Nevertheless, one of the undisputed features among theorists is its experience of social, cultural, economic, and psychological traumas, to the extent that diaspora necessarily recalls a bitter association to suffering and trauma. Yet, this negative attachment must undergo certain investigations to examine its validity.

1.2. Trauma: An Illusionary Reference Point

The majority of writers who indulged in the field of diaspora studies attached this notion to negative cultural and psychological complexes and self-identity loss. For example, Leela Gandhi believes that "diaspora evokes the specific traumas of human displacement" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 131). It is legitimate to question this false overgeneralization of Gandhi, when she boldly subcategorizes diaspora under the notion of trauma. It is unfortunate, also, to see her leaving this claim unjustified.

Moreover, Cohen adopts a more logical path when he proposes historical justifications, regarding the traumatic experience of diasporans. He believes that the notion of diaspora came as a result of Jewish banishment and suffering. The genesis of diaspora lies in the conquest of the kingdom of Judah and enslaving the majority of the Jews in the region, banished them into Babylon. "Babylon subsequently became a code word among Jews for the afflictions, isolation, and insecurity of living in a foreign place" (Cohen, 2001, p. 3). He adds that the Armenians, categorized under the victim diaspora, have undergone similar afflictions and calamities, when the Turks carried out a bloody genocide in 1915, killing over one million and a half (Cohen, 2001, p. 45). Similarly, the Indian indentured workers suffered from the oppression of the bourgeoisie class, who invented a modern slavery system. The recruited workers had to experience the horrific journey to their employers' lands, under inadequate legal protection, and the destruction of family system, when there was only one to four indentured female allowed for every ten men (Ibid, 63).

Another false overgeneralization is found in *Cartographies of Diaspora* where Avtar Brah believes that "the word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience" (Brah, 2005, p. 190). Here, the writer still clings to the traditional understanding of the discourse of diaspora, proposed by the Jews in exile. It is strange to find that Brah continues to put forward hesitantly a self-contradictory idea. Brah retrieves to write that "diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individuals and collective members collide, reassemble and reconfigure" (Ibid).

Nevertheless, it is unfair to falsify this heritage of diaspora studies, which include some points of truth; yet, there is a keen distinct point that the trauma lies in the genesis of departure, or diaspora. In other words, the initial stages of departure and exile represent a sense of misfortune and calamity, but later, diaspora is embraced as a gift by the diasporans. As a short instance, the Jews in the sixth century confronted a serious psychological trauma when forced to leave their homeland to Babylon. However, a greater majority of the exiled Jews refused to go back into Israel. Moreover, the Israelites voluntarily migrated from their homeland to the neighboring territories (Sheffer, 2003, p. 40). In other words, there is an obvious detachment between trauma and diaspora in its long process.

1.3. Floating Home

The notion of home has been a great challenge to diaspora theorists to define. There is an everlasting conflict in defining home. Some definitions come to be in direct opposition to each other. For example, home is a place which grants its residents a common identity and history. Yet, Weingrod and Levy defy this definition that "in the new discourse *homelands* sometimes fade out of view entirely or... they become nation-

states that by definition repress minorities and place upon their cultural and other freedoms" (Weingrod and Levy, 2008, p. 5). Here they imply that homelands have gained an opposing function to become the source of fear and terror for its citizens, as in the case of Iraqis. Iraq, for a great number of Iraqis, is a land of nightmares and death, to the extent that most of them suffer from nostophobia, or fear of home.

Going back to Cohen, in *Transnationalism*, he strives to put forward a relative solution to the contradictory notion of home. Cohen suggests three versions of homeland: solid, ductile, and liquid. Solid homeland, then, is the real homeland that binds the diasporans to its history, ethnicity, and identity. In response, the diasporans lobby politically and economically for the flourishing of their homeland, as in the case of Iraqis before 2003. The second version, ductile homeland, holds a more complex nature, lying in an intermediate position between solid and liquid homelands. For example, European and American Jews on the one hand, and Israel on the other, are growing an increasingly shaky and unsustainable relation between each other. The Jews in diaspora are believed to be experiencing 'dezionation', detaching from their religious roots and identity. Thus, they are not prompted to think to go back home, since they are enjoying a flourishing life abroad, and replacing home with Israeli summer camps with Israeli flags and Hebrew lessons. Imitation of Israeli diaspora has descended to a more evolved nature with a softer understanding. Ductile homeland represents the possibility of finding a similar homeland in diaspora, or floating home. As for the third version of homelands, liquid, it proposes an extremely unstable and changeable nature. This type of homeland is found in the majority cases of diasporans. It is a 'deterritorized' diaspora which eradicate the traditional sense of solid homeland. Here, the diasporans have lost their conventional understanding of territory that binds them to a specific identity (Cohen, 2008, p. 22-9). Thus, it is impossible to pose one valid comprehensive definition of homeland. It has become a dissolved territory with no real reference point. Additionally, it is perceived differently by each nationality according to its accumulative cultural and social heritage. Generally, diasporans live in a dilemma: they yearn to go back home, glorify its history, praise its culture; yet they unconsciously reject to reside in homeland since it represents the source of their fears. In this regard, as a matter of fact, there is no real trauma resulted from the long process of diaspora, or at least, after the first stages of departing from homeland, because home is a floating notion and it may become any place in the globe, regardless of its different cultural aspects.

In some cases, moreover, home becomes the creation site of diaspora. In other words, all the functions of home to diasporans traverse to get attached to hostland. Hostland adopts the functions of home and helps further in creating a homeland for the diasporans. The Sikhs, for example, around the globe raised the slogan "Khalsa shall rule". After a long history of oppression, they have created an imaginary homeland, called Khalistan, with a prime minister for the non-existent republic of Khalistan, a monthly magazine, a Khalistani passport, and even currency. These nostalgic creations

are all a strategy proposed by the Sikhs to free themselves from the repression of the Hindu domination (Cohen, 2001, p. 113). Here, the real functions of homeland is transferred into hostlands. Diaspora is, then, the source of solace, independence, and solid cultural identity after homeland has lost its sense of solidarity and warmth for its citizens.

1.4. Home: A Place of Terror

As mentioned previously, home, in some cases, becomes a place of death and terror for some nationalities. For example, homeland for some Iraqis connotes both glory and death. There is a split of feelings concerning the notion of homeland. These two perceptions, one positive and another negative, lead to the sublime, a concept proposed by Longinus and developed later to its fullest shape by Edmund Burke. The sublime, as proposed by Burke, refers to a grand style in literature or in life, which raises the individuals to transcendental emotional feelings through the means of pain, danger, and excitement (Hogle, 2002, p. 14). Accordingly, homeland represents a source of danger and excitement at the same time. However, some diasporans fail to acquire the feeling of the sublime, to perceive the notion of home merely as a space of death and negative thoughts. Homeland no longer carries the traditional features of psychological stability and identity provider. In this respect, because of this absence of duty, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis left their homeland for other hostlands around the globe in 2016. Then, what is the use of homeland if it fails to provide its citizens with the necessary responsibilities it holds towards them?

After this traditional understanding of homeland dissolves and fades away, the diasporans resort to, as Salman Rushdi has proposed, 'imaginary homeland' (Huddart, 2006, 47). This imagination leads the individuals to think of a solid home elsewhere that guarantees a pure independent identity. Moreover, they are free to imagine a homeland in a way they had already dreamed of, almost ideal, with a well-founded reliable identity. In other words, this imaginary homeland becomes the ultimate alternative to the original homeland, and it might be located anywhere, without being bound to any particular geographical location. This floating home becomes the companion of the 'Wandering Jew', or any person who has lost the traditional sense of a bind to a solid homeland in a specific geographical place. This Wandering Jew is capable of creating an ideal homeland through his imagination with a solid independent identity without necessarily being attached to a place. It could be anywhere at any time.

Pertaining to this, Homi Bhabha extended his understanding of the problematic notion of home by defining home as the source of the 'uncanny', a burden of lacking home, or a feeling of being homeless, or unhomed (Huddart, 2006, 57). This sense of the uncanny is thickened in colonized countries, because homeland has transferred into something uncertain, hesitant, distorted discourse, and crippled language. In actual fact, the uncanny has been proposed by Sigmund Freud in the first place. He defined it as

something frightening which associates our memories to something long known to us, familiar to us, but forgotten (Heiland, 2004, p. 78). More relevantly, Sue Chaplin believes that "Freud's theory of the uncanny points to the continuing importance to the individual aspects of early childhood experience that have of necessity to be repressed if the child is to progress to functioning adulthood" (Chaplin, 2011, p. 236). Pertaining to this, abandoning homeland, or the uncanny, pushes the Wandering Jew, or the sublime diasporan, to progress into more a functional position, and to break the chains of his homeland anxiety and crippling fears: it is a transition from childhood into adulthood. Any society imposes a bundle of fears upon its citizens that chain them to the ground. These boundaries lie in the superego of individuals. Superego, or social norms, regardless of their legitimacy or rationality, functions as an everlasting ultimate prison to the members of a society. Accordingly, any individual who attempts at breaking these social chains is considered an outcast and moral deviant. Thus, in the majority of cases, superego is a fundamental aspect of intellectual regression. Pertaining to this, abandoning homeland, a manifestation of superego, assists in social, psychological, and intellectual progress, since it is the uncanny, a source of fear and repression.

1.5. Identity: A (Mis)Fortune

Designating one stable identity to individuals and a nation is an impossible mission, though some critics have boldly proposed some certain stable definitions for national identities. "National identity, however, may itself be increasingly eclipsed by one or another supranational one" (Safran, 2008, p. 10). One can no longer suggest one comprehensive definition of identity, because a nation is always evolving culturally and open to new identities, despite its boasting about its -illuminating- history. Some countries, for example, claim that they have maintained the original pure Islamic identity as the source of their legislation. This very claim has become the primary source of dilemma, because they are trapped between the accelerating technological cultural development of the globe, and the stable historical Islamic identity of fourteen hundred years ago. Thus, one of the paths to national survival is to attain one flexible identity that is open to change and progress.

This changing of identity imposes upon individuals certain types of strangeness and foreignness (Huddart, 2006, p. 59). If all people are foreigners, then, there is no meaning for homeland, since they are foreigners even within their so-called homeland. In other words, due to the flexibility of identity, which is a defining factor of nationalities, then, there is no stable homeland that can define individuals. In this respect, there is no meaning to define ourselves in relation to a nation, since it is unable to maintain one stable identity, and if one nation resists the evolution of cultural identity, psychological and social complexes will emerge out of this repression. This leads us to the fact that there is no place as abroad or home, because nations fail to define our identity.

As mentioned earlier, homeland represents the uncanny. Identity, accordingly, represents one angle of the uncanny. For some nations, digging deep in the roots of national identity reveals accompanying fears and complexes. The Caribbean countries, for example, underwent traumatic historical events during the process of their formation, because the natives "failed to survive the glories of the Western civilization – nearly all died from conquest, overwork, and disease. Virtually everybody in the Caribbean came from somewhere else" (Cohen, 2001, p. 137). These events of mass killing initiates the formation of those countries' cultural identity. In case of revealing the roots of their identity, it would cause the uncanny feeling to activate. Thus, for certain nations, if not all, it would be socially and psychologically healthy if the real identity remains hidden. Nevertheless, there seem to be some superficial labels and identities that certain ideologies have imposed upon individuals as a strategy to give distinct feature and power to certain groups of people.

When the Wandering Jew, or the perfect diasporan, carries his apparent cultural identity in other nations, this contrast becomes a factor of brilliance and progress. When individuals are put in contrast with others, their real essence is exposed, easily gaining an independent entity and existence, because similarity and the absence of intellectual and cultural variety leads to dullness, stability, and regression.

This disintegration of identity is an assisting factor for individuals to dissolve into whatever apparent cultural identity they indulge in and help them to integrate into any hostland they travel to. Moreover, integration will necessarily lead to the process of socialization of individuals. "Socialization implies that those who benefit from it find their place in society, in the nation and in the institutions whose rules, norms or values they accept and acquire" (Wieviorka, 2008, p. 136). Integration, then, is a necessary process a successful diasporan undergoes to identify with the current political rules, social life, and cultural aspects of the hostland. On the other side, "those who are not yet socialized are incomplete, immature, human beings" (Ibid). Wieviorka believes that this image would necessarily lead into another: "if they are incomplete and immature, they constitute a threat to society, a danger, a risk" (Ibid, 138). In this respect, one of the features of the Wandering Jew, or the sublime diasporan, is to integrate and socialize with the hostland, so as not to form a threat and obstacle to the host country.

Thus, identity is no longer a possession of homeland. Identity has become transnational, flexible, and capable of emergence and recreation at any place and time.

1.6. Diaspora: An Anti-ideological Ideology

The concept of ideology, as a matter of fact, has undergone a very conflicting evolution in its essence. Ideology, as discussed by Marx, is active only in the level of knowledge, which is produced by language to correspond the outside world, or the real world. It sums up in Marx's well known phrase "they do not know it, but are doing it", labeled as 'false consciousness' (Zizek, 1989, p. 24).

Nevertheless, Louis Althusser has opposed this classical notion in his *Ideological State Apparatus* that "ideology has material existence". In other words, "ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. The existence is material" (Althusser, 2000, p. 296). Althusser here tends to refer to the fact that ideology is present in the actions of our life, as when we go to the church, we admit the existence of God before even knowing him.

Having encountered Slavoj Zizek, however, he entirely rejects the classical notion of 'false consciousness'. He believes that the naïve concept of ideology is no longer at work in this contemporary intellectual world. He depends on the German thinker, Peter Sloterdijk, to develop his idea that "they [people] know very well what they are doing, but still they are doing it" (Zizek, 1989, p. 25). The subjects of a society know the falsehood of the system and its deceiving policy, and moreover, aware of the hidden agendas and interest beyond the ideologies adopted by the system, but still they tend to trap themselves deliberately in this paradox and never to renounce it. This is called 'ideological cynicism', as Zizek puts it.

As mentioned earlier, homeland tends to impose upon its citizens certain forged cultural identities. Despite the fact that identities are flexible and changeable, and there is no real everlasting stable defining identity, homelands always imprison people with deviant compelling identities, another face of ideology.

Identity, or ideology, works as a false consciousness, blinding people from observing reality as it is. Identity might transform its concepts into apparent tangible manifestations, according to Althusser. At its most extreme, identity becomes ideological cynicism, ridiculing people and forcing them to follow a set of procedures, disregarding the range of their falsity and invalidity. People adopt identity to gain cultural dependence and feel their existence. They follow these cultural procedures in order to solve an epistemological complex. Thus, they do not care about the range of intellectual legitimacy of an identity as long as it satisfies their epistemological thirst. In this regard, identity functions in the same way as ideology does.

The Wandering Jew is not bound to a specific identity, since he roams among various hostlands with diverse apparent identities. This diversity of identities that the Wandering Jew undergoes transcends him from the conflicting paradoxical identities, or ideologies of nations, and is not obliged to yield to one deceiving identity. He might be clouded with false consciousness, and later, ideological cynicism, but is free to choose his own ideology or identity, while other homeland citizens are compelled to accept the identity they were born within. The unfortunate fact is that identity is a possession of culture and culture is the creation of the masses of a particular region or country. It is acknowledged that the masses do not enjoy an acceptable amount of intellectual understanding. Thus, the production of these masses might be intellectually and logically inaccurate. In this respect, identity becomes a compelling factor that chains

everyone, including the scholars, to the unmeasured manners and attitudes of the masses. The perfect diasporan, on the other side, does not necessarily undergo the creation of the masses, or at least, he has the liberty of choosing identity, or creating his own version of independent identity.

Similarly, Said believes that culture becomes an obstacle in the path of individuals' progress. "Said focuses on culture as a hegemonic and saturating power rather than a description of a way of life" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 45). A successful diasporan might be able to detach himself from the hegemony of a culture and describes his attitudes in life the way he deems to be appropriate.

1.7. Enigmatic Features

The Enigma of Arrival, an autobiographical novel by the Nobel Prize winner V. S. Naipaul, is an approximate manifestation of the 'Wandering Jew' phenomenon. It is a plotless novel which is an attempt at replacing the traditional features of novel writing. It has replaced conflict with mental mediation on various events and encounters with other characters. The main character, like the author himself, has left Trinidad to reside in different countries. He is a restless unbelonging diasporan, who transgresses various kinds of mental, ideological, and physical borders, without being bound to one position. He roams the lands to find one place that is able to satisfy his intellectual desires. He does not adopt any specific ideology, or identity. He holds a cynical attitude towards the burial ritual at his mother's grave. He criticizes the follies of his fellow citizens and praises their positive characteristics. He is one eclectic character who has built his personality upon a bundle of international cultural features. He is an appropriate manifestation of the Wandering Jew phenomenon.

The protagonist, or the writer himself, expresses his worries about the regression of the people because of the force their identity is practicing upon them:

How could people like these, without words to put to their emotions and passions, manage? They could at best, only suffer dumbly. Their pains and humiliations would work themselves out in their characters alone: like evil spirits possessing a body, so that the body itself might appear innocent of what it did. (Naipaul, 1988, 45)

The worries of the Naipaul is apparent here when he observes the burying identity of the society is impeding their existence. They have no place for thinking, acting, and developing. This identity is like a devil who resides in their chests and mind, suppressing them from any progress intellectually and socially.

Naipaul further develops his thoughtful idea on the necessity of emancipation from any specific geographical space. He believes that homeland, identity, history, belong to the individual himself inside, without having any external realization. He says: "Men need history; it helps them to have an idea of who they are. But history, like sanctity, can reside in the heart; it is enough that there is something there" (Naipaul,

1988, p. 435). Though identity is part and parcel of Man's existence, it should not be bound to any particular place. It should be universal, thus giving place to innovation, thinking, and intellectual progress.

1.8. Conclusion

Homelands, ever since, have been in constant change in their features, becoming places of both flourishing and calamity. It is impossible for a land to remain immobile and stable in cultural aspects and identity. Nevertheless, an identity is imposed upon people and are obliged to adapt to the cultural attitudes of that specific identity. Thus, a diasporan is capable of escaping this cultural prison and free himself from the resulting traumas.

Homelands have also lost their traditional functions at providing safety and psychological stability. They have become a source of fear, anxiety, and nostophobia. A diasporan is not obliged to undergo these traumatic experiences that harvest the mental health of other citizens.

The homeland identity also functions in the same way as ideology does. It blinds people from observing the truth. Thus, identity might become a direct reason for regression and intellectual immobility.

The Wandering Jew, unlike what the historical name suggests (a man of traumas and ultimate anxieties) is a successful diasporan who has got rid of all the cultural and psychological implications that are imposed by a society. He enjoys a greater range of freedom at choosing the place, in which he deems to be progressive. The Wandering Jew contradicts the traditional perspective towards diaspora. He is the representation of the ultimate success a diasporan may experience.

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ظاهرة اليهودي التائه: نجاح ما بعد الشتات

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المخلص :

لحقب طويلة من البحث العلمي لا يزال مفهوم الهجرة والشتات يتعاطى معه الباحث بصورة سلبية، وهذا قد يكون أمر طبعيا ؛ بسبب الأحداث والأزمات التي أدت الى هذه الهجرات. ويعتقد كثير من الباحثين أن هذه الهجرات والشتات الى بقاع العالم قد تؤدي الى نتائج كارثية مثل فقدان الهوية الثقافية والخلط الثقافي والأزمات النفسية وعدم الاستقرار الاجتماعي. يعتقد بعض المنظرين، امثال هومي بابا، أن "فقدان الوطن" او فقدان الاحساس بالانتماء الى وطن قد يكون إحدى العوامل التي يساعد في الهجرة، ولكن قد يكون هذا تعميما خاطئا. في هذه الدراسة اعمل على عرض جديد لمفهوم الهجرة. اعتقد أن هناك بعض الأنواع من الهجرة تساعد كثيرا في التطور الثقافي والاجتماعي والفكري للأفراد. في هذا البحث اعمل على دراسة مفهوم الهجرة بأنواعها وربطها بظاهرة "اليهودي التائه" ، وقد تعمدت في اختيار هذا الاسم الذي له دلالاته التاريخية والأسطورية وربطها بحالات الهجرة المختلفة، فبدل أن يكون هذا اليهودي التائه رمزا للعناء والمشقة ، فقد يكون رمزا للتطور والحرية والحكمة. وفي النهاية، أحاول أن اطبق هذه المفاهيم على رواية إرهابي الوصول للكاتب العالمي "في. اس. نايبول".

الكلمات المفتاحية : اليهودي التائه، الشتات، الوطن، الهوية، الأزمة النفسية، الايديولوجيا.