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DAN SMYER YU

The Logic of Diasporic Selfhood



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Abstract

This article is a theoretical attempt to articulate the meanings of diaspora with an emphasis on the individual rather than on the collective movement and cultural change of a given group. Its unit of analysis is therefore the relationship of the Self with its transnational lifeworld as the changing terrain of the diasporic identity. This relationship is seen less as a dichotomy of homeland and hostland or body and consciousness, but as synergetic potential inherent in the kinesthetical nature of diasporic identity: Both the diasporic self and its territoriality are in motion. Thus, the theoretical discourse of diasporic self in this article is meant to suggest a nature of human cultural as well as physical motion, in which the individual plays a pivotal role in refashioning his/her personal and collective identities in what the author terms an enselfment/emplacement process. At the same time this article addresses these questions: How does the individual alter native cultural practices on the move and in diaspora? What are the alternative mediums of cultural discourse when the traditional conceptual framework of culture undergoes destabilization due to the diasporic individual's displacement, deterritorialization, or movement in and out of the geographic location of his/her cultural origins?

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Introduction

Diaspora has been a panhuman phenomenon throughout the world since ancient times. The dispersal of the Jews after the Babylonian exile became known as the Diaspora in Judeo-Christian cultures and for a long period of time, the word “diaspora” referred exclusively to the experience of the Jews scattered to various parts of the world. In the narratives of this unique Jewish historical experience, the word was capitalized, making it a marker signifying a traumatic as well as triumphant experience of a particular religious and cultural community. In this context, the meaning of diaspora is closely associated with the collective acts of a given cultural community and places a strong emphasis on the unity as well as uniformity of the members of the community based either on religious faith(s) or on clearly specified cultural beliefs or practices. This aspect still defines the contemporary study of diaspora within the social sciences to this day.

In *Routes*, James Clifford quotes William Safran’s model of diaspora, defining it as

“expatriate minority communities” (1) that are dispersed from an original “center” to at least two “peripheral” places; (2) that maintain a “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland”; (3) that “believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country”; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) whose consciousness and solidarity as a group are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991: 83-84 quoted in Clifford 1997: 247).

These six aspects of diaspora are derived from the experience of the Diaspora of the Jews, particularly in terms of dichotomizing the homeland and the hostland, or the center and the periphery. They entail a strong overtone of ethnocentrality and nostalgia for the community’s origin(s) as found in myths and memories.

In the contemporary world, diverse diasporic experiences of different communities and individuals can no longer be understood merely as the dichotomy of homeland and hostland with an underlying assumption that the diasporic community will eventually return to its homeland and that, by extension, it therefore treats its hostland as a “peripheral,” temporary dwelling or staging area before this eventual and inevitable return. It is from this perspective that a diasporic community appears to be justifiably unconcerned with integrating itself into or adopting new modes of being in the hostland. In actuality, however, this is rarely the case: American descendants

of former African slaves became African-Americans; many European Jews became Jewish-Americans after World War II; and late nineteenth-century Chinese migrant railway workers settled in the U.S. along with their Irish migrant co-workers. In the twenty-first century, with legal acceptance of dual citizenships and flexible immigration regulations in many Western countries that specifically cater to skilled professionals and resourceful investors, diasporic experiences can become synonymous with experiences of migration and a transnational lifestyle. Thus today “the eventual return” to the homeland seems to be more a myth than a reality either because the return is routinized for the diasporic individual or because the homeland is no longer felt to be a desirable place to which to return.

A contemporary diasporic experience should not only be considered as the collective experience of a particular group without taking into account the varied individual motivations and changing modes of being for those who intend to accept the hostland as the new homeland or at least as an intrinsic part of the diasporic individual’s bifocal life style (Vertovec 2004: 971) and flexible citizenship (Ong 1999). From this angle, it can be seen that the existing modes of diaspora deviate from the biblical model and that a given diaspora is a meaning-making process of both the diasporic individual as well as a community in the context of ongoing, planet-wide human migration.

By contextualizing diaspora in the current studies of transnationalism, migration, and multiculturalism, I am investigating what is beneath the overarching “roof” of diaspora and present the argument that diasporic individuals who may or may not retain a close association with their homeland or who consciously choose to establish a new homeland in the hostland, enact diaspora with a logic of self-making and place-making that manifests as a translational and translocal mode of being. In this process, homeland and hostland may be distant from each other but both are foundations for the diasporic individual to fashion a new self in new places with new situations and circumstances in which the loyalty to the ancestral homeland is shifted to the interests of the diasporic self. My discursive progression in this article centers on the meanings of self, nativeness, adaptation, and the cultural logic of diaspora.

Methodologically, I write this article as a work of phenomenological anthropology, meaning that my discourse on diaspora bases its theoretical perspectives on the relationship between the “I” and the world. The “I” is not an abstract subject but is concretely embodied and grounded in the living body and active consciousness absorbing, responding to, and adapting itself to the *lebenswelt* or lifeworld (Husserl 1970: 108; Paci 1972: 43). According to this approach, the collective sense of belong-

ing or the exercise of one's adaptive skills in a new living environment is never at a remove from one's corporeality and lived sense of time and space (Paci 1972: 47). I thus draw theoretical references from phenomenologists as well as social scientists who phenomenologically articulate linkages between the living, moving body and its changing cultural environment and the embodied sensing consciousness situated in a given social condition.

Empirical support to my theoretical discussion of diaspora comes from my fieldwork with Tibetans in China and North America, as well as from my own diasporic experience in the last twenty-five years as a migrant scholar having moved from China to North America, and back to China, and then to Europe. I thus acknowledge to my readers that this article bears the signature of a "serial" migrant professional who flies between Asia, America, and Europe and lives a multi-focal life style. Thus, every theoretical statement in this article is empirically grounded.

The *Entelecheia* of the Diasporic Self

The contextual reality of the social sciences is inescapably situated in "an increasingly powerful force field: 'the West' " (Clifford 1997: 4), in which the concepts of culture and multi-layered meanings of culture are continuously conceived. In the context of anthropology, the expansive, expository notion of culture itself is a translation project that brings close what is far and thus familiarizes what is foreign. Admittedly or not, such an immense cultural translation project, supported by the intellectual solidarity of the social sciences, is a transcultural, transnational, and translingual practice, in which tectonic plates of cultures are transported from continent to continent, particularly exemplified in the field of anthropology. But where does diaspora fit in this cultural translation project, seeing as the kinesthetical nature of diaspora stands in diametric opposition to traditionally conceived culture as relatively bounded and isolated within geographic locations? Where are the locations of diaspora if it is seen as something or someone always on the move? Do cultures disappear when their geographic boundaries become ambiguous or even dissolved? What are the alternative mediums of cultural discourse when the traditional conceptual framework of culture suffers from disorientation due to the historical fact that people are on the move (ibid. 2), in and out of the geographic locations of their cultural origins?

My reflective look at the social sciences is meant to promote an inquiry into the phenomenon of diaspora as a translation project, but does not intend to dwell on

translating cultures into certain colossi, or entities that seem only to speak to themselves but to no one else. In other words, cultures in diaspora are not the “culture gardens” of social scientists (Herskovits 1972). Diasporic cultures under the gaze of the social sciences, I propose, have to be engaged in translational terms involving both particular and universal cultural practices. To work toward this end, I adopt Aram Yengoyan’s concept of cultural translation, in which he proposes:

...a basic distinction between culture as a potential set of categories of thought and culture as levels of consciousness. The former refers to the mental ability to categorize and abstract, not only in the mind’s dealings with reality in any specific situations, but also in its overall potential for abstraction, its capacity to operate in situations not specifically given in a particular culture context. Culture as levels of consciousness designates that part of the total mental capacity which is actualized or realized by or in a particular culture (Yengoyan 1999: 8).

Yengoyan clearly advocates a quest for human universals in the process of cultural translation. My intent is to establish a first step for the anthropological translation of diaspora via culture as categories of thought and levels of consciousness from the angle of phenomenology. It is an irrefutable fact that both thought and consciousness are mediated through individual human minds and bodies. Thus, the inquiry into cultures in diaspora begins and advances with diasporic individuals as the basic unit of analysis, in whom thought and consciousness, as immaterial principles of the human life world, are the primary subject of diasporic discourse before any assertion of collective appearances of diaspora as noted in the works of Clifford and Safran.

I therefore propose a notion of *diasporic self* as a foundation of the anthropological translation of diasporic cultures. The coinage of *diasporic self* is meant to suggest a nature of human cultural as well as physical motion, in which individuals play a pivotal role in refashioning their personal and collective identities. *Self* here connotes a twofold meaning. On one hand, it signifies the state of owning one’s personhood. On the other hand, it is an embodiment of the immaterial qualities of a person in an actual living body. Thus, a *diasporic self* lives in “in-between spaces” which provide “the terrain for *elaborating strategies of selfhood* – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 1994:1 emphasis added). To be more precise, the newness of the diasporic self refers to its double or multiple consciousness because of its situatedness “in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (Clifford 1997: 255).

From the angle of the phenomenology of life, my emphasis on the multi-consciousness of the *diasporic self* is meant to affirm the living human body as a “self-individualizing complex” into which “[n]o matter at what cost of trial and error, life proceeds by linking its energies, synergies, forces” (Tymieniecka 1996: 13) so as to produce and reproduce the “elaborating strategies of selfhood” in the landscape of diaspora. In the empirical sense, the synergized complex of the diasporic consciousness originates from the diasporic person’s transnational living experience and sensed identity change or re-adjustment because, obviously, “...among certain sets of contemporary migrants, the identities of specific individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place” (Vertovec 2001: 573).

The active diasporic consciousness that responds to changing living environments is an immaterial capacity of the individual in diaspora; however, it is mediated through and realized in material terms via bodily movements in a given social environment. It is obvious that the *diasporic self* is an intersection of what is material and immaterial, or what is corporal and what is psyche. At this juncture, I wish to address this synthetic union of the immaterial and the material as *entelecheia*, an Aristotelian term referring to the actualization of one’s potentiality with imminently existential forces (McKeon 1941: 220). In the development of the Husserlian phenomenology of life, *entelecheia*, often rephrased as the *entelechial design*, energizes the potential of the individual to unfold and embodies itself in the social acts of the individual (Tymieniecka 1996: 14). It bridges the “I” and the lifeworld via the body. In this respect, the *entelechial* power is anthropocentric in nature in the sense that the individual draws as much of the entire lifeworld as possible into him- or herself as nutrients of nature and culture for self-preservation. In many ways the *entelechial* power is a self-organizing system which is “a most intimately coordinated, intertwined network processing the energies and forces of becoming” (Tymieniecka 1999: 9). In this sense, this self-organizing system is synonymous with the individual’s existential agency, which “is capable of encompassing the entire circumference of its beingness, identifying it as its ‘self,’ and controlling its actions and reactions” (ibid. 10). It is an adaptive mechanism that affords the diasporic individual to cross multiple national and cultural boundaries and to assume new cultural identities, both real and projected. I then define the *diasporic self* as an *entelechial* mode of being, which unites the immaterial and the material so as to become something that is not yet a “finished, formed, established, or stabilized state” (Tymieniecka 1996: 15).

To a person in diaspora, the actual exercising of the *entelechial* power is a process of translating otherness into sameness, and the exotic into the familiar. Sometimes

it is construed the other way around for the social advantage of the person and is literally a translation of transnational differences. From the angle of transnational migrant studies, such a translation process is synonymous with transformation pertinent to both social and personal modes of being. The prevalent pattern of such transformation is what Vertovec and other scholars call “bifocality” (Vertovec 2004: 971; Rouse 1992: 46), which is understood as a transnational habitus signifying “the effects of transnationalism for changing meanings, attitudes and experiences both ‘here’ and ‘there’ ” (Vertovec 2004: 975). In this regard, the entelechial power is an embodied adaptive response of the diasporic person to changing encounters on the global routes of his or her bifocal or multi-focal life style.

Between 2007 and 2011 I had a faculty position based at a university in Beijing. Having been a naturalized U.S. citizen for nearly ten years before heading back to China, my new national identity as an Asian-American put me “out there” to the university community as a stranger in a familiar land. I sensed the on-campus currents of my double-consciousness triggered by the external social responses to my simultaneously being a naturalized American and a native of China. When traveling with senior faculty members to the U.S. for conferences, I was accepted as their “compatriot” but often had to respond to questions like the rhetorical “Is the moon more round [more perfect] in the U.S. or in China?” When on campus in Beijing, many of my colleagues introduced me at formal talks as a *meiguoren* (American), their attempt at patriotic humor in which they used a term generally referring to European-Americans to imply “A Chinese is always a Chinese.” I began to take initiatives to turn this awkward, external dual perception of my being familiar and stranger to my advantage by showing more of my American side: teaching courses with American pedagogy, giving talks in English, bringing more American scholars to the campus for collaborative projects, leading more university delegations to the U.S., and writing publications in Chinese concerning the history and diversity of Asian-Americans. I soon transformed my familiarly strange presence into a site of cultural, intellectual, and scholarly curiosity on campus. I thrived in my social in-between space as a communal source of lived stories about the world outside China.

In my experience the *entelechial* power of a diasporic person often reflexively expresses itself for the sake of maintaining existential equilibrium and of flourishing. While I was at the university, I met a Jewish-American who was an English instructor. Prior to coming to China he had been a labor activist and later was unemployed in the U.S. The university in Beijing where we worked usually limits the contract of English-language instructors to a maximum of two years but he had managed to

have his contract renewed indefinitely. His past labor activism and left-leaning social position combined with a talent for folk music provided him with a niche in which to thrive in China. He wrote nostalgic lyrics about Chairman Mao and composed songs praising the unity of China's ethnic diversity. The communal scale of his performance soon led him to radio and TV programs where he became a showcase of twenty-first century socialist China saving an unemployed American labor activist. Though he did not speak Chinese his friendly otherness became sought out by a segment of China's entertainment field catering to popular nostalgic consumption of Mao's socialist revolution.

In my interaction with the university community I saw myself and my Jewish-American colleague as a social experiment testing out Aihwa Ong's idea of "flexible citizenship" (1999). Legally, citizenship is not necessarily flexible but entails a range of rigid sets of boundary marks in the sense of a legal framing of foreignness, national security, perceived belonging, and perpetually desired otherness for the solidarity of national self; what is flexible, however, is how the person in diaspora translates and projects his or her changing mode of being to a socially conforming environment highly responsive to strangeness. In many instances pressing existential needs trigger an entelechial response to the new living environment, and thus the taking of initiative to make one's otherness familiar or at least strangely familiar is a simultaneously reflexive and reflective translation process of one's life experience.

The emplacement of the diasporic Self

In his frequently quoted passage regarding human migration, Akhil Gupta proposes:

On the one side, we need to investigate processes of place making in terms of how feelings of belonging to an imagined community bind identity to spatial location such that differences between communities and places are created. At the same time, we also need to situate those processes within a systematic development that reinscribes and reterritorializes space in the global political economy (Gupta 1992: 62).

My exegesis of Gupta's excerpt, in the context of this diasporic discourse, emphasizes these key phrases, "place making," "imagined community," "identity," and "reterritorialization." Without a place, the diasporic individual or community can hardly show the verity of its existence and professed identity. Place-making is the essential task in the process of diasporic livelihood. In the phenomenological sense, diaspora

is about “esoteric passion for place” (Tymieniecka 1997: ix), referring to a place of displacement, place of temporary settlement, place of nostalgia for the return of the paradise lost, and place for refashioning one’s tradition. Thus, diaspora is about seeking both real and imagined routes for the emplacement of the diasporic individual in both physical and symbolic terms. In my discernment, diasporic emplacement, in relation to the issues of identity, community, and reterritorialization, is a mode of meaning-making as well as the enselfment of the diasporic self. The focal point of this twofold signification of emplacement is the imaginative capacity of the diasporic individual, which affords his or her new establishment in a new place.

Between 2000 and 2006 I assisted Arja Rinpoche, the abbot of Kumbum Monastery in exile, with the initial writing stage for his memoir *Surviving the Dragon: A Tibetan Lama’s Account of 40 Years Under Chinese Rule* (2010). While helping him translate and edit his rough narratives, I had the opportunity to spend time at his residence in northern California. His house stands out among its neighbors with colorful prayer flags decorating the front yard and hung between the redwood trees. The image of the house immediately connected the visitor to Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. The interior space of the house was transformed with *thangkas* and statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and meditation and shrine rooms and the abbot’s writing space resembled a monastic study. He sometimes invited me to join his daily circumambulation of his neighborhood in the redwoods. He told me he was so used to circumambulating Kumbum, his monastery in Amdo, that he continued the same habit while visualizing his current residence as a replica of Kumbum Monastery. Many times Chöphel, Arja Rinpoche’s assistant, joined the walk, too. Our conversations usually turned to their queries about changes in their home region because I traveled there often for my fieldwork. I soon sensed that I had become their connector to Amdo. Both of them missed their homeland and yet gradually spatially transformed their new place into a place of familiarity with a community of warm-hearted Californian Buddhists.

Arja Rinpoche’s initial stage of his exile/diaspora was a place-making process. When he and his monastic assistants landed in the U.S. as political refugees, they moved from one place to another as temporary residents. They missed home terribly, as Arja Rinpoche recalls,

So many changes had come upon us so suddenly. We missed our monastery, our homes, and our families and friends. I could not help thinking of my life in Tibet, how it flowed in the thousands of tiny unnoticed patterns that could make a day predictable, from the morning tick of my clock to the feel of my cushion as I said my evening prayers (Arja 2010: 230).

As soon as a good-hearted American family welcomed them into their house in northern California, Arja Rinpoche began to make it into a Dharma realm and a culturally familiar living environment. A few years later when he succeeded the Dalai Lama's oldest brother, the late Tagtser Rinpoche, as the director of the Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center in Bloomington, Indiana, Arja Rinpoche simply called the place "Kumbum West" (2010: 238).

The diasporic individual is displaced and de-territorialized from his or her homeland; however, humans are always "implaced beings" (Casey 1997: x). This terrestrial condition constantly drives us to make the course of life into a process of place-making wherever we go. In the case of Arja Rinpoche, place-making is not merely the altering of a spatial layout to one of cultural familiarity, but is also a meaning-making process by which to spatially refashion one's own unique difference into a social materiality that is available for cross-cultural and transpersonal appreciation and acceptance. In the phenomenological sense it is a case of emplacement or a re-ordering of one's life in a new environment in placially recollective and imaginative terms. The materialization of the diasporic emplacement is clearly a dialectical interplay between the reality of imagination and the imagination of reality. Herein, imagination does not pertain to the domain of "falsity," "fiction," or "untruth." Instead, it is rather germane to the enactment of memory, cultural upbringing, and habits of daily routines for the self-preservation of the diasporic individual; thus, it has its own logic for one's well-being. In other words, humans tend to seek aid from the imagination to cognize things that are unfamiliar. Logic, in this sense, is an imaginative mechanism "...when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them" (Vico 1994: 30). Pertaining to the reality of imagination and the imagination of reality, the former then refers to the immaterial but portable constituent of the diasporic individual, while the latter to the activities of the actual material space of cultural-crossing in both a physical and intellectual sense. Both mediate and refashion each other for those "dwelling in travel" (Clifford 1997: 2), whose imaginative capacity plays a central role in the transnational and transcultural process of diaspora. I deem this imaginative capacity also a part of the human entelechial mode of being.

As a continuing interplay between the immateriality of the mind and materiality of social space, the entelechial mode of place-making is thus meaning-making in nature. The emplacement of the diasporic self in this regard not only signifies the nature of diaspora as a movement across or through places, but also implies that the

meaning-making process of the diasporic individual takes place in one's re-positioning or re-securing one's situatedness in unfamiliar cultural and political terrain away from the homeland. In other words, emplacement is concerned with how to situate one's physical body in the given social body generated by the multitude of individual bodies, which often appears foreign to the diasporic individual. In this respect, one's imaginative acts are enacted to bridge what is foreign and what is familiar, both of which are concrete cultural realities manifested in the milieu of the diasporic individual's hostland. As Gupta points out, diaspora is about binding identity to spatial location, thus the meanings of a given identity in diaspora are bound to meaningfully mediate what is foreign and what is familiar.

Boulder, Colorado, is one of the few places in North America hosting a community of Tibetan refugees and immigrants. To many of my Tibetan friends there, it is a home away from home. The existing culturally familiar places, such as Old Tibet (a store), the Shambhala Center, and Naropa University, make Boulder one of the most welcoming communities in the U.S. to Tibetans in diaspora. The Rocky Mountains, which bear a resemblance to Tibet's mountainous landscapes, add to the Tibetans' affinity with Boulder. One friend, Dorje, shared with me how he "shapeshifted" the Rockies' landscape to the landscape of his homeland when he missed home. Looking at the Rockies and visualizing the mountainous landscape as part of Tibet was commonplace in his new life in Boulder. As a screenwriter he wrote a script based on his own lived experience on a ranch in Boulder, with the protagonist, a Tibetan refugee of nomadic origin, saving a failing ranch with his inspirational insights about the kindred bond between the earth, people, and livestock. Dorje embeds his daydreaming and "shapeshifting" of the Rockies into Tibet in the protagonist's dual vision of the ranch as both his home away home and actual home in the mountains of Tibet. Dorje's creative intent carries a spiritual message to his future American audience: Tibetans in diaspora have brought a culture richly filled with spiritual potency and lived experiences that resonate with Americans.

The "American dreams" of Arja Rinpoche and Dorje turned out to be the materialization of their unique Tibetan lifeworlds in America: the Kumbum West of Arja Rinpoche and a Tibetan landscape "shapeshifted" out of the Rockies. Hence, emplacement, as the mode of meaning fulfillment for the diasporic individual, is impregnated with a *telos*, that is, the process of making difference into sameness, and sameness into difference. As the diasporic individual traverses cultural differences on the routes of his diaspora, the gradual fusion of his displaced identity and his hostland is simultaneously the locus of sameness and difference. Sameness is found in the

self-recognized cultural markers such as native language and place of birth. Difference is seen in the ascribed cultural markers that bear a foreign outlook upon entry into new cultural environs. In this regard, existential meanings of diaspora pertain to transformation and transposition of differences. In this context the sameness of one's identity becomes a difference in the midst of manifold differences.

I find that Appadurai's notion of culture effectively captures the diasporic mode of being. He turns *culture* as a substantive property into its adjective form, *cultural*, to convey a sense of contrastiveness (Appadurai 1996: 12) in the contour of one's diaspora. Thus, cultural differences become nutrients for the imagination of the diasporic individual in the process of his emplacement in light of assuming new modes of being. In this sense, the images of differences and the imagined differences are "all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*" (ibid. 31). Consequently, emplacement, with the aid of the immaterial faculty of imagination and visualization in the cases of Arja Rinpoche and Dorje, extrapolates existential meanings out of "the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness" (Giddens 1991: 27) and invites the psychic presence of homeland into the landscape of the hostland. This diasporic phenomenon is "the central feature of global culture today," which "is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another" (Appadurai 1996: 43).

As understood in my ethnographic cases of diaspora, "to cannibalize" signifies an act of empowerment in the psychic and spiritual senses, not as a utilitarian, exploitative, or depriving act of one-sidedly drawing vital elements from a person, a place, or a system. A salient example of this psychic and spiritual practice is Christians' intake of the sacrament, symbolized in the bread that is broken into pieces for each Christian's spiritual consumption. The alterity of Christ is symbolically "cannibalized" such that a shared identity of the person and divinity is forged. Likewise, the cannibalization of differences in the diasporic context is a bridge-building, essence-sharing act of the diasporic person, through which his or her cultural identity is materialized in a new living environment. It is important to note, however, that it is not a case of an old identity revitalized in a new place. On the contrary, the diasporic identity rests upon the mutual infusion of vital elements from the diasporic individual and his or her hostland. To explicate it further, the cannibalization of differences reorients the diasporic person toward a heightened consciousness of his or her identity in a given diasporic place and toward a mode of being that is a fusion with local cultural dynamics. In this reorientation, diasporic individuals cannot help but ask questions

– “When did we become ‘a people’? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do these big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others?” (Bhabha 1999: 7).

The logic of diasporic self

By virtue of pondering these questions, I arrive at my second assertion, that diasporic emplacement, in fact, is also a mode of enselfment. As I discussed earlier, the entelechial power of the diasporic self is anthropocentric in nature; it constantly coordinates the interaction between the “I” and the lifeworld. In his investigation of human subjectivity, Husserl points out, “I always find myself a someone who is perceiving, objectivating in memory or in phantasy, thinking, feeling, desiring etc.; and I find myself actively related in these activities for the most part to the actuality continually surrounding me” (Husserl 1982: 54). As a matter of fact, the “I” and its acts are “enselved” (Turner 1984: 37) in a body which demarcates a clear boundary between what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic, and yet the body unites both. The body of the “I” “is at once the most solid, the most elusive illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing – a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity” (ibid. 8). In the process of diasporic enselfment, the body becomes “a public mask” (ibid. 108) or a space for a syncretized identity completed with the adjoining of enselfment and emplacement. In other words, the newly established identity on the routes of one’s diaspora is an organon, a medium between sameness and differences. The process of enselfment, in this sense, is about embodying external marks to the consciousness of the “I.” These external marks are a melange of accolades and stigmas, through which the identity of the diasporic self is engendered, re-narrated, and re-projected.

Emplacement as a mode of enselfment thus essentially entails the process of concretizing the diasporic self from immateriality and to materiality with its corporal presence. Teleologically, the enselved body of the diasporic self absorbs and merges with the changing lifeworld through its self-controlled “aperture” (Bianchi 1999: 277). As it finds its emplacement, it also begins to transform what is alien into what is familiar, and eventually expands its axiological system for a mutual-conversion of the values of sameness and differences. Enselfment thus is the process of a simultaneous owning and disowning of one’s ownness. Since the diasporic individual traverses

the terrains of multiple cultural communities, his or her enselfment moves along with where the body goes, and thus, it metaphorically resembles the process of allopatric-speciation, a term used in physical anthropology to describe the evolvement of organisms outside their birthplace or original habitat (Lewin 1999: 17). What is adaptive to the original habitat loses its validity in a new environment, and thus, it begins to disown itself in order to own a new self or selves.

In early 2000 I was writing a short ethnography on Tibetans in diaspora in the San Francisco Bay Area. After working with several Tibetans coming from Tibetan regions in China, I found that each of their life stories was unique but that their diaspora experiences had a common theme of self-readjustment in the U.S., namely an emphasis on their refugee status and Buddhist identity. The refugee status was a given as they chose not to return to China for individually unique reasons in fear of persecution; however, I found their Buddhist identities varied in degree and purpose.

Those who came to the U.S. via India mostly firmly embraced Buddhism as their cultural identity. To quite a few of those who had been educated and had worked in urban China, their Buddhist identity appeared to be a re-adoption after they arrived in the States. Norbu, a former editor in China, told me that he had actually disliked Buddhism when he lived in Beijing because he felt it was Buddhism that weakened the fighting spirit of Tibetans, meaning that Buddhism pacified Tibetans or made them absorb external aggression rather than fight against it. In the meantime he also admitted that his modern education and lifestyle had accustomed him to seeing a greater world beyond the Buddhist Tibet. His re-adopting Buddhism made his parents happy back in Tibet, but in the initial phase he found it challenging to practice it on a daily basis, e.g. offering water and performing daily recitations. His perception of Buddhism began to change when he saw how American Buddhists showed their reverence to Tibetan Buddhism in their Dharma centers and private homes. Gradually he began to see Buddhism as a source of national strength for Tibetans rather than a weakness, especially in the sense of peace-making. During the following years, Norbu's re-adoption and practice of Buddhism became a process of re-embracing his ancestral Buddhist tradition on one hand and, on the other, an effort to recognize the destructive force of China's modernization against Tibetan culture. Eventually he felt he became more Tibetan in diaspora than he had been in China. On an existential level, being a Buddhist Tibetan opens to him a wider social realm in America.

In the case of Norbu, diaspora is a process of enselfment and emplacement, in which the disowning of parts of his past and the re-embracing of new vital elements of the present social environment are adaptive mechanisms for the ongoing recon-

struction of self-identity and for internalizing new mode(s) of being. Thus, diasporic enselfment takes place in a paradox of disowning and owning itself. What was once familiar is disowned while that which has been alienated as one's "dead" tradition becomes revitalized. In other words, the enselfment process allows one to re-conceive what is alien and what is familiar.

In the domain of the West alone, there are many types of diasporic populations that include immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, political dissidents, and exiles. Although national boundaries and borders have become ever more visible and impassable in recent times, humans still keep their old tradition – everyone is on the move, moving away from and moving into places by choice or by coercion. This is the essential feature of the entelechial mode of being, meaning that both the corporal and psychological constitutions of humankind operate in unison to seek both real and imagined destinies. To wit, this essential feature best expresses itself in the kinesthesia of both the mind and body of the diasporic individual. The logic of the diasporic self could be said to be that the moving body and active consciousness intend to maximize opportunities and space for self-preservation in accordance with the law of nature that every single living being constantly looks for the best in life.

To re-emphasize, the entelechial power of the person in diaspora creates semantic fields through the process of the emplacement of oneself, and is actively engaged in resurrecting one's lost home as well as in finding new existential meanings, or simply in innovating a bifocal living between one's homeland and hostland. At this point, I assert that the entelechial mode of being is the logic of the diasporic self, revealed in the processes of its enselfment and emplacement on the terrains of diaspora. It is this logic which disperses and assembles particular cultural groups consisting of multitudes of individuals. It is this logic which engenders such world phenomena as "dissemiNation", which signifies the "the scattering of the people...in the nations of others" (Bhabha 1994: 139). It is the entelechial power that enables the diasporic individual to exercise his or her faculty of imagination to articulate what is real and what is imagined, and to transform what is material to what is immaterial and vice versa. In sum, the *entelecheia*, as the synthetic union of the corporal and the spiritual, seeks to fulfill meanings by fashioning realities of resonance, resonance of what is foreign and what is familiar. Thus, the entelechial mode as the logic of diasporic self is a mode of cultural translation between sameness and differences.

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