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**(DIS) LOCATION AND (DIS) IDENTIFICATION IN THEIR DOGS CAME WITH THEM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Modern age is an age of migrations. The rise of globalisation coupled with the improved means of communication and technology has facilitated transnational migrations. In the globalised world, migration has become an easy phenomenon more than ever before. The motivating factor behind transnational migrations in the modern times is the hope of a better life. However, the migrant population often confront various issues in the host land which makes its survival very difficult. The migrant population oscillates between two cultures and there is no definite sense of identification among the migrant population. Besides, state sponsored means of control sometimes adds to this crisis of (dis)identification among the migrants. The same is true of the Chicanos, that is, the Mexican-Americans who confront diverse issues as migrants. The present paper is an attempt to depict the multi-faceted issues which the Chicanos confront in the United States which leads to their (dis)location as well as (dis)identification vis-à-vis the mainstream culture as well as their own culture.*

**KEYWORDS:** migration, chicanos, identity, culture, control.

**INTRODUCTION**

Modern age is an age of migrations. With globalization came the concept of cosmopolitanism which propounds that the entire world is a small community. Although transnational migration is not a new phenomenon, but with the advent of globalisation, transnational migrations have received a fillip. Transnational migrations have become easy due to the improved means of communication and transport than ever before and people are constantly on the move:

Migration has gained increasing political salience over the past decades....This does not imply that migration is something new....The 1850-1914 period has been perceived (by Western scholars at least) as mainly one of transatlantic migration....Newer studies show great mobility...[which] has become easier as a result of new transport and communication technologies....International migration is thus a central dynamic within globalization. (Castles et al. 5)

The same pattern of migration is also followed by the Mexican people who have been on the move historically as well as currently. Large scale migration from Mexico takes place with people moving in search of a better life. The most sought after place by the Mexican migrants is the United States, which has led to the formation of the Mexican diaspora as the largest foreign born population in the United States, "In 2014, more than 11.7 million Mexican immigrants resided in the United States, accounting for 28 percent of the 42.4 million foreign-born population—by far the largest immigrant origin group in the country" (Zong and Batalova). Large number of people migrate from Mexico to the United States in search of all those things which are lacking in Mexico. In this search for a better life, the United States becomes the most favourable location as it attracts migrants with its idea of the American Dream. It is generally the



romanticised ideal of the American Dream which motivates the Mexican people, like other people to leave their homeland and move to the United States.

Mexican migration to the United States has other dimensions also. Not all migrations to the United States take place because of the so-called American Dream. A counter-narrative to the dominant one of migration to the United States as an alien land is challenged by some Mexicans. According to this view, Mexican people by migrating to the United States are not moving to an alien land, but are merely returning to their homeland which has been forcibly occupied by the United States, "...movement north from Mexico is as old as the borderlands themselves. It continues today, not only because of economic stress in Mexico and relative opportunities in the United States...[but] [p]sychologically and culturally, Mexicans are not *emigrating* to the Southwest; they are *returning* there, or perhaps more accurately, migrating within one homeland" (Heyck 318). Out of the multiple disputes that arose between the United States and Mexico from time to time, the Mexican-American war of 1848 became the most decisive one. After the United States became victorious in the war, it occupied the many regions which belonged to Mexico and the Mexicans residing in those areas automatically became the United States citizens:

With the exception of those Mexicans residing in what was then Mexican territory in 1848, each of these groups has one or several periods of migration to the United States. As a result of the policies of Manifest Destiny, what is today the Southwest of the United States was usurped from Mexico. Mexicans living in this area were offered either citizenship or the "choice" of "returning" to Mexico. For them, there was never a migration.(Ortega and Sternbach 6)

This forcible occupation had adverse effect on the identity of the Mexican people. The people who considered themselves as Mexicans became United States citizens all of a sudden, "The treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the United States-Mexico War (1846-1848) and cost one half of its national territory: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and other lands. Overnight, Mexicans in the borderlands became United States citizens, like it or not" (Heyck 4). This sudden change in their status led to identity crisis and fragmentation among the people.

Regardless of all the factors and hostility between the two countries, large number of Mexican people migrate to the United States voluntarily. The motivating factor is, of course, a longing for a better life. As there is widespread poverty in Mexico with the resources not properly and equally distributed, this leads to a wide gap between the rich and the poor. For many poor people migrating from Mexico to the United States, the migration is an attempt at survival, "For many *mexicanos del otro lado* [mexicans on the other side], the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live" (Anzaldua 10).The large scale migration from Mexico to the United States and the subsequent settlements have created a large Mexican diaspora population in the United States which is referred to as Chicano. Similar term Mexican-American is also used but the fundamental difference between the two is that the term Chicano which popularised in the 1960s connotes political activism. During the Chicano movement for equality in the United States which started during the 1960s, the term Chicano gained momentum in usage. Overtime, the term has expanded in its usage and comes to be applied to the people of Mexican origin residing in the United States whether they ally themselves with the political activism of the 1960s or not.

Helena Maria Viramontes is a Mexican-American writer born in East Los Angeles in 1954. Growing up, she witnessed the escalation of the Chicano movement which aimed at equality. The Chicano movement which was influenced by contemporary events such as African-American civil rights movement sought to end the rampant discrimination against the Chicanos. The Chicanos rose in rebellion against the discrimination and bias widespread against them in the mainstream United States society:

Influenced by developments in other social movements including the Black Power Movement, the anti-war movement, and the American Indian Movement, as well as change in women's understanding of gender and men's understanding of masculinity, the Chicano Movement was markedly militant compared to other historical civil rights movements led by Mexican Americans. (Rodriguez)

As a response to the growing Chicano movement the United States adopted various repressive measures to curb the growing Chicano movement. It is against this backdrop that Helena Maria Viramontes'

novel *Their Dogs Came with Them* (2007) is set. The novel describes the various control mechanisms used by the United States authorities to check the rising tide of rebellion among the Chicanos ranging from repeated curfews to freeway construction. All these contrivances severely hampered the identity of the Chicanos. Moreover, the freeway construction intruded their space and the people were forced to dislocate as a result of the constructions:

In a dystopian rendering of this period, Viramontes describes the neighbourhood as highly controlled and enclosed within a series of fences and manned checkpoints. The neighbourhood is monitored from above by helicopters and its residents are subject to an evening curfew that curtail their movement. The guises for this heightened surveillance is two-fold during the decade Viramontes depicts: the construction of the massive freeway interchange that cuts across East L.A. and a fictionalized rabies outbreak that authorizes the Quarantine Authority to monitor residents and dogs from above with guns. (Granado 76)

This (dis)location led to the fragmentation of the Chicanos' identity and their consequent (dis)identification with the mainstream United States society as well as with their own society. The novel touches upon the aspect of (dis)location and dis(identification) among the Chicanos. A complete picture of the Chicano community is provided with various characters struggling to identify with both the cultures. The novel hints at the aspect of dislocation quite early in the novel with Grandmother Zumaya describing the bulldozers in horrific terms: "The earthmovers, Grandmother Zumaya had called them; the bulldozers had started from very far away and slowly arrived on First Street, their muzzles like sharpened metal teeth making way for the freeway" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 6). Grandmother Zumaya equates the displacement resulting from freeway construction to the displacing and devastating effects of earthquakes, "Pay attention, Chavela demanded. Because displacement will always come down to two things: earthquakes or earthmovers" (8). The freeway construction leads to the annihilation and devastation of the place inhabited by the Chicanos. The United States authorities in the name of freeway construction encroaches upon the private space of the Chicanos forcing them to dislocate with the aim to weaken the growing Chicano movement, "...the construction of a freeway interchange that cuts across the East L.A....dramatically alters the space, not only by disrupting its geography, but also by uprooting established neighbors and the sense of community" (Granado 77). The result is apparent with people leaving their homes to decay and dislocate to some other locality: "The rows of vacant houses were missing things. Without hinged doors, the doorframes invited games. Shattered windows had been used as targets. Chavela never would have allowed her yard to weed wild, never allowed cans of trash to be scattered by the street dogs or left to the crows who pecked at coffee grinds and cucumber peelings" (*TDCT* 9). Another character Tranquilina along with her mother also notices the change which has occurred in the Chicano neighbourhood as a result of the freeway construction. When she revisits the neighbourhood after a brief absence, she at once comes to notice the change which has occurred in the neighbourhood:

The two women struggled hard through the rain in a maze of unfamiliar streets. Whole residential blocks had been gutted since their departure, and they soon discovered that Kern Street abruptly dead-ended, forcing them to retrace their trail. The streets Mama remembered had once connected to other arteries of the city, rolling up and down hills, and in and out of neighborhoods where neighbors of different nationalities intersected with one another....The city of Tranquilina's birth was hardly recognizable. (32-33)

All these incidents reflect the intensity of change which occurs in the neighbourhood as a result of the freeway construction. The freeway construction which is aimed at dislocation serves its purpose and the Chicanos are uprooted from their space.

The novel also touches upon the aspects of (dis)identification in the context of the Chicanos. The problem of identification is itself a burning issue as far as migrant subjects are concerned. Straddling between two cultures, the diasporic subject loses identification with both the cultures. The novel depicts this (dis)identification through the character of Ben who struggles to form an association with both the cultures to which he belongs. In this process, Ben receives hostility not only from the host population, but from other Chicanos as well, "First it was his last name, Brady, in a roomful of Rodríguezes and Pérezes and Holguins. Who the fuck did he think he was? White, did he think he was white?"(105). He is even made to endure

racist comment, “Shit, your mama is darker than dirt, man, dirt on my shoes....You ain’t white! Said the bald-headed one, keeping watch” (105). Ben realises that he does not belong anywhere as being a diaporic individual he has a double consciousness, “The diasporic individual often has a double consciousness....The dual or paradoxical nature of diasporic consciousness is one that is caught between “here” and “there” or between those who share roots, and is shared through multilocality. (Agnew 14). Being the child of a Mexican mother and an American father, he is doomed to oscillate between these two identities as a hybrid subject: “His hybridity contributes to his overall anxiety, since he does not know where he belongs” (Moreira 81). Ben soon realises that he will neither be able to identify with the white American population because of his skin colour, nor able to identify with the Mexican population because of his surname which he inherits from his American father. This fact severely affects Ben’s sense of identity and identification: “The attempts to connect with their Chicano heritage, especially for characters such as Ben and Ermila, has a profound affect on their sense of identity and adds another dimension to their psychological landscape” (Andrew). Because of his hybrid identity, Ben struggles to form an association with either of the cultures. Ben’s identity, therefore, remains in a state of flux.

Dislocation and (dis)identifiacion is also portrayed through the character of a homeless gang member, Antonia Maria Gamboa, a girl who adopts the male name Turtle as well as the male ways of life in order to survive in a neighbourhood marred by gang conflicts and violence. Turtle also loses identification with her home culture as she rejects the traditional gender roles ascribed to women in the traditional Chicano familial set up, “Turtle defies patriarchal imperatives by living and dressing as a boy from childhood...” (Seliger). After rejecting the strict gender roles, Turtle disguises as a man and joins her brother Luiz Liz Lizard as a member of the McBride Boys gang. In a bid to survive, Turtle adopts a new identity, that of a boy. Turtle erases all the marks of her femininity. She shaves her head as well as dresses in big oversized clothes and tries to behave in a manly way, “Alone on a campout, they smoked frajos...burned plastic toy soldiers to see how long they took to melt.... Turtle tried to pee like a man, standing up, legs apart, and peed in the darkness like her brother...” (*TDCT* 157). As a consequence of her masculine ways of life, Turtle invites hostility from her Chicano community who see her masculine behaviour as a transgression:

“What’s with the shaved head? Aunt Mercy asked Amá, though Turtle stood right in front of her...

You • member Chuy’s daughter? • Member her, Angel baby? Mercy asked. From Humphrey Street? La malflora who did her old man in, • member?...

La pinche malflora stabbed him cold, man....

Bottom line is la malflora shaved her head. That was the start of going bad. (167)

Turtle invites hostility from her community just because she shaves her head and refuses to confirm to the strict gender roles prescribed by the society. She is termed as a malflora, that is, a bad girl, a term, “...which is a variation of “manflora,” which can be used to describe a masculine woman or an effeminate man, evoking the association of women’s masculinity with both supposedly failed masculinity and supposedly inadequate femininity” (Cuevas).

As a result of the rejection by her family, Turtle decides to live away from her family and after her brother is sent to Vietnam as a soldier, Turtle decides to live on the streets all alone without any support. However, she soon becomes a victim of the state sponsored violence as she is killed in the aerial shooting carried out by the United States authorities in a bid to kill the rabid dogs. Turtle violates the curfew which is imposed every day from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. because of her gang conflict, and as a result, she is killed, “...the Eastside is again targeted by the city, this time in relation to public health. Helicopters, sharpshooters, and searchlights produce noise, light, and vibrations throughout the night, as “mammals” including, at times, humans, are shot, and gunfire echoes throughout the neighbourhood” (Buckles 27). This shooting carried out in the name of killing the rabid dogs is actually a way to restrict the free movement of the Chicanos. Turtle’s death, however, has masculine dimensions as she is involved in gang conflicts. Moreover, even after

her death, she is referred to as a man in the local newspapers and her (dis)identification with her own gender is continued even after her death, “Even more ironically, after her death she became “officially” a man, as the police registered her as ‘Antonio’ in the police report, something which would never have been possible for her during her life at that time, even if she had wanted it” (Moreira 78). Turtle’s situation therefore, depicts complete lack of identification with the dominant institutions of society.

The novel *Their Dogs Came with Them*, depicts (dis)location and (dis)identification in case of Chicanos. The novel depicts the various control mechanisms employed by the United States authorities to curb the growing Chicano movement. The novel also portrays the negative effects these control mechanisms have on the Chicanos which includes (dis)location and (dis)identification. Further, the novel also depicts how the migrant or the diasporic population struggles for identification and how most of their efforts are marred by their ambiguous positioning as diasporic subjects who always oscillate between two cultures.

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