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Note on Authors' Name

We wish to add a note on the transcribing of authors' names. In some Asian countries family names are placed before personal names and it is our policy to respect this practice and observe our authors' preferences. In order to indicate the family name of each author we carry these in the upper case on the first page of each author's contribution. We would appreciate it if prospective authors indicate their family names to us clearly and endorse our policy.

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Diaspora, Gender, and Nation: The Case of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*

TAE Heasook

Abstract

The aim of this article is to re-conceptualize the recent diaspora from a corporeal materialist feminist perspective while exploring the issue of decolonizing political agency in our increasingly globalizing capitalist patriarchal era. I therefore look at the complex and multiple relations among diaspora, gender, and nation. *Dictée* by a Korean-American woman writer, Cha Hak Kyung (1982/1995), is a text that embodies the material traces emerging from colonial/national/transnational bodies and locations, which are radically different from the de-historicized, de-politicized terrain of postmodern hybrid subjects. When we conceptually distinguish "diaspora" from nomad, exile, and immigrant, and then conceptualize it from a corporeal materialist feminist perspective, it emerges as a subversive political figure embodying a political struggle that seeks to define the local/national against the historical contexts of displacement and makes visible the bodies and labor of women. Then, "diaspora" can encompass the problem of the gendered subaltern against liberalist bourgeois elitist agenda, by persistently unlearning the globalizing re-arrangement of the apparently multicultural "empire," and consciously dis-identifying the total-

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istic and oppressive national/transnational unity and agency.

Clearly aware of (neo)colonial violence and trauma, Cha Hak Kyung attempts to represent the multiple and complexly colonized conditions in which she lives and under which her cultural in-between-ness is formed, via the politics of a double negation of both empire and "home" land. She strives to empower herself by breaking the silence imposed on her, and to engender her own "foreign" languages that can be defined as unwriting or blood writing. Cha's re/unwriting the histories of her eastern and western mothers' bodies and her reconstruction of nation as a feminist genealogy, are read primarily against the political unconscious which is basically patriarchal and tends to erase the women's bodies. As such, *Dictée* refigures "diaspora" as a politically-informed agency. It revises colonialist/nationalist/neocolonialist historiography through the deconstructing energies of gender and subalternity and presents the "nation" as the location to resist globalization and Americanization, although it sometimes unwittingly ignores women's labor.

Keywords

Diaspora; corporeal materialist feminism; diasporic nationalism; unwriting; subalternity; *Dictée*

Conceptualizing Diaspora from a Corporeal Materialist Feminist Perspective

There has been a rapid increase in migrations in all directions across the globe, at least over the last three decades. The new and full-blooming use of spatial terms such as "deterritorialization," "in-between," "border(land)," "displacement," and so on, in the field of critical theory is not unrelated to these recent and increasing migrations. It is therefore not surprising that there are newly

emerging subjects with these migrations, as many of the large-scale, global migrations are crossing "borders" and creating new displacements and new diasporas. As these are taking place due to a variety of causes, recent migrations are already breaking down the historical distinctions between political migrations and the economic ones. In the context of global border-crossing, subjectivities based on spatiality and displacement are addressed as some new modes of subjectification: diaspora, nomad, exile, and migrant. In theorizing these new phenomena and emergent subjectivities, it is evident that place rather than time/temporality is more significant as an influencing factor in (re-)constructing human subjectivities in this era of global migration. Place(s) and displacement cease to be abstract notions any more, at least in that our body is the very place in and through which we live; as a bodily presence, we are in particular places at a time.

In this essay, I shall focus on the diaspora, (re-)conceptualizing it into a historically useful, discursive and analytic device to illuminate this increasingly globalizing world in general, and the so-called diasporic women from the "third" world[1] in particular. For this, in particular, I shall connect my own conceptualization of the diaspora with the issues of gender and (trans)nation(alism). Women are playing a very central role in the global division of labor (Spivak, 1987); nation becomes re-located simultaneously for and against the globalizing tendency of the world today according to geopolitical interests. Yet, till now, there seem to be few attempts to theorize these interconnecting issues of diaspora, gender, and (trans)nation (alism), especially from a corporeal materialist feminist view.

The contemporary diaspora is a politico-economic mark of *trans*nationality, which has been accelerated within the flexible rearrangements of global capital since the 1960s. In western societies, the term diaspora, has referred to a particular form of displacement for religious causes, as revealed in the word's strong association with the dispersion of the Jews after their Babylonian exile. Yet, this "traditional" (in fact, Eurocentric) model of diaspora is no longer adequate for theorizing the late twentieth century diasporas.

Contemporary diasporas have been formed with more and more diversified reasons; their ethnicity is also as diverse as the circumstances under which they are forced to leave their "home" lands; moreover, the historical trajectories of each diasporic group are never homogeneous. Because the late twentieth century diasporic formations cross nation-state borders and flexibly exploit the notion of "nation" in favor of free movement of capital, they become critically central to the issue of "nation"(ism). For a diaspora, is the "nation," a place that was once a home or an imagined community with which the dispersed identify, even when they live elsewhere? If diaspora means re-rooting or trans-rooting our bodily beings—to use a spatial metaphor, the body is that very primary place in which we live—into elsewhere, how can we think of the (trans)nationality in terms of the re-rooted bodies? I shall present a corporeal materialist feminist perspective as a crucial frame of analysis regarding these complex set of issues.

Before I discuss this, let me begin with distinguishing the diaspora from other forms of displacements. What are the diaspora's differences from those of exile, nomad, and migrant? Exile is pursued by individuals, many of whom are (politically) dissident against their "home" society; as such, in western societies, exiles have appeared since the modern era in which so-called "liberal democratic" social codes were established. In that living as an exile is a relatively voluntary choice in his/her own will and/or for political or other reasons, exiles often reveal a strong sense of nostalgia for their "homes" and a yearning to return there. In brief, exile is an individual phenomenon, while diaspora is related to collectivity: the latter is often forced and implies not a single place, but "a geographically dispersed network" (Peters, 1999: 20). Then, disapora does not need to be limited to historically particular experiences, as revealed in the Eurocentric association of the term with the Jews. Rather, it may be enlarged and enriched as a theoretical concept for "genealogical analysis of the relationality within and between different diasporic formations" (Brah, 1996: 241).

With some contemporary theorists' work, the nomad is

(re-)made into a postmodern subjectivity. Nomadic subjects see "home"-lessness as a chosen condition based on their own choice, rejecting allegedly assumed stable identities and the sedentary habitus of a settled life as well as the authoritative nature of the state or society that exerts normative and regulative powers over individuals. Rosi Braidotti, one of whose postmodern feminist figurations is the nomadic subject, defines it not as the literal globe-traveler but as "a political fiction," which allows us to open up the possible ways for "the subversion of set conventions" (Braidotti, 1994: 4-5). Braidotti's "nomadic subject" is a kind of intellectual nomad and entices us with new territorial images of thought and subversive transgressions. S/he has some connection to the cunning of privileged groups and attempts to take over the still untouched wild border zone with her/his own symbolic or cultural capital and electronic mobility (Morley, 1999: 160-61). Compared to this kind of "intellectually" mobile nomad, let us see, for example, the African Americans' historically forced displacement. Violently driven into living as diaspora, they suffered from so many kinds of difficulties from forced up-rooting and yet have been systemically thwarted against the making of their own new "home." On the contrary, refusing any fixation or firm rooting in a particular place, the nomadic subjects' desire for flight is likely to be that of a new "universal" identity, which we term "cosmopolitan," especially by implicitly concealing specific differences in material conditions between the subjects both in and from other cultures. The new visions opened up by the "nomadic subjects" do not have to be restricted in intellectual nomadism. Rather, those visions should be based on the material understanding of actual displacements taking place in all directions across the globe, forced or voluntary.

It is homing *in* elsewhere, "a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a 'homeland'" (Brah, 1996: 180) that makes diaspora different from exile and nomadic subjects. Here, the preposition *in* implies diasporic affirmation of their presently being put into elsewhere, whether the displacement is forced or voluntary; thus, it also implies the diasporic activity of locating or, more exactly,

re-rooting themselves in (spite of) the present material conditions in their own situations. In this vein, James Clifford argues that diaspora is "a signifier not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement" (Clifford, 1994: 307). If we follow Brah and Clifford, diaspora has rich potential as a very politically-informed, collectively active subjectivity in this globally displacing world. "Homing" in elsewhere and living as the master of their displaced lives, diaspora deconstructs the binary between globality and locality. Unlike the borderland related to geopolitical and psychological notions of territories, diaspora allows for multi-locality (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996: 190, 194). Then, besides or together with the basic fact that contemporary diaspora is a politico-economic mark of (trans)nationality, it can be a meaningful starting point to raise a new set of questions regarding the nation-state as a local community.

It is noteworthy that diaspora is different from immigrants who invest their energy towards an (often materially) "better" life in their new environments. Called diaspora or "new immigrants," the immigrants who have rushed to the U.S. since the 1960s in general and the intellectuals among them, in particular, Gayatri Spivak, does not conceptually distinguish immigrant from diaspora (Spivak, 1999: 394-99). Of course, diasporic subjects share commonalities with immigrant subjects. However, it is necessary to conceptually distinguish the two if we want to facilitate the term diaspora as a political subjectivity, which will turn out to be useful for social change in the post-industrial twenty-first century. The immigrant leaves one place for another for a very clear purpose; as clearly revealed in her/his versions of the "American dream," while s/he is caught-up in ambivalent emotions of disillusionment and nostalgia. With her/his despair from the past life in her/his "home" country, which, in turn, gives her/him clear purposes for immigration, s/he is also disillusioned with the present life in the new place. They are often disillusioned by the harsh reality in his/her "dreamed" place as its social system turns out to be unfavorable to the immigrants. Unexpectedly, s/he often starts her/his "new" life under worse

conditions than her/his past ones in the "home" land, which in turn brings forth a sense of nostalgia for the past, often "better" life there. With such ambivalent feelings toward her/his past and present life, s/he actively identifies her/himself with the middle-class citizens of the "empire," concentrating her/his energy and time on upward mobility. Meanwhile, many immigrants are subject to or depend on the flexible rearrangement of global capital as well as the variety of mechanisms and interests that the "empire" demands its citizens to conform to, including its immigrants. The "empire's" rhetoric of free upward mobility based on individual merit and competence is one of the most seductive means of stimulating the immigrants' active identification with and subjection to life in the "empire."

Compared with the immigrant, the diaspora observes *counter*identification or even *dis*identification of her/himself from the citizens of the "empire." Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis have not elaborated the significant point of how a human subject disidentifies (rather than identifies) her/himself with others. Instead, they have illuminated the "differences" whereby the human subject is constructed irrespective of her/his intention and will. Consequently, in these psychoanalytic frames, "mimicry," or to use a more positively nuanced term, "mimesis," which is the mechanism of identification, becomes an important determining force in the construction of human subjectivities. Such illuminations, based on the *identificatory* mechanism, often leave the binaries less questioned at a radical level: the "third" world "home" land/the "empire," the East/the West, nationalism/transnationalism, to name a few. As its corollary, discussions follow on the so-called multi-cultural and superficially eclectic hybridization and hyphenization of various subjects inhabiting the "empire's" metropolises.

Here, let me mention the British cultural materialist, Raymond Williams. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), he argues that "the dominant" assiduously incorporates "the emergent" while "the emergent" also enriches its own potentials for resistance, seemingly and sometimes actively being incorporated into "the dominant." It is these potentials that can be powerful sources of counter- and

dis-identification. This complicating/ed cultural dynamic of "the dominant" and "the emergent" suggests that the construction of human subjectivities implies not only unconscious levels but also political and conscious levels of "making" oneself or "positioning" oneself as resisting those that thwart one's own desire and will. In this sense, our bodies and identities are the battleground in which our inner forces actively respond to the outer forces. If human identity or subjectivity is a provisional result of "inherently relational processes of identification and differentiation" (Brah, 1996: 247), we need to pay more attention to the 'disidentificatory' mode of subjectification. Then, diaspora implies a politically-informed subjectivity which is self-conscious of the internal dynamics of identification and disidentification.

A diaspora's self-positioning via disidentification is based on her/his own bodily experiences: for example, the violence of colonization in the "home" land, diverse kinds of discrimination in the "empire," and impoverished life under the globalizing capitalist exploitation. Moreover, with her/his keen understanding of her/his material conditions of living, a diaspora is aware of the limits and, in a sense, fruitlessness of social assimilation (especially, in the "empire's" metropolis); rather, s/he chooses disidentification according to her/his own political will and self-respect. It is in a diaspora's disidenticatory mode of subjectification that we can detect a significant mark of possible political subversion. This new mode of subjectification, processed in a so-called "third space" in a politicizing and historicizing way, requires us to penetrate the foggy rhetoric of multiculturalist inclusion and to focus on the disidentificatory mode rather than assimilation or incorporation. This politicized disidentificatory mode of subjectification can criticize the so-called hybrid mode of subjectification in which cultural interaction is led by a seemingly inclusive both/and logic, as if hybridization or a cultural mix has already de-centered and destabilized uneven power relations.[2]

Recent discussions on "hybridity," over about two decades, produce the ironic effect of imposing "passive" mimicry on postcolonial subjects by fogging materialist understandings of