

## Where Boundaries Lie: An Analysis of Catherine's Diasporic Experience

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**Mehnaz Khan**

Lecturer in English, National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Email:** [mehkhan@numl.edu.pk](mailto:mehkhan@numl.edu.pk)

Corresponding author

**Kainat Zeb**

Lecturer in English, National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad Pakistan.

**Email:** [kainat@numl.edu.pk](mailto:kainat@numl.edu.pk)

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### Abstract

The study is an attempt to analyze the diasporic experience of the character of Catherine from the monumental work by Emile Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*. The main argument is that it is not only the outward migration from the homeland to a foreign land that produces diasporas but even in the land migration from one role to another can turn a person into an individual diaspora bringing in psychological transformation. The main finding of the study is that Catherine's diasporic experience, her shift of place and role produces a gap in her, leaving her nostalgic, lamenting the lost home and friend. Eventually, the encounter between the past and present role and its demands in the constructed notion of identity reduces her ability to sustain her new position and descends her into the world of psychic imbalance making her more in love with death than life. It has been concluded that the boundaries within are as vital and significant as geographical boundaries.

**Keywords:** *Wuthering heights*; Catherine; self; identity; analysis; diasporic experience; homeland

### 1. Introduction

Diasporic literature<sup>1</sup> provides narratives based on the idea of homeland providing an account of the protagonist's journey to another land and how she/he behaves in a

new situation either accepting or rejecting the new sense of place and its cultural code. When a person emigrates from one land to another she/he carries with him/herself certain defining elements that still compete in giving identity. These elements may be rooted in language, religion, culture, social or financial status or gender, etc. In a new country, they constantly dominate collectively as well as individually.

In diasporic communities, identity becomes the process of evolution because the sovereign powers of these identities have not been born in the migrated country. To meet the challenges of the new society the diasporas<sup>2</sup> have to reduce resistance to a new culture. They have no choice but to change themselves according to new demands. There are many issues that diaspora face, particularly during the different stages of their settlement into a new place. Since people from different backgrounds define themselves in different ways and attach different sets of meanings and values to their cultural background. As identity and culture is a process and constant evolution is the only permanent thing in it, thus it leads an individual to pass through different stages in life to comprehend it fully. The objective of this essay is to expand the horizon of diaspora by bringing in psychological time and space into its geographical boundaries.

The thesis of this essay is that not only migration from the homeland to a foreign land creates diaspora, but also in land migration from one role to another a person can become an individual diaspora, which brings a psychological transformation that makes him/her experience the diasporic concepts such as nostalgia, lamenting the loss of homeland, friends, and past life, and so on.

## **2. Research Methodology**

As the dialogue of argument is based upon the new and different point of view about diaspora, therefore, the main method of the study is the dialectic method<sup>3</sup>. Hegel's dialectics arise from phenomenology's stance that "all things are actually processes, that these processes are in constant motion, or development, and that this development is driven by the tension developed by interconnected opposites forces that are acting against each other" (Au, p. 2). We have taken the present horizon that is migration from homeland to foreign land turns a person to diaspora as thesis (geographical boundaries) and constructed reality of the term, and an effect of change of role and place without crossing geographical boundaries (as antithesis) being the alternative constructed reality that questions the legitimacy of the present notion of reality. In the synthesis, the thesis has been tested and other possible understanding of the experience has been explored (antithesis). As a case study, the character of Catherine (senior) has been taken to analyze her process of self-recognition and the effects of the diasporic experience on

her thinking to grasp how her identity has been affected and transformed over the span of time with the change in the place and role.

### **3. Discussions and Results**

The discussion is underpinned on diaspora; however, the point of difference is that we have brought into focus the individual diasporic experience of the character of Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* when she shifts from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange in a newly assigned role to experience a new self and life. Instead of inspecting the experiences of diasporic community when they shift and settle in a foreign land, an attempt is made to examine Catherine's experience of settlement in a new place, in a new role, her psychological reaction, and her dislocation in life that is marked by the loss of her childhood friend from the perspective of diaspora. Since the term diaspora implies re/settlement in a new place, it needs to be differentiated from the term individual diaspora [*we coined and proposed the term*] which is more related to inner boundaries than geographical boundaries.

As a motherless child after the death of her father growing in a loosely organized household under the tyranny of her brother and rigid Methodism of Joseph, Catherine develops the capacity of resistance and rebellion and becomes an 'assertive child associated with the realm of nature' (Mahapatra, p.12024). She spends her childhood with Heathcliff in un-socialized and private moorland world whereby Heathcliff provides her with the privilege to enjoy more freedom to be herself to realize herself. Since Heathcliff appears to be 'wolfish' and Catherine would wildly resist her family's taming influence (p. 12024); Moorland becomes their paradise of freedom where they can escape the control of Hindley and the imprisonment they face at home. Both grow up as free, uncultivated, rebellious, and 'as rude as savages' (Bronte, p. 87) as Nelly says that 'to run away to the moors, was one of their chief amusements in the morning and they would stay there all day' (Bronte, p. 87).

In an accidental visit of Thrushcross Grange Catherine's first observance of the life of the refined Linton attracts her and induces her to wish that if she and Heathcliff were inside such a room, 'they would have thought themselves in heaven!' (Bronte, p. 89). She finds Thrushcross Grange as refined, civilized, and elegant; its peace and heavenly comfort look opposite to the uncivilized heath of Wuthering Heights which 'is being close to being naked or "raw" with uncarpeted floors, most of its barely literate dwellers, even the meat open to inspection on its shelves —Thrushcross Grange is clothed, bookish and "cooked" feeding on negus, cakes, and tea' (Gubar, 1979).

The blissful and cultured outlook of Thrushcross Grange appeals to her, and she decides to go there to be dressed in the clothes of civility offered by the sophisticated Linton family. She shares her heart with Nelly by associating Edger with comfort and peace, stating that she would love to be the supreme lady of the locality and shall be honored by having a spouse like Edger.

The first accidental visit and then the five weeks' stay at Thrushcross Grange transforms Catherine and alters her behavior and attitude. She reforms her looks and appearance that Hindley appreciates 'you look like a lady now' (Bronte, p. 93). The new identity she finds in Thrushcross Grange divides her into two selves and the competitive struggle between the two priorities starts to turn her into a double character to feel for both but 'she was well aware that her love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods which will be changed with the passage of time, as winter changes the trees, [and] her love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary' (Bronte, p. 122).

Though she loves Heathcliff more than Edger and identifies herself with Heathcliff when she declares to Nelly that "I am Heathcliff!" (Bronte, p. 122) and accepts that he remains on her mind not as a means of pleasure but as her own being, however, at the same time she finds him socially inferior. She shares in chapter nine with Nelly, that marrying Heathcliff would degrade her then. Although because of social and economic differences she does not consider him for marriage but she knows that Heathcliff is her complimentary self and she never dares to imagine being separated from him as she opens her heart to Nelly and says that "he's always, always in my mind" (Bronte, p. 122), So, she should not even think of their separation because it is impossible. She also states to Nelly, that "her great thought in living is himself. If he remained and all else perished, she would continue to be; and, if he were annihilated and all else remained then the whole Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. She would no more seem a part of it" (Bronte, p. 122). The loss of being abandoned by her parents was covered by Heathcliff's presence but she can't bear her separation from Heathcliff. Her fear of Heathcliff's desertion leads her to accept Edger's proposal to keep herself safe from the potential psychological destruction that she would experience if she would part from Heathcliff forever. She believes that marrying Edger does not mean leaving Heathcliff, from this misinterpretation of the situation destruction follows. She also believes that after marriage she will be in a position to help Heathcliff to improve his status and get him out from under Hindley. But Heathcliff sees her acceptance of Edger as a rejection of him and his feelings and leaves Wuthering Heights for three years.

Although for civility and culture of Thrushcross Grange and to be ‘the young lady’ she resolves to ingratiate Linton and exchanges the savage rebellious nature and her freedom of Wuthering Heights but she does not know that the child of nature won’t be able to survive far off in manmade refined environment. The diasporas, who leave their homeland by their own choice, do so mainly for making a better life for themselves and their future generations. Catherine does the same, for her better life, although she decides to marry Linton and to adapt fully to the new lifestyle but unconsciously she completely ignores the fact that she will never be able to detach herself from her past/roots entirely, leaving behind Wuthering Heights, its freedom and Heathcliff.

By marrying Edger, Catherine goes physically from one place to another, changing her identity, unconscious, unaware of the worth of the strong spiritual self that she leaves behind. Finally, when Catherine’s dream fulfills and she lives in Thrushcross Grange that inside her heart, she starts feeling that something is missing. Although what she ever wished for she has got all but that fulfilment could not fill the void which has been created by the confrontation of two realities. One she dreamt for and the other is the present time that she is living in without Heathcliff, without her roots. In between her dream and desire, she feels alienated. She was shattered; the part of her was left behind in Heathcliff; when she alienates from real then just like diasporas she develops crises of identity and is confused to decide where to go. She reflects herself in her reconstructed paradise and tries to see herself in that culture and then actually she alienates more unconsciously.

At the moment when she sees Heathcliff, after once losing him, the incidents link her back to her real potent elements of the past and her body and spirit undertakes the state of fragmentation, of disintegration, unsettling her in her new state. The longing for her past life in Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff and the Postcolonial struggle of maintaining the past with its essence causes the emotional trauma. Catherine wanders as a stranger having lost origin, without being able to make roots, belonging to no land, time, or love. Catherine is in the move, in a permanent search of self, a migrating stranger from both the lands of her love never understanding her journey to a country she never really reached, from a past to never approaching future.

Catherine, in her search, meets the other not only within people around her but also within herself. Although Catherine willingly chooses the new peaceful heavenly land to fall into lady hood by marrying Edger but the new identity of Mrs. Linton exacts a price; having been locked into a new system she has to forget about the freedom and egotistical fulfillment of desires she used to celebrate with Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights. She starts looking back to moors as the only heaven on earth and the place

where she feels unrestrained, free from the control of others, closer to Heathcliff. When the people of diaspora face voluntary uprooting from their own land, they may have the right to come back to their homeland if they want; Catherine desires the same as she yearns for her past with anticipation to survive but being Mrs. Linton this chance was least possible for her.

As Catherine has lived in two different houses, she has gathered different experiences and has various observations about life, love, and home<sup>4</sup>. Thus, she feels dislocated from one home to another. However, her physical connection to the place and her past memories don't let her to be completely separated from her roots. Her strong ties with the past, Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights fail her in fully integrating the emerging working opposites of herself into a new and complete whole. In accommodating feelings for both of them (Edger and Heathcliff), she develops a double standards and calls her destruction. Binary opposites are the philosophy of the Universe<sup>5</sup>, same opposites working against each other in the human mind. One is knowledge seeking and peace-loving while another is violence seeking and aggressive. The aggressive tendency is mostly inactive but it masters when we slow down our peaceful loving forces. It masters us by creating its own identity and reality and presents before us as an ideology by relating it to our nature, e.g. fame-lover will develop fame-seeking identity. Ideology can control us if we do not know its roots. Thus the identity that Catherine carries with her ("I am Heathcliff", Bronte, p. 122) has the ability to turn her inside into an ideology and imbalances her marital life. She behaves under the power of ideology opposing the norms of society and familial responsibility. Her identifying herself with Heathcliff becomes her ideology, which chains her heart and mind to perceive, understand, and adapt according to the demands of new role and place. Under the power of this ideology her psychological interpretation of relations gets changed; far becomes near and near becomes far for her then the physically distant Heathcliff was felt psychologically close and physically close Edger was felt psychologically distant.

Catherine loses herself as she defines herself in connection with others. She maintains a place for herself within the net of relations and tries to preserve the relationship of Heathcliff but by not hurting Linton. Her tendency to maintain the relationship within safe emotional boundaries becomes self-destructive. Jean Baker Miller (1976) explains feminine psychology in *Towards a New Psychology*: 'One central feature is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation to others. Indeed, women's sense of self is organized and maintained by her relationships and strong affiliations. Eventually, many women perceive threat of disruption of affiliation as a loss of self' (p. 83).

Even Edger leads her to self-destructive and self-loathing behavior when he asks her to choose one as he considers it impossible for her to be Heathcliff's and his friend at the same time, and Linton 'absolutely requires to know which she chooses' (Bronte, p. 156). But it was impossible for her to choose one because both of them were the two faces of her ideal and complete love -one being cultured, with whom she preferred like one prefers the land of one's dreams and the other savage, the native land which although one leaves for new destinies but still the roots remain undetached.

Her inability to enjoy the benefits of a new role brings in her strong feelings of nostalgia for the lost happiness, freedom, and unrestricted reality of nature in Wuthering Heights; her melancholia is disclosed by her disordered bodily symptoms and her 'senseless, wicked rages', frustrated by the repeatedly traumatic experience of abandonment. She falls into major depression first when Heathcliff disappears for three years and secondly when he returns as a gentleman, wealthy and ready to take revenge. Heathcliff's emotional and physical desertion produces in Catherine an experience of anxiety, a sense of nothingness, bereavement, and low self-esteem. His departure alienates her from the world, and she becomes prone to fits of frenzy. Eventually, she passes through physical and mental decay and wishes to go back to her earlier life of freedom and liberty rejecting the heavenly worlds of Linton.

She recalls her past because it was associated with things that help her to understand what she was and is today. Besides, it was not only Catherine who was experiencing it, but it is true in the case of all most all the diasporas that when they feel lonely or alienated, they consciously or subconsciously go back to their past memories. The specific ways of going back to the memory could be physically or mentally through recalling the past and being nostalgic.

Nostalgia arises from loving memories, now that she feels lonely in her new place, she starts missing the chaos and too many voices of her past life. Catherine's rejection of her natural elements sparks off 'seasons of silence and gloom' (Bronte, p. 131). It is not only a longing for a friend, a place but also a yearning for a time that was so different and good. Here, her childhood memories pull her back to the time and place. Consequently, she becomes nostalgic and, she exclaims, that 'she is burning!'. She wishes to go out to experience what she has experienced as a free, hardy and half-savage girl- free and hardy and half-savage who would never get mad at injuries rather would lough at them. She does not accept her changed self and hopes, "I'm sure I should be myself where I once among the heather on those hill" (Bronte, p. 163).

Catherine feels lonely and alienated in her new place; she constantly recalls her life in Wuthering Heights. She craves the life she used to have there. Moreover, it is not

only Heathcliff's company that she wants to retain but the memory of the place and situations as well. When she moves to Linton's house in a new role, she not only misses what she left-back but she, again and again, goes back to her past and reminds every bit of wuthering heights as she has experienced in her past.

Catherine starts mourning her changed life. She seeks her primitive and savage self-back unconsciously. She cannot recognize herself. She feels changed after becoming Mrs. Linton, trapped in a place away from everything she loves in past, especially Heathcliff and the freedom he used to provide her. The gentle, educated and the cultured universe turns into a "mighty stranger" to make her depressed. She hallucinates and demonstrates 'fits of frenzy'. In severe depression she locks herself in the room, leaves eating, and spends days in sickness dreaming of Wuthering Heights enjoying with Heathcliff as a child but when wakes, finds herself as '...an exile, and outcast from the world what had been her own world' (Bronte, p. 163). Von Ghent (1952) takes this longing as Catherine's desire to 'breakthrough the limitations of civilized life and of personal consciousness' (P. 197). She says to Nelly "O dear! I thought I was at home...lying in my chamber...Before I recovered sufficiently to see and hear...the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank...I was a child; my father was just buried" (Bronte, p. 163). She misses her past life. It is evident that when people live away from their roots for a long time, memories get reinforced and they do not fade away. The more people start living a complicated life, the more they tend to go back to their simple past or memories.

According to Hommas (1980) in "Cathy's delirium, the purpose of returning to childhood and to nature is to return to Heathcliff, the earth alternative is her early cosmic comparison between the two suitors" (p.153). Since the primordial features of nature are also related to Heathcliff. She opens the window in a moment of delirium, careless of her health screaming that she is burning and she wants to be out of the doors to be a girl again to experience her free, hardy, and savage life. Wion (2003) states that "hallucinations and dreams show that the boundaries between Cathy's self and the world are definitely broken down" (p.79). She does not recognize her reflection in a mirror, which clearly refers to the loss of identity. She feels so different from her real wild self. She seems to intend a suicidal illness and does not recognize herself and the change she has been through after entering adult life away from everything she loved in her past. She expresses her return to the past and nature to Edger saying, 'My soul will be on that hilltop before you lay hands on me again' (Bronte, p. 165).

On her death bed, she raves for the past ideal moments of her childhood in Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff and musingly utters, that the thing which irks her



the most was that shattered prison, after all. She feels tired, tired of being enclosed there. She wishes to restore her previous life even if she pays at the cost of her life. She exclaims that she is ‘wearying to escape into that glorious world to be there always; not yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; not seeing it dimly through tears, but really with it, and in it’(Bronte, p. 196). She considers herself lucky and better than Nelly and says that “you think you are more fortunate and better than I; in full strength and health. You feel sorry for me but very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for you. I shall be above you all. I wonder he won't be near me!” (Bronte, p. 196). The instance shows that living in a diasporic space, the character is more allied with memory because life in a new place actually forces her to go to her past. She feels the value of her past life more when she is not there physically (like diasporas).

The urge of returning to her roots is strong that happens mentally. She goes back to her roots psychologically through her memory and by remembering the past. In her last moments when Heathcliff sees her, she wishes for her reunion with Heathcliff to return to her free self-saying , ‘I wish I could hold you...till we were both dead!’ (Bronte, p. 195). She knows that only the end of her physical body would allow her to get rid of her artificial identity and would unify her soul with Heathcliff in its natural essence as Freud explains in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003), the death instinct is an aspiration, a desire to restore an earlier state of things. Hommas (1980) explicates, ‘the Death’s project is the reunion of two individuals, not of parts of the self. Heathcliff is eager for death so that he and Catherine may “be lost in one repose.” The dispersal of identity, loss of self, leads to the unification and reintegration of identities. For both the characters death is the last way of dissolution, and once they both have lost their — what Freud called — Das ding, they developed a kind of behavior where cry, hysteria, obsessive neurosis are somehow considered in a frantic effort to return to that lost “object,” which is forever unattainable but is unforgettable,’(p.129).

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Catherine dies not because of the strong feelings of love but since she was wrong in her choices that cause her separation from her true natural self. It was her past, her roots that alienate her from the present and become the reason for psychological transformation. Her shift of place and role produces a gap in her leaving her nostalgic, lamenting the lost home and friend, and becomes the reason for psychological distancing and eventually leads her to the tragic death. She realizes that she can enjoy her identity, which more exists in Wuthering Heights and Heathcliff than in the new place and role. If she has not felt psychologically distant from her real self

and place in Thrushcross Grange then she would never wish to die to return to the place she loved the most.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Works written by authors who live outside their native land are called diasporic literature.

<sup>2</sup> In today's meaning, diaspora has become an umbrella term which includes both people's forceful and voluntary movement from their homeland to a different country.

<sup>3</sup> Dialectics method is to see the development of the thing, (phenomenon, respectively), its own movement and its own life. To understand the meaning of Hegel's logic see Lenin's work *Philosophical Notebooks*, Volume 38, Lenin's Collected Works, p221

<sup>4</sup> Home has diverse meaning in diasporic situation. The concepts of homeland form a complex framework in the present era of transnational migration. Barnali Dutta says, "[a]ccording to the critics like Homi K. Bhaba, Avatar Brah and Stuart Hall, the floating nature of home and fluid identity have replaced the age-old concepts of fixed

home” (1). For detail, see Dutta, Barnali. “Diasporic Identity and Journey in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*.” *Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism*, May 12, 2013, pp. 1-7.

<sup>5</sup> For more understanding read Chinese philosophy of Taoism, Confucianism, and Neo Confucianism