

Diasporic Theorizing Paradigm on Cultural Identity

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In this paper, I trace the construction of cultural identity, historically and politically, from various disciplines. I explore how the processes of globalization and transnationalism impact the theorization of cultural identity. Specifically, I examine the ways in which globalization—a highly-uneven process that involves, among other things, the spread of global brand names, the transnational flow of goods, knowledge, images, labor, capital, and immigration at an extraordinary pace—challenges and/or reinvents the traditional way of understanding identity. I compare and contrast the traditional identity paradigm with a diasporic theorization of cultural identity from an interdisciplinary postcolonial perspective. In so doing, I hope to expand and continue the scholarly dialogue on theorizing identity as a site of struggle in post-colonial and transnational globality in the study of intercultural and international communication. By including such a perspective when researching the notions of cultural identity, intercultural communication researchers are able to unpack the imperialistic implication of such cultural globalization onto various cultural contexts around the globe.

In the twentieth century, the upward mobility, the irresistible flow of capital, information technology, and people destabilize the traditional identity paradigm—a static sense of nation-state-based cultural identity. Globalism, following its monopolized corporate culture, leads to a seemingly unified world culture. Since globalization de-territorializes, the borders of countries and the bounds of cultures become blurred, contested, open-ended, unstable, and frequently modified. On one hand, the mobility and re-placement of our bodies destabilize our traditional sense of identity that was usually deeply rooted in a sense of nation-state. On the other hand, “localism,” or “nativism,” simultaneously increases as reaction and resistance to the global forces from the locals.

In this article, I first review theories that focus on culture and identities from various disciplines, with the aim of unpacking the ways in which “identity” and “culture” have been conceptualized in various political and historical contexts. In so doing, I am able to set the stage for diasporic theorizing paradigm as an alternative and important lens through which to study cultural identity. To narrow the topic, I specifically emphasize notions of nationality, ethnicity, and racial identification as they exist as the primary struggle for people of dispersions in their new host land. Second, I propose a diasporic paradigm in theorizing cultural identity as a concomitant framework for studying intercultural and international communication. Finally, I provide some sample case studies that draw from research in intercultural communication. My goal is to seek a more holistic understanding of identity politics, by examining the negotiation of cultural identities across categorical differences of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality in liminal spaces, or the “in-betweenness” (Bhabha, 1994), of the designations of identity, the historical and political periods, and the ongoing negotiation to produce recognition and representation of cultural particularities within

postcolonial and transnational contexts. It is therefore necessary to situate communication studies, specifically international and intercultural communication, within the historical and political contexts that we understand as a whole complexity of identity politics and cross-cultural communicative expressions of identity.

Modernism, Essentialism, and Construction of Cultural Identity

In the academy, culture and identity has been a much-debated topic for many fields of study. The question of the system of nation-state and sovereignty became a new crisis in the globalized era. Following the condition of global modernity, anxiety, and uncertainties around the definition of cultural identity raise fundamental philosophical questions in various disciplines of humanities, social science, anthropology, and contemporary communication studies, among others.

Cultural identity used to be seen as objectified collective meanings emerging from anthropology and historical research (Clifford, 2000; Rosaldo, 1989). Culture and identity were invented as static markers to identify biological and cultural characteristics of a specific ethnic and racial group, which acted as controlling models for the First World's "civilizing mission." Authorities such as anthropologists, medical doctors, religious leaders, and politicians produced various cultural and medical discourses that "situated groups, provided peoples with roots (always spliced), with narrative connections between past and present (traditions), with distinctive social habits and bodies" (Clifford, 2000, p. 97). These peculiar, invented aspects of identities and identification were then sustained and circulated by media representation, through which ordinary people became attached and remain loyal to them. As such, culture then became a notion of, to use San Juan's (1992) term, "the cult of ethnicity and the fetish of pluralism" (p. 31), which supplied the Enlightenment ideology of cosmopolitanism.

Over the past century, social sciences believed that knowledge and truth equated with scientific method. With modernist propensity, they argue that people's behaviors are predictable, controllable, and certain (Mumby, 1997). Rosaldo (1989) points out that classic ethnographic studies use the present tense to depict social lives and human behaviors by distancing the researchers from their research and, thus, further normalizing their depiction of human behaviors and social reality. This positivist stance implied that culture, identity, and social life are a set of shared routines that are static. Thus, through the paradigm, identity is constituted within a representational discourse—which shapes power and resources—that always and already echoed modernism and the positivist legacy (Mumby, 1997).

By assigning collective meanings to groups, ethnographers also actively sustained historical positioning both for the researched subjects, such as Third World primitives, and the Western researchers or Westerners within a narrow binary framework (with the latter possessing a privileged whiteness). Identity in this sense, as Hall (1996a) asserts, is always positioned within certain discursive fields that involve power imbalance. Such an essentialized identity paradigm was a way of objectifying collective meanings, inventing culture and traditions, because it also always involves the claims of authenticity for many selective cultural symbols (Clifford, 2000). Through the process of manipulating, creating,

including, or excluding these elements, a particular version of cultural identity and culture is invented and maintained.

Given such, the creation of the essentialized identity paradigm is closely intersected with belongingness and nationality operating within “the realm of primordial being” (Gilroy, 1997, p. 310). Through identity, individuals understand the interplay between cultural and historical contexts and our subjective experiences (Gilroy, 1997). Identity mainly involves belongingness through which people share fixed and collective categories with others, such as kinship, homeland, biological, or cultural heritage; sameness and difference are crucial to the formation of identity. The categorical “markers” including gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity become reorganizations of belonging. The fixed notion of identity provides comfort for certain individuals because they act upon given roles accordingly; it also functions as political solidarity to mobilize nationalism. But the reduction of identity to a simple sameness, in a postcolonial and transnational context, functions as a result of European colonialism. The question could be asked: Who defines whom and for what purpose? By reducing the colonized’s identity into fictive sameness or categorical differences, the colonizer is performing psychic interpellation. In order to justify the civilizing mission of imperial adventures and their version of Christianity, Afrikaner identity, for example, was created to solicit national, ethnic, or racial identification. The machinery was often understood “as a historical or economic process that defined the special, manifest destiny of the group in question” (Gilroy, 1997, p. 307).

A concrete example will illustrate this assertion more clearly. Racial minority groups such as Black children grow up internalizing the White dominant attitudes and behaviors, assimilating to the White dominant culture in order to pass. The process of naturalization and essentialization of the self identity in relation to the other, and the fictive determination of sameness and difference—who gets to be included and who gets to be excluded—cause profound pain and ambivalence in the oppressed (i.e., “black skin, white masks,” Fanon, 1967). The subject who constantly oscillates between cultures takes on a double consciousness, and it heavily influences one’s communicative practices. I will further discuss the notion of double consciousness in a later section by examining research on European colonialism and its impact on the construct of national identity and the production of culture.

Colonialism, Racism, and the Discourse of National Identity

It is no longer sufficient to consider the idea of racial, ethnic, or national identity as primordial. The cultural discourse of Western modernity is informed by the ideas of capitalism, industrialization, democracy, and the concept of nation-state (Gilroy, 2000). Identity is formed by various cultural formations and different definitions of place and community. Modernity consolidates the systematic race-thinking; it also “makes that fateful compact fundamental to the task of grasping how knowledge and power produced the truths of ‘race’ and nation close to the summit of modern reflections on individuality, subjectivity, and ontology, time, truth, and beauty” (pp. 55-56). Racial typologies, the idea of race, and racialized hierarchy shape various aspects of power and decisions exercised by government

and state. Such ideologies contribute to the operations of collective political and historical consciousness both among the dominant and minority groups.

For example, Appiah (1992) deconstructs the idea of African race by examining the elements in the Pan-Africanism discourse. The common ground in the discourse is the guiding concept of race—that is, there is a sort of racial essence, as well as essential heritable characteristics and motherlands for a certain race. He argues that the Pan-Africanism discourse was a product of the history of African nationalism after the Second World War. For the political purpose of acquiring independence after experiencing European colonial racism, African-American and Afro-Caribbean Pan-Africanists articulated themselves with their partially shared African ancestry to build their racial and political solidarity. In the prewar era, colonial Africans experienced European racism—the discourse of Pan-Africanism by the colonizer to justify the colonial project; yet in the postwar era, the notion of race became the only accepted notion to develop solidarity in the New World. In other words, the postwar generation of British Africans consciously or unconsciously accepted the commonly shared racial meaning and differences that were created by the European colonizers. They retained the racial differences developed from theories of race. Cultural nationalism of “roots,” accordingly, operates within the false consciousness—the racial ideology. Simply put, Appiah points out that the very categories of race and cultural nationalism are actually the product of European colonialism, which subjects the racialized natives to an imaginary identity category, contrasting sharply with the White civilized Other. This situation reflects Barthes’s notion of *ex-nomination* (Fiske, 1987). As Barthes posits, the dominant ideology is naturalized by the ruling class, and the subordinates give their consent to practice those ideologies.

The emergence of racial identity paradigm was used as a crucial tool of differentiation and division, creating a distinctive regime of truth since the nineteenth century (Appiah, 1992; Gilroy, 2000). The history of colonialism and conquest that modernity has brought facilitates the consciousness of race and identity. In other words, it was a product and a project of the modern notions of political rationality, self-possession, democracy, and citizenship. The restricted, defined identity could only exist “in the neatly bounded, territorial units where true and authentic culture could take root under the unsentimental eye of ruthlessly eugenic government” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 62). Under western humanism, the production of racial or national identity should be viewed as a historical legacy that interplays with reductive cultural or national sameness and difference.

In essence, racial differences play a crucial role in colonial experiences because they form the continent’s diversities (Appiah, 1992). Traditions, customs, and values are reconstituted to support cultural particularities—the discourse of projection of nation. To borrow Appiah’s words, “nativism constructs national particularities, fetishizing the customs, folklore and vernacular, turning them into a ‘culture,’ that is, in fact, an artifact of Western modernity” (p. 60). While discussing the invention of tradition in colonial Africa, Ranger asserts:

The invented traditions imported from Europe not only provided whites with models of command but also offered many Africans models of “modern” behavior. The invented traditions of African societies—whether invented by the Europeans or by

Africans themselves in response—distorted the past but became in themselves realities through which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed. (as cited in Appiah, 1992, p. 61)

In this sense, it is inevitable for voices that had been marginalized to adopt hegemonic traditions as a way to somehow free themselves from its power, to become individuals, and not just the collective others the discourse has labeled them. Clifford (2000) argues:

Human beings become reflexive agents capable of effective action only when they are sustained “in place” through social and historical connections and disconnections...this is the work of culture...taking up discourses of the present and the past. (p. 96)

For many indigenous intellectuals and cultural producers in a post-colonial and transnational era, the cultural traditions and native identity they advocate are often a set of ethnic particularities that embody national mythology for political solidarity in the decolonization process.

The indigenous intellectuals, in the process of (re)searching their culture, highly valued the traditions, customs, and looks of their own people. Culture in this sense was made to be the native intellectuals’ passive resistance to colonial rules. Culture never merely equates to simplification; on the contrary, it is often in opposition to the natives if it is considered as translucidity of custom (Fanon, 1963). Take indigenous artists for example; even though they deny the influence of foreign culture on renaming their cultural traditions, they are unconscious about emerging national thoughts within the colonial culture that have radically changed the native people. The process of (re)searching culture and national consciousness is questionable and insufficient, because the revival of history and tradition doesn’t take into account the present national reality.

Due to the constant tensions between the colonial rulers and the native subjects, the passive resistance reflects upon cultural productions. When natives become cultural producers and possess their self-sovereignty, their cultural production becomes differentiated and marked as particularism, confined to a national imagination while struggling for liberation. On the whole, the cultural expressions reassured the colonial power since they are locked in a rigid form of representation that is at the heart of colonial culture (Fanon, 1963).

Thus, Fanon (1963) asserts, one cannot free oneself by reproducing European paradigms of the native subject or denials of their existence, but by joining the native people “in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called in question” (p. 227). Namely, one has to recognize the zone of occult instability and indeterminacy. The defense of communal interests often mobilizes the fantasy of a static culture and a frozen identity. Nationalism can therefore be both liberating and problematic. Another example would be a contemporary research on women and identity politics of belonging. Longman (2007) argues women in strict Orthodox Jewish diasporic communities actively negotiate their religious practice and identity. It is therefore through the constant negotiation that their agency and empowerment for each other

has been exercised under constrained structural conditions. In the next section, I discuss the problem of the essentialized identity paradigm when facing the globalized era of post-modernism.

Globalization, Transnationalism, and the Construction of Culture

As discussed previously, we are constantly reminded that our identity is bounded to a geographical and territorial sense of being. This construction is at stake, given that at the political level, identity actually involves “an ongoing process of self-making and social interaction” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 103). Identity has become a crucial element in conflicts over ethnic, cultural, religious, and national differences. The particularities people choose to identify and connect with passionately and collectively function as political solidarity. Sovereign-state and the distinctive model of national belonging are formed and accentuated. As Gilroy argues,

the growth of nationalism and other absolutist religious and ethnic identities, the accentuation of regional and local divisions, and the changing relationship between supranational and subnational networks of economy, politics, and information have all endowed contemporary appeals to identity with extra significance. (p. 107)

Globalization de-territorializes, in the sense that people and societies are no longer restricted to geographical/physical location. The borders of countries and distinctions of cultures become blurred, open-ended, unstable, contested, and reconfigured. As a result, “the national state is increasingly difficult to produce, and localities try to prevent slippages of local identity from national moorings” (Wall, 2005, p. 101).

Globalization should be viewed as a process through which new communicative practices are enacted and cultural imagination and hybrid identity are produced by the transnational flow of capital. It is crucial to understand the interplay of localism and globalism and the influences each has on the idea of national identity. The dialectic of globalization and localization makes the phenomena of identity more complex. Therefore, it is essential to consider the global in a local context. The resistance and acceptance of global ideology leads to a more unified world culture, but at the same time it also produces a fragmented cultural hybridity of a local culture. This international flow of products and capital has resulted in the proliferation of national or regional identity. Identity, in the global context, consolidates selfhood that is used to resist or re-search the roots of the locals.

Globalization, however, is based on an uneven economic developing process. To that end, Winant (2004) asserts that globalization is a racialized social structure: “It is a system of transnational social stratification under which corporations and states based in the global North dominate the global South” (p. 131). Globalization is the continuation of colonialism since the old empires still continue as legacies of a ponderous past. Racial identity, thus, also means “self-representation, autonomous signification, cultural (and thus social and political) practice” (Winant, 2004, p. 184). Through the emergence of global economic forces, ethnic, national, and religious identities are produced, reproduced, and assembled by various cultural

communicative technological means, invoking national myth. Identity is therefore constantly negotiated to serve political ends. Divided global structures (such as the North-South Axis and the West-East Dichotomy) perpetuate and reinforce racial formation. Yet, the binary oppositions that both produce and inform these divisions, such as First/Third worlds, White North/Black South, colonizer/colonized, and center/periphery, have been challenged by postcolonial theory, and by contemporary international and intercultural communication scholars such as Boyd-Barrett (1997), Chitty (2005), Chuang (2000), Mendoza (2002), Mendoza, Halualani, and Drzewiecka (2002), and Shome and Hegde (2002), just to name a few. They point out that globalization is a fully international system of cultural exchange through which the imperial power is strategically maintained and expanded. It operates within the network of power relations that is deeply embedded in the political, cultural, and economic legacy of Western imperialism. While suggesting the mobility of global culture, the representation of local community and identity consumed by the global community still reflects an imperial constitution of the world.

Globalization is in a universal postmodern space, Ashcroft (2001) argues, and it always exists within history, but “reveals itself as the site of practices and strategies which have been developed by local communities over many centuries” (p. 207). We therefore need to address the historical, political, economic, and cultural forces under which local identities are constituted. This constitution of local identities has transformed from the global perspective of European imperialism. Imperialism and globalization share the similar processes of circulating culture and naturalizing historical power relations which emerged and were characterized by European modernity, through transnational corporations and the diffusion of global economy without political boundaries (Ashcroft, 2001; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1999). The transcultural interdependence (Ashcroft, 2001) complicates the structure between the local and the global. To study globalization must mean to discuss global in the local level; that is, we understand the local engagements within global systems (Ashcroft, 2001; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002; Chuang, 2000).

Diaspora and the Challenge of Identity Boundary

The processes of globalization include massive migrations and relocations, thus challenging the traditional concept of nation-state and opening up borders and boundaries. Given the transnational movement of goods, information, and bodies, we need to reconsider the effects of relocation, displacement, and the transition between cultures and how these things affect the construction of identity (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002; Gilroy, 2000; Sahoo, 2006).

The mobility of bodies challenges the limits of identities. The political and academic debates on the issues of transnationalism, global disjunctures (Behdad, 2005), and diasporic differences in relation to new world (dis)order have arisen in various fields of study. The issues of diaspora, dispersion, and displacement complicate how we study the concepts of culture and identity. Clifford’s theory of traveling cultures addresses postcolonial travelers and accounts for complex traveling systems. Cultural, political, and economic circumstances lead to varying travel-related issues, such as “movements in specific postcolonial, neocolonial

circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours, and returns” (Clifford, 1997, p. 35). Thus, traveling signifies a range of special practices that produce cultural knowledge. While some privileged travelers enjoy the autonomy to move at their own choosing, many travelers are forced to leave home to survive. Given the several issues of modern and post-modern transnationalism, it is necessary to reconstruct diasporic conjunctures in relation to identity and ethnicity (Hall, 1990; Hall, 1996b).

Diaspora refers to legal or illegal practices of border crossings; and after being dispersed, diasporas (those who have dispersed) remain transitionally linked with a real or symbolical homeland (Clifford, 2005; Safran, 1991). It is a phenomenon constituted under conditions derived from unequal power relations in the global context. Diasporas, as a product of transnationalism, are grounded in systems of inequality. The system of inequality evokes the specific trauma of forced displacement, usually resulting from specific and violent histories of economic, political, and cultural conflict, such as the history of African slavery (Clifford, 1997; Gilroy, 1993). Diaspora studies are generally concerned with cultural dislocation, examining the effect of displacement in relation to a new constitution of cultural meanings (Ashcroft et al., 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2002). In other words, diaspora can be understood as a consequence of imperial dominance, the displacements of people through slavery, indenture, and settlement. It not only involves geographical dispersal of significant numbers of people, but also the “identity, memory, and home which such displacement produces” (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 218).

The transnational movements of bodies, knowledge, and capital generate the liquidity or nomadic identities (Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, & Sheller, 2003). Transnational identity formations therefore emerge out of “a shared history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland” (Safran, 1991, as cited in Clifford, 2005, p. 527). National and ethnic affiliation is defined by the relationship with the history and the past. The history and the past of the diasporic subjects are not buried in the past, but instead, provide an alternative avenue for a new constitution of subjects and continue to shape the present. The emotional attachment and the deeply seated embodiment of the nostalgic sentiment to the collective past emerge as a form of cultural empowerment. A corporate, communal, or shared diasporic identity is defined by the relationships between the dispersed; Distance from one’s motherland generates a sense of loss (Dutta-Bergman & Pal, 2005; Liao, 2005). The diasporic experience tends to focus on a collective memory of a lost homeland, childhood, cultural identity due to the trauma of forced dispersion (Naghibi, 2009). Peters (1999) suggests that the dispersed develop and sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication, such as language, media, or rituals. Thus, the collective memory of a homeland enables the scattered individuals to band together to create real or imagined relationships with one another. Simply put, rather than merely an experience of individuals, diaspora is a collective experience. Asian diasporas, for example, have sustained critical networks of exchanging material and symbolism with their homelands (p. 504). As Klein (2004) posits, “The collective maintains its sense of people-hood through networks of travel, communication, economic exchange, and cultural interaction that crisscross national borders” (p. 10). Clifford calls them “lateral axes” of affiliation, implying that instead of grounding

one's sense of identity in the dispersal community that exists in the present, travelers on diasporic journeys are settling down elsewhere and creating their sense of identity in a homeland that exists mainly in memory (Klein, 2004).

Diaspora and Double Consciousness

In his discussion on Black diasporic consciousness, W. E. B. Du Bois used the veil to indicate a metaphor of racial dialectic. The Black community develops a double consciousness, which “describes a subjectivity both sundered and fused, an identity divided by forces originating both within and outside the self” (Winant, 2004, p. 28). In other words, Blacks strive for the wholeness of their souls both from within (the black side), and outside of the self (the white side). Yet, the inside and outside of the self is always unstable and contradictory. The metaphor of the veil signifies the ambivalent desire for otherness.

While discussing diasporic double consciousness, Dayal (1996) argues that it allows for the emergence of different meanings of “belonging.” For example, examination of the notion of “home-binding” provides an illustration of Dayal’s assertion. For diasporic communities, the recreation of home-binding signifies the development of cultural belonging by exchanging symbolic or material meanings. The work of the collective memory in constructing the imagined homeland closely connects to concrete materialization of objects, traditions or rituals. The rebuilding of home depends on the “reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted” (Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, & Sheller, 2003, p. 9). Imagined fragments are pieced together as a wholly-imagined home. The affective and physical creation of the imagined home is a continuing process. Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, and Sheller (2003) argue that the issues of home and migration are negotiated from art, popular culture, language, and the Internet. Uprootings and regroundings, as argued, “emerge from this collective work as simultaneously affective, embodied, cultural and political processes whose effects are not simply given” (p. 2). Thus, we need to rethink the notion of home and the whole complexity of cultural memories and diasporas that are associated with the forced dispersion.

Diaspora as a Collective Consciousness

Another characteristic of diasporas, the imagined communities, is what Benedict Anderson (1991) holds as the idea of “mental image” (as cited in Hoover & Stokes, 2003, p. 510). Hoover and Stokes (2003) put it this way:

While community requires face-to-face interaction to sustain a sense of community, within nations, individuals only ever meet a small proportion of the larger population with whom they supposedly share an identity. Through a history of struggle and change, out of which arise notions of exclusion and inclusion, as well as difference, nationhood becomes socially significant. (p. 510)

Diasporas' sense of identities is not fixed, but rather may form in different contexts. In other words, they are "situationally determined" (Werbner, 2004, p. 900). Along the same line, diasporas from a particular region share the same language, traditions, nationality, and generally the same culture. They also share a rich material of culture of consumption including high culture and popular culture (e.g., films and other works of fiction). Through the diasporic aesthetics, the cultural producers may create a certain kind of nostalgic plot that may be still locked in the "obsolete and reactionary customs and beliefs of the old country" (Werbner, 2004, p. 901).

Considered collectively, diasporas refer to displaced populations who usually remain in subordinate positions by established social structures such as racial exclusion or subordinated ethnic status in the new land. Through the attachment to homeland, cultural traditions, and shared history of displacement, diasporas establish a collective symbolic community and identity, contributing to cultural solidarities. A collective diasporic identity is necessary because it provides the community with a new possibility to appreciate and critique the past—their history and their positioning. In a social structure that is often based on systems of exploitation, diaspora consciousness is actually constituted by suffering that accompanies strategies of survival: "strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and the stubborn visions of renewal" (Clifford, 2005, p. 534).

In essence, the phenomenon diaspora does not only signify transnational movements but also embodies political significance—that is, the political struggle to define a distinctive community in historical contexts. The selective processes of maintaining, remembering, articulating, recovering cultural traditions, "customizing," and "versioning" (Clifford, 2005, p. 339) in hybrid and often antagonistic situations reflect tension with rigid nation-state and assimilationist ideologies.

In studying the canonical work *Black Atlantic*, Gilroy (1993) points out that the position of the nation-state and the construction of the dichotomy of center and periphery cannot be applied to the Black Atlantic diaspora. The Pan-Africanism that links the Black people of the Caribbean, Britain, and the U.S. to Africa is one example. He argues that the Black nationalists still ground themselves in the logic of Euro-American modernity, which underlines an essentialized Black subject. In other words, Pan-Africanism leaves little room for the ambivalence of the exile as it is conveyed by their synchronized and hybrid aesthetics. Rather than seeing identity as a social and historical construct, nationalist claims affirm and reinforce the belief that there exist invariable and fixed properties of Black identity.

Gilroy demonstrates that the diasporic culture of Black settlers in Britain transcended Thatcherite England's racial policies and engaged in a cosmopolitan Atlantic phenomenon. Black diasporic cultural expression, especially music, is a tool to develop transnational networks as well as to defend against capitalism and violent racism. He argues that the study of Black diasporic identity is "more concerned with the flows, exchanges and in-between elements that call the very desire to enter into question" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 190).

To illustrate his critique of modernity's relation to the Black diasporic community, he disputes the intrinsic sense of "pure Africanness" by which inequality has been justified. Based on his study of the experience of slavery in relation to European modernity, Gilroy

questions the positioning of Black diasporas in the production of modernity, reversing the usual paradigm that White Europeans produce modernity and hence they are advanced.

He asserts that the term “diaspora”:

Opens up a historical and experiential rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging...Consciousness of diaspora affiliation stands opposed to the distinct complexity of nation-states. Diaspora identification exists outside of and sometimes in opposition to the political forms and codes of modern citizenship. (p. 124)

Echoing Clifford, Hall and other postcolonial theorists, this point suggests a positioning and a process of becoming, rather than fixed, unvaried roots. The appropriate question of diaspora identity is to ask not “Where you are from?” but rather, “Where are you at?” (Gilroy, 1991, p. 3).

In this vein, Hall (1996b) notes the occurrence of qualitative changes through globalization that affect the variance of identity formations; yet these changes cannot be separated from their histories. Again, Hall reiterates that historical specificities, political or economic forces heavily impact identity formation; namely, identity is a question of from which positioning one speaks. While discussing Caribbean diasporic identity and the Pan-African political movement early in the century, Hall (1990) argues that cultural identity has become a matter of “becoming as well as being” (p. 225). Rather than being fixed by an essentialized cultural root, identity is instead fluid, constantly subject to the continuous play of history, power, and discourse (Hall, 1996b). Identity might exist outside discursive meanings, yet it is only meaningful within a placed discourse, a specific positioning. Thus, Hall (1990) states that diasporic identities “are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 236).

In a transnational era, the new ways of belonging challenge the binary oppositions of oppressor and oppressed, pure and impure, authenticity and hybridity. Hall (1996b) notes that

identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (p. 4)

Identity is therefore mediated by different representations, language practice, memory, fantasy, and so on. In the late modern times, there is no simple return to the origin or the ancestral past because identities arise from narratives, usually partly in the imaginary, and inevitably politicized.

When the diasporic margins struggle to come to represent their own voice in the modern time, “ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak” (Hall, 1997, p. 34). The marginalized space can be a place of power, a place of resistance, because the margins take on the essential categories not only to search for their hidden histories, to reclaim the representations of themselves, but also to open up a new possibility to critique the restraints

of identity politics. The new space allows them to speak their own languages, recover their own histories, as well as construct their new roots. For example, Hall (1997) tells us, “you could not describe the movements of colonial nationalism without that moment when the unspoken discovered that they had a history which they could speak; they had languages other than the languages of the master, of the tribe” (p. 35). The reconstruction of history generates the new ethnicity (Hall, 1997), which erases the identities from the imperialists’ lens, as it were, in the post-modern manifestation of diversity. Here, diasporic identity embodies the variation and transformation of ethnic identification, constantly reconstituting itself.

Diasporic Identity Paradigm and Intercultural Communication: Case Studies

In this section, I offer two case studies, including research specifically drawn from contemporary research in international and intercultural communication, as demonstrations that it is precisely through the fruitful integration of identity politics and symbolic communication practices, particularly regarding diaspora, that facilitates a more holistic understanding of the expressions of identity heretofore presented.

Chinese Diaspora and Transnationalism

Minority cultural workers such as Chinese diaspora participate differently in post-national and/or the so-called nomadic context. In her research on Chinese transnationality, Ong (1999) proposes an alternative theorization of the Chinese diaspora as “flexible citizenship.” She asserts that the change in the way financial services are provided, new markets, and labor have two consequences. One consequence is the development of a new kind of social organization that requires de-territorialized, highly mobilized intercultural communication. Due to the segmented international division of labor, the new transnational professionals “evolved new, distinctive lifestyles grounded in high mobility (both spatial and in terms of careers), new patterns of urban residence, and new kinds of social interaction defined by a consumerist ethnic” (Ong & Nonini, 1997, p. 11). Thus, “third cultures” have emerged out of the new social rearrangements. The relatively special-independent lifestyles transcend the political borders of nation-states. Among Chinese, the emerged diaspora has produced new identities.

In discussing a “diasporic consciousness” raised by Chinese diaspora intellectuals, Chow (1993) suggested that displacement produces an ever-shifting identity. She remarks:

Whenever the oppressed, the native, the subaltern, and so forth are used to represent the point of ‘authenticity’ for our critical discourse, they become at the same time the place of myth-making and an escape from the impure nature of political realities. (p. 44)

She observes that Chinese nationalist intellectuals’ claims to authentic Chineseness are actually “the assured means to authority and power,” because they are “robbing the terms of oppression of their critical and oppositional import, and thus depriving the oppressed of even

the vocabulary of protest and rightful demand” (p. 13). She has clearly identified the limited effect that the natives want to achieve. Chow instead suggests that diasporas are “tactics of intervention” (p. 15) because they embody in-betweenness by speaking “inauthentic” language, which has already proven to be an interruption of hegemonic discourse.

Similarly, Ang (2001) asks, “Can one say no to Chineseness?” while pushing the limits of the diasporic paradigm. Ang further states that it is liberating to develop an imagined Chinese diaspora subject, in the environment where they always feel symbolically excluded. The transnationalization of the imagination creates a sense of belonging; but, at the same time, the construction of a distinct racial paradigm such as “being authentic Chinese” reinforces ethnic absolutism and can also be oppressive. The resulting diasporic hybridity challenges the presumption of purity. Diasporas function as discursive communities in which people establish a paradigm delineating who is to belong and who is to be excluded. Also, diasporic solidarity is developed through some common experiences; that is, it is the historical mistreatment such as anti-Chinese racism that has driven Chinese diasporas to stick together.

In the field of communication studies, more research has been focusing on the ways in which communication technology impacts individuals’ perceptions of self and other. New communication technology such as new media and the Internet provide a great source for individuals to interact with each other. For example, in Taiwan, researchers have long started to explore interactivity between user ability and diasporic reception. Chang (2006), for one, published a case study of the ways in which the interactive design of digital media create conditions that allow Chinese diasporas to experience new levels of engagement with cultural heritage. Through the exchange of information and online postings on Internet forums, technology helps facilitate and accommodate all levels of human communication, on the one hand. On the other hand, media technology could simultaneously be used as a tool to provide resources for constructing cultural values, memories, and imagination, both on the collective and individual level. Nationalism and national identities, for migrants, can be frequently and conveniently acquired and learned through media technologies.

Chang (2006), in her research on Chinese migrants, examined contemporary Chinese national identities and Chinese nationalism through cyberspace. By examining two websites and Bulletin Board System (BBS), she studied how Chinese migrants in Singapore use cyberspace as a site of resistance for the new Chinese migrants against official discourse from the government. Namely, Chinese migrants employ the Internet as a tool to challenge the governmental rhetoric on Pan-Chinese national identity.

Filipino/American Diaspora and the Search for Identity

Identity formation is constituted in and through various cultural productions. By examining the construction of cultural events such as the Filipino Cultural Night, Gonzalves (1997) argues that the system of particular cultural symbols serves as a static definition of Filipino and Filipino American culture and identity. She raised several questions such as “How does culture work?”; “Why can culture be represented on one night?”; “Who is involved?”; “What did the show say about themselves?”; and “Why did they choose particular symbols—specific dance styles, music, costumes, formats to unpack what is edited

and constructed as Filipino and Filipino American culture?" The cultural practice connotes a fixed identity. For example, the explored exile theme is the common thread deployed throughout the cultural shows. Gonzalves states that "the Filipinos presented on stage are culturally marked through 'indigenized' costumes" (p. 175). In other words, to say something is *indigenized* is to point to an active and complicated process of manufacturing. Additionally, this is the process in which a particular vision of an ethnic cultural life is constituted. The cultural origins are mediated within particular cultural images through the standardized inventory exponents such as the national dance troupes. These cultural presentations, Gonzalves argues, transformed into a model for younger generations eager to show authenticity of Philippine cultural symbols. In essence, the cultural event, as Gonzalves observes, is a vehicle to represent, or more precisely, to hegemonize the Filipino American experiences without recognizing the fluidity of identity.

Taken as a whole, the presumption of authenticity presents an idea that different cultural subjects such as diasporas or indigenous people are a sturdy storage area of knowledge. Yet, the practice fails to recognize the fact that cultural fluidity, local variances, indeterminacy, and ambiguities are at work between the local and the global.

These case studies illustrate that geographical and cultural displacement creates new forms of cultural belonging, and increasingly informs us of the local-global cultural dialectics. Mishra (1996) posits that hypermobility actually reinforces ethnic absolutism because diasporas connect to the myth and politics of homeland. Thus, diasporic discourse of homeland not only creates a myth of racial purity but also a kind of return of the repressed for the nation-state itself, its presymbolic (imaginary) narrative, in which one sees a more primitive theorization of the nation itself. Diasporic study therefore makes it possible to challenge the traditional notion of culture and identity, opening up new spaces or subjectivities.

Conclusion

The increased complexity between the local and the global, as well as its effect on the idea of nationhood and the native identity is one of the most distinctive features in post-national and transnational contexts. Cultural identities are never static; rather, they constantly change, without the limitations of special boundaries. Under the circumstances, one needs to understand the complexities of globalization that intersect with the constructions of national identity of the natives. The local communities simultaneously undergo transformation of themselves to respond to and engage in transnationalism—negotiating, constructing, and reinventing their own subjectivities. The ideas of "pluralism" and "cosmopolitanism," as liberal as it might sound, actually create the ethnic differences—the ethnic absolutism that leads to neo-racism and oppression.

Postcolonial theorists therefore assert that postcolonialism only makes sense within specific historical contexts; that is, there are no essential postcolonial cultures, there are only postcolonial moments, where various discourses, representations, and tactics cohere to create a systematic argument (Clifford, 2005; Hall, 1996b). The impact of transnational forces, such as the rapid circulation of images, goods, information, and movements of diasporic

populations, demonstrates the limitation of the nation-state framework. Diaspora studies deconstruct the boundaries of nation-state, reconstructing a non-Western model of identity formation. The diasporic “in-betweenness” moves beyond the binary construction of colonized and colonizer, center and periphery, serving as a model of resisting the hegemony of Western modernization.

The question of origin in the late modern era, as Chow (1993) points out, is answered by the issue of diaspora and migrancy, as she termed it “a form of interference” (p. 142) because of their de-territorialized nature. That is, to account for the questions of diaspora is also to destabilize the process of identity that was viewed as objective and given, and interrogate ideologies that fix the unquestioned identity formation, and further produce alternative frameworks of cultural knowledge. Diaspora has become a site of intervention, and re-articulation of the politics of home.

In this article, I trace the construction of cultural identity, historically and politically, from various disciplines. I explore how the processes of globalization and transnationalism impact the theorization of cultural identity. Specifically, I examine the ways in which globalization—a highly-uneven process that involves, among other things, the spread of global brand names, the transnational flow of goods, knowledge, images, labor, capital, and immigration at an extraordinary pace—challenges and/or reinvents the traditional way of understanding identity. I compare and contrast the traditional identity paradigm with a diasporic theorization of cultural identity from an interdisciplinary postcolonial perspective. In so doing, I hope to expand and continue the scholarly dialogue on theorizing identity as a site of struggle in postcolonial and transnational globality in the field of intercultural and international communication. By including such perspective when researching the notions of cultural identity, intercultural communication researchers are able to unpack the imperialistic implication of such cultural globalization onto various cultural contexts around the globe.

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