

Displacement and Marginalisation of Haitian Immigrants

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Abstract

Displacement is the forced or voluntary migration of people. Colonialism and Imperialism are the significant factors that lead to the displacement and dislocation of people. Economic poverty and natural calamities add to the physical movement of people from one country to another. The migrants suffer physically and psychologically in the host countries. The fear of non-acceptance leads to their marginalisation in society. Marginalisation is a social phenomenon in which ethnic minorities or sub-groups are excluded from mainstream society. When an individual migrates, he aspires to acceptance in the host country. The natives do not find any semblance to the migrants and do not accept them; they treat them indifferently, demean them, and use derogatory terms for them. The immigrants find it difficult to adapt and feel secluded and marginalised. Edwidge Danticat writes about the immigration of Haitians and the problems they faced after immigration. The immigrants are displaced in the host country and feel alienated when they do not find any help or solace. They face social, economic, political, cultural and psychological marginalisation. The marginalised are always at the receiving end, and their needs are ignored. These marginalised people may develop low self-confidence and self-esteem.

Keywords: Displacement, migration, Marginalisation, social, economic, exclusion, migrants, immigrants, psychological, etc.

Introduction

Human migration is an age-old phenomenon. Earlier human beings migrated in search of food. Now they migrate in search of resources. An individual leaves his native home and migrates to another land for a better future. The alluring dreams of the new land soon turn out to be a bitter future when one is not accepted in the host country by the citizens of the country and is looked down upon as an alien. The migrants need space and respect. They carry their memories which are difficult to erase, and when they face hostility in the new land, they

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feel displaced and dislocated. Their identity is shattered as they are in turmoil about where they belong. Issues like homelessness, belongingness and alienation result in an identity crisis which shatters the dreams once cherished by the migrants.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines displacement as “the removal of someone or something by someone else which takes their place.” It also elaborates on the meaning that displacement is “the enforced departure of people from their homes, typically because of war, persecution, or natural disaster”, and the Dictionary’s psychoanalytic version describes displacement as “the unconscious transfer of an intense emotion from one object to another” (OED: 2010: 505). Displacement is thus a removal, estrangement and loss which has a prolonged physical, psychological and cultural effect on humans. It is the physical dislocation and separation of people from their original culture, forcefully or voluntarily. Mourid Barghouti, in his work *I Saw Ramallah* describes Displacement in the first section of the work:

Displacements are always multiple. Displacements that collect around you and close circle. You turn, but the circle surrounds you. When it happens you become a stranger in your places and to your places at the same time. The displaced person becomes a stranger to his memories and so he tries to cling to them. He places himself above the actual and the passing. He places himself above them without noticing his certain fragility. And so he appears to people fragile and proud at the same time. It is enough for a person to go through the first experience of uprooting, to become uprooted forever. It is like slipping on the first step of a staircase. You stumble down to the end. (131)

People were dislocated due to imperialism and colonialism. They were uprooted and estranged from their native land and culture. They were displaced internally and externally. According to history, World War II led to the greatest displacement of humans. The harsh policies of colonialism and imperialism made the farmers landless, curbed their fundamental rights, made them adopt a new language and culture and also led the natives to flee and migrate to new lands. Colonialism also paved the way for slavery, as during colonialism slave trade flourished, which gave rise to discrimination and racism. This resulted in the flourishing of colonial rule and power. This discrimination, social stress and economic poverty also led to the migration of people. The post-colonial literature describes the bereaved migrant who lost his home, is alienated and suffers displacement. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in their book, *The Empire Writes Back*, define displacement as:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and

place ... A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (9)

Angelika Bammer defines displacement as "the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture" (Bammer, xi). Displacement adds to our knowledge of different cultures. It can contribute to bringing different nations and nationalities together. This can happen only when the host country accepts the displaced. However, several limitations arise as the host countries do not welcome the displaced. They are thought of as liabilities, they are mistreated, and their dignity is violated. They suffer cultural clashes, hatred, identity crises, gender issues, isolation etc. Most migrants try to cope and assimilate, but they face hostility. This alienation and isolation results in a sense of marginalisation of the migrants.

Marginalisation is exclusion and segregation from society. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes Marginalisation as "The process of-to put or keep putting (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group" (Merriam-Webster, 2014). When someone is not accepted as a part of society and is treated as a stranger or an outcast, he is said to be alienated or marginalised. Unemployment, poverty, racial discrimination, gender inequality and non-acceptance by society lead to one's exclusion, alienation and marginalisation. This marginalisation can be in any sphere of life, social, economic or political. J.E. Arnold defines marginalisation as, "Marginalisation, then, when applied to cultural evolution, refers most broadly to a process by which persons or positions are separated from central operations of a society. It implies, as well, instability, expendability, lack of power, and an absence of full integration with centralised decision-making" (91-2).

Haiti became the first black republic in the world in 1804. Haitians paid a huge price \$20 billion for independence from the French. High-interest loans from the US forced Haitians to accept the supremacy of America. Haiti's poverty and geographical location caused hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes that forced Haitians out of Haiti. Haitians migrated to America and The Dominican Republic. The Haitians are blacks as they originate from African natives, and so are discriminated against by the whites. The Haitians were displaced and alienated. They suffered marginalisation in the host country as they come from different backgrounds and find it difficult to leave their habits and traditions. Marginalisation is not suffered only by individuals, it can

also affect the whole class, society, minorities, ethnic groups, etc. Edwidge Danticat a Haitian American writer describes the displacement and marginalisation of Haitians in her works. She has migrated to America, but her heart is always in Haiti. She writes about the migrant Haitians' lives and suffering as a migrant in America. In her interview with Nadege T. Clitandre, she says, "I think since we have so much migration out of Haiti, diaspora writing can offer a lot of insight to Haitians in Haiti on what it's like to live outside of Haiti. Our work can show both the difficulties and advantages of that life from up close. Perhaps readers in Haiti can learn as much about our realities as we can learn about theirs."

Objectives and Methods

This work studies the impact of immigration on migrants. The works of Edwidge Danticat a Haitian American writer form the basis of the work. The work accounts for the socio-economic circumstances in Haiti and America faced by the immigrants wherein they feel displaced and marginalised. The qualitative research analyses secondary sources to describe the concept of displacement and marginalisation. Various internet websites, books, research journals and newspapers are also used as references.

Discussion

The United States hosts the largest Haitian immigrant population, with an estimated 705,000 as of 2020. Haitians have been living in the United States for many years. Haitians migrated to the US mainly by sea, these people were called the Boat people. The US alarmingly detected these people and ransacked their boats. The US immigration policies were strict and obscure, only documented people were let in. From October 2020 through August 2021, U.S. Border Patrol caught 30,000 Haitians, nearly all at the U.S.-Mexico border. This is the largest since 1992 when authorities intercepted 38,000 Haitians at sea. The causes of displacement date back to imperialism. The imperialists forced the people to submit and those who could not endure the torture and pain of being a slave left and escaped. It was during Imperialism that the slave trade started as slaves were brought from Africa to work for the imperial power. Colonialism followed imperialism, and based on the same principles they exploited the resources and manpower of the colonies which resulted in migration. The natives fled to escape the violence they were put through. Haiti though free came under the rule of the US which exploited the rich resources available in Haiti. Haiti was then called the "Pearl of the Antilles" by the French because of its natural beauty and its wealth which the French took.

The first Haitians to flee Haiti were panic-stricken slaves, the free blacks and the white men who left Haiti as the slaves revolted against slavery in the 1790s. There are five major documented periods of Haitian immigration to the United States: the period of French colonization; the Haitian revolution (1791-1803); the United States occupation of Haiti (1915-1934); the period of the Duvaliers (1957-1986); and the overthrow of President Aristide (1991).

Haitians migrated in search of political asylum and permanent residence. The skilled Haitians, professionals and students fled Haiti due to political persecution. The displacement of the Haitians started due to their fear of survival and continues till date as Haiti could never be economically strong and sufficient. Most of the Haitian displacement resulted because of political turmoil.

Many writers like Stuart Hall, Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Edwidge Danticat etc. have also gone through Displacement and are now writing about the migrants of their native countries. They help them socially and financially to form a part of the host community and to withstand the discrimination against the migrants. She writes about Haitian Immigrants and how they experience displacement and are mistreated in America. In her interview with Leila Fadel, Danticat talks about the treatment met by the asylum seekers, she says, "It's the ache, I think, of being an immigrant and the child of immigrants and watching people suffer who - that could be me. That could be my brothers. That could be any of us. And it is us in so many ways. So that ache continues. But I also want to stress that I think for us, it's not sort of a pity-seeking ache. It's an inspiration. It's a kind of calling for those of us who are here on the other side to work really hard to try to advocate." Some of these writers have taken to writing as a result of migration as they want the world to know the truth about the American Dream. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes about her experience of becoming a writer when she faces the challenges of defending her Indian culture. In one of her interviews, she says,

I think immigration made me into a writer. The world of America was so different from the traditional Indian society I grew up in . . . I think I started writing in order to make sense of it, to process it. I continued writing so I would not forget the world of my childhood. Then I became very interested in immigration and how it transforms us. (Divakaruni)

There are several reasons why a native migrates from his country. It can be to get a good education, for economic prosperity and because of political strife. The migrant has a mixture of experiences and feelings. His primary stress is keeping his values and culture alive amidst the host culture and surviving. Bhabha says:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary post-colonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the 'middle passage' of slavery and indenture, the 'voyage out' of the civilization mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the west after the second world war, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the third world. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement—now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of 'global' media technologies—make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. (247)

Edwidge Danticat is a Haitian American writer who migrated to America twelve years after her father went to America due to poverty and her mother followed as they had to earn enough to call for their family. She met two new family members who she never thought existed, she also feared that her parents would have changed in the meantime. She faced discrimination at school being a black child and also in society which made her write about her experience as she wanted to share the experience of what is suffered by Haitians and blacks in the host country like America. America which is called the 'Melting Pot.' All cultures are welcome here, but its hostility towards the Haitians and blacks still exists as described in the works of Edwidge Danticat. Her works mirror the life of Haitians in America, she lends a voice to the Haitian immigrants who suffer in the host society. Her works are a description of her own life.

Celiane, the protagonist, in her work *Behind the Mountains*, portrays Celiane as her image who migrates and feels the cold in the host country. She describes the mental state of Celiane who loses her way and feels neglected and alienated. A young mind is subject to isolation and dislocation facing the atrocities of the host community. Gisselle and Isabelle also face the hatred of the immigrants in the form of a car accident by Gloria who also is a sufferer as she is a victim of child trafficking. Danticat also writes about the boatmen who migrated to the host land who either suffer, are illegal migrants or are detained by the host country and deported. Displacement brings with it many problems and challenges. Migrants struggle to cope with the new culture, language and society. They are not acknowledged in society and at work. They are marginalised in society are not given good accommodation conditions, are put to petty jobs and earn a meagre income.

Marginalisation, as faced by immigrants, exists in various forms, the primary of them being social, economic, political, and psychological marginalisation. Social Marginalisation is the deprivation of basic amenities and social fundamental rights. It is also called social exclusion. Hilary Silver in his work on social exclusion writes, "Social

exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live" (15). As the racial disparity and ethnic diversity grow the immigrants feel the push of marginality more severely. The distance between the immigrant and the native widens, and the immigrant feels the pull towards the homeland. Social Marginalisation results on the basis of race, education, social standard, gender and belongingness. Marginalisation results in detaching the immigrants from inclusion in social policies and institutions and hence curbing their growth in the country. The immigrants are poor and unauthorised. They do not have efficiency in the English language and are unknown to American society. These language barriers and social differences result in the immigrant's marginalisation. The social distancing that arises due to cultural and linguistic differences leads to the formation of stereotypes which implies that the immigrants are a threat to the national and cultural identity of the host nation. This further results in viewing the other immigrants as a threat or prohibiting their access by imposing strict immigration rules. Edwidge Danticat in her book *Brother I'm Dying* writes about such rules which are inhuman and which result in disastrous outcomes such as the death of Danticat's uncle. She writes about her experience in *The New Yorker* and blames the US government for its immigration policies. By giving voice to the marginalised, she wants to make believe her identity as a Haitian. In an article on Edwidge Danticat in the magazine *World Literature Today* Renee Shea writes, "In these *New Yorker* pieces, Danticat continues as an interpretive voice for Haiti-its legacy of occupation, the continuing threat of deportation from the Dominican Republic, and the devastation of earthquakes and hurricanes. Characterizing the Donald Trump administration's "draconian immigration policies" that divide families and refuse asylum from dictatorship and poverty, she has openly challenged the authority of the current presidency." She further writes that Danticat's article "We Must Not Forget Detained Migrant Children in *New Yorker* on June 26, 2018, "is a study in rhetorical deftness of heart and head together as she interweaves the experiences of her immigrant parents and her current life with the objective data of official US immigration policy."

Another problem faced due to marginalisation is the poor quality of education. Even if the school is the same as the immigrants, Haitians have a different class as the children are not well versed in English. In the work *Behind the Mountains*, Danticat's character Celiane has to attend a class of students who are not fluent in English, she was a brilliant student in Haiti, and she has to adjust to a different class altogether in America as she belongs to Haiti and she is also warned of

ragging by the whites. Racial discrimination is another evil prevalent in society which curbs the powers of immigrants. The Haitians are black, and they are discriminated against on the basis of colour and race. They are treated inferior to American blacks. They are not given houses to live in, they are given petty jobs and meagre wages. Immigrants face marginalisation in social institutions and their daily lives as well. They do not have any interpersonal or societal resources to help them. They face physical and emotional barriers in integrating themselves into society. Institutions such as schools, legal aid, and religious and health services are insufficient for immigrants. Discrimination and racism have a significant impact on a person's mental health. It can lead to an increased risk of depression or suicide. It also causes anxiety and stress-related illnesses which result in post-traumatic stress disorder.

The weaker sections of society are more prone to marginalisation. Women and children are considered to be weak in society. Haitian women are marginalised in America, Celiane's mother in *Behind the Mountains* has to work as she migrates to Brooklyn. She has to learn new cooking techniques and also has to leave her home to meet the two ends meet. Gloria in *Untwine* faces marginalisation as her foster parents do not give her any freedom and as a result of curbed desires, she commits a crime. Edwidge Danticat finds herself marginalised and alienated when she cannot tell her mother of the physical abuse suffered by her through her relative. Celiane's friend Therese is sold off to a wealthy family in Brooklyn as her parents cannot provide for her, it is a myth that she will be sent to a good school in return for household work, but Celiane knows she will only be a house help. Haiti became free after paying a sum of \$20 billion which was loaned from the US. Haiti's poverty and economic instability led to its marginalisation in the world economy. Haiti became one of the poorest countries in the world. The US took advantage of this fact to further exploit its resources and took Haitians as slaves to the US. The Haitians found a way out of Haiti, a saviour from the rule of the Duvaliers and the violence, disease and starvation in Haiti. Not only the cruel ruler but the unfavourable geographical location is also a reason for economic instability in Haiti. Haitians also migrate for economic reasons, given that Haiti has the Western hemisphere's lowest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Many Haitians work for long hours and earn low wages than the natives. Economic poverty leads them to face many challenges. The policy changes, racism and growing anti-immigrant sentiment paved the way for feelings of alienation and marginalisation. Haitians were the least likely to be employed and reported the most workplace discrimination. Many Haitians report feeling discriminated against while living in the US. The Haitians are thought to be a threat to the US economy. Politicians use

this policy of Divide and rule, especially during economic ups and downs. Donald Trump emphasised the need for a southern border wall to keep out the “undesirables”. The politicians benefitted as they showed concern for the Americans by showing a hostile attitude towards the immigrants. This leads the immigrants to face discrimination and prejudice in their daily lives. Political marginalisation curbs the political rights, economic opportunity and social integration of the marginalised group. Political marginalisation does not allow the group to participate in decision-making, so they have no right to social, economic, or political benefit. Marginalised groups do not have access to good education, respect in the workplace, and the right to vote or speech, they are not economically stable and often become vote banks for the political parties. Immacula’s mother in *Behind the Mountains* lives in a shabby room, which is rented and the landlord is always threatening to put her out. People like Immacula’s mother and her children, Therese and Faiderbe are all votes for the politicians. Things like the bomb blast in Port-au-Prince, riots and violence always accompany elections and are never favourable for the marginalised.

The anti-immigration policies and growing anti-Haitian sentiment in the US are succeeding in creating a great sense of insecurity for thousands of people of Haitian descent. The government reports that many Haitians have “voluntarily” left the country for Haiti. The deportations accelerate, and thousands will move to Haitian border towns. The fear of deportation also results in the marginalisation of the Haitians as they know they will leave everything they know behind for a country that has never accepted them. Many have learned English and will have a tough time getting employment in Haiti where Creole and French are the official languages.

Everybody has a right to education, and it does not follow any discrimination or marginalisation. Equal opportunities are given to one and all in all countries of the world. Sometimes marginalised groups are neglected by national educational policies denying students their right to education. The marginalised face different forms of discrimination as they belong to different marginalised groups. The human rights principles emphasize equality and non-discrimination in education. Education leads to social justice, but a large number of children in the world are still excluded from the educational system. Marginalisation threatens not only the economic and social well-being but also the mental health of marginalised individuals. The marginal groups start accepting themselves as unworthy and insignificant. Being treated as aliens and outcasts has a long-lasting impact on the mental health of an individual. The marginalisation also leads to ideological threats. Identity crisis is one of them. This creates a marginalised identity in the interest of the dominant groups in society.

Young (2000) defines marginalisation as exclusion from meaningful participation in society, partly because the labour market does not accommodate them proving to be one of the most dangerous forms of oppression. Carole in Edwidge Danticat's *Everything Inside* faces a mental disruption, wherein she forgets herself and her surroundings. Carole faces marginalisation and becomes more vulnerable to stress, she is stressed to find her daughter Jeanne not attending to her newborn baby. Exposure to trauma is high for the marginalised, and coping with this stress is difficult as it may lead to social exclusion. Carole does not recognize her illness for fear of losing her family. Individuals feel isolated from society and feel a sense of paranoia as to how society will look at them or call them. Carole feels invisible, she does not know when she has the attack, it seems invisible to her. Self-doubt and frustration are common psychological responses. Some marginalised groups and individuals are at higher risk for suicide and self-harm. Carole goes into one such fit when she is carrying her grandson and is about to throw him into the pool, but she recovers and has no idea of her condition. Edwidge Danticat has not only portrayed the sufferings of the Haitians, but she has also described the consequences immigration leads to, one of them being marginalised.

Marginalisation is inescapable in society. Man in one way or the other has to accept and submit. A society is formed of various groups, communities and races. These can be favoured, but some remain unfavourable, facing challenges for survival. These races or groups are left behind in every social, political and cultural gathering. One such group is the Haitians in America. Harsh immigration laws, detention, and inferior social status are what a common Haitian gets in America. They undergo subordination and discrimination from the native community. In *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha writes about the marginal space of the diaspora:

History may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image.... The marginal or 'minority' is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organism, the deep notion, the long past—that rationalize the authoritarian, 'normalizing' tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative. (3-4)

Conclusion

Haitians are French Creole-speaking and Black, so they face obstacles as migrants, they are displaced and feel alienated which results in their marginalisation, legally and based on race and colour by state officials

and locals alike. According to J.W. Berry, "Marginalisation is often associated with major heritage culture loss and the appearance of many dysfunctional and deviant behaviours (e.g., delinquency and substance and familial abuse)" (31). Also, he says, "marginalisation can be a strategy that people choose as a way of dealing with their acculturative situation, it can also result from failed attempts at assimilation (involving cultural loss) combined with failed attempts at participating in the larger society. Such cases may be partly due to discriminatory attitudes and practices of the dominant group" (24). Marginalisation occurs in all spheres of life. Displacement is inevitable, be it forceful or voluntary. Displacement is not always welcome, by the native or the host. Society imposes some forms of marginalisation, and some are one's abstractions. The immigrants because they face marginalisation, sometimes also perceive what is not. They acquire the behaviour against them and feel it and hence cannot escape it. Though it is also the duty of the governments concerned not to violate human rights and justify their behaviour towards the marginalised by changing the laws as required. The children born in the host country should be given their citizen right so that future generations do not undergo the trauma faced by their ancestors. The host countries should implement rules against discrimination and gender abuse. The immigrants should be given proper accommodation, and equal wages should be given for equal work. The workplaces should follow non-discriminate policies for all employees. The Haitian government should make amends in its economic policies to make Haiti a place where no Haitian has to migrate to another land. Further marginalisation can be eliminated by taking measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to marginalised groups to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs. Marginalised groups should be able to promote their identity equally with majority groups. Some States have imposed criminal penalties on those who practice discrimination or violate laws protecting minorities. Integration policies should be voluntary and consistent with the rights of marginalised groups so that they do not feel displaced. Marginalisation is an evil curbing human rights, and it should be eradicated.

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