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## A DELEUZIAN STUDY OF DIASPORIC IDENTITY AS BECOMING IN SUSANNA MOODIE'S ROUGHING IT IN THE BUSH

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### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the transformation of diasporic identity in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*. The focus of the study is the analysis of modern and post-modern definition of diaspora identity. While modern diaspora thinkers consider diasporic identity in interaction between territories of homeland and host country, postmodern thinkers probe this identity in the process of traveling, laterality, and difference. Moreover, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notions of "arbre," "rhizome," and "becoming" are applied in this study. In this novel, the main character, Susanna, prefers to abandon her home country and settle in another country but she permanently idealizes her mother land; this idealization is a kind of transcendentalism and "arborescent" type of thinking. In fact, as modern diaspora thinkers believe, Susanna is vacillating between two territories of homeland and hostland and she attributes herself mostly to her mother country. What is conspicuous in this process is that she cannot resist the changes that occur in her life in hostland; as a result, she dispenses with her "arborescent" model of thinking and indulges herself in the host country "rhizomatically" which this "rhizomatic" involvement leads to the transformation of her identity.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, arbre, rhizome, becoming, being.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora refers to "any phenomenon of dispersion from a place; the organization of an ethnic, national, or religious community in one or more countries; a population spread over more than one territory; the places of dispersion; any nonterritorial space where exchanges take place" (Dufoix 2). What is pivotal in this research is the study of the definition of modern and post modern diaspora theorists who have explored diaspora identity from two perspectives. The first group considers diasporic identity through two places of homeland and host country or what Mishra names as "the scene of dual territoriality" (24). The second group, however, investigates diaspora identity in traveling and moving, or what Mishra calls as "the scene of situational laterality" (24).

For Mishra, the first group is redolent of structuralism. She believes that modern diaspora thinkers make a binary in which diasporic subject is a "being" that is placed as a "split between the geopolitical entities" of homeland and hostland. Accordingly, in this binary, "homeland state" is considered "as classically autocentred, racially self-evident." The major contributors of this group are Gabriel Sheffer, Walker Conner, William Safran and Robin Cohen. (16)

Sheffer explains diaspora in "triadic relationship between ethnic diasporas, their host countries and homelands" (1). Conner also considers diasporas as "that segment of a people living outside the homeland" (16). Moreover, Safran concentrates on homeland as an "original 'center'" (83). Cohen is the last one in the first group who concentrates on the significance of the dichotomy of homeland and hostland by classifying diasporic features in nine categories.

On the contrary, the postmodernists do not confine diasporic subject to "dual territoriality" (Mishra 27). Unlike the first group, Mishra asserts that the second one challenges national terrains as a privileged factor in identity formation. In fact, they believe that diaspora subject is constituted in and through "routes" rather than "roots." The major contributors to this study are Paul Gilroy, James Clifford, and Stuart Hall (Mishra 17).

Gilroy undermines “absolutist categories of culture, race and nation” (Mishra 55). Clifford believes in “traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling” (108). Like Gilroy and Clifford, Hall does not pinpoint cultural identity to the national boundaries. What he emphasizes is defining diasporic identity as a combination of being and becoming or “the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture” (226).

Taking look at Moodie’s novel, Susanna’s character as a diasporic identity is explored both from modernist and post-modernist vantages of point. While she wavers between the dichotomies of her home country and hostland, she renders what Deleuze and Guattari call an “arborescent” model of thinking. “Arbre” is a French term for tree which sets up hierarchies, aims at centers and “operates as a transcendent model and tracing” (Deleuze and Guattari 20). However, dispensing with home and host binaries, Susanna commences to live in a “rhizomatic” way. “A rhizome provides for Deleuze and Guattari a hard-working figure of becomings since rhizomes proliferate through underground, horizontal networks rather than by the vertical, rootedstructure associated with trees” (Bryden 5). Indeed, “rhizomatic” thinking is another way of thinking which does not resort to any foundation or representation due to its connection to all parts and its effacing of the centers and points. (Deleuze and Guattari 7)

## 2. “LINGERING LOOK BEHIND” : THE “ARBORESCENT” TENDENCY OF DIASPORA IN HOSTLAND

*Roughing It in the Bush* is an autobiographical novel which traces the emigration of the newly-wed couple, the Moodies to Canada. What is prominent here is the graphic depiction of the interaction of Susanna with Canadian settlers, her relation with nature, and the influences of these interactions on her own personality. Admittedly, Alec Lucas considers the tensions of this novel on the basis of “human beings in society, in nature, and as individuals” (149). However, not being totally detached from her homeland, at first, Susanna is an “emigrant, largely an observer and logical historian” who does not involve herself in her hostland and she only makes an effort to fulfill her homeland anticipations in Canada (Lucas 149). Thus, this section deals with Susanna’s “arborescent” tendencies in Canada due to her dangling between two counties of homeland and hostland.

### 2.1 UTILITARIAN TENDENCIES TOWARD NATURE

Modern diaspora thinkers trace the motivation of the diasporas “in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions” (Cohen 180). The very motive of the Moodies’ emigration to Canada is the hope of achieving a rosy prospect too. Recognizing that they cannot make ends meet, Susanna says that “I had bowed to a superior mandate, the command of duty; for my husband’s sake, for the sake of the infant, whose little bosom heaved against my swelling heart” (*Roughing* 138). However, the solitary redeeming feature of Canada that can meet their expectations economically is nature. Admittedly, Susan Johnston in her article mentions that the eighteenth and nineteenth century British people tended to gaze the world. In this process, due to the objectification of the subject, the object is bereft of its external reality and its value is determined through the gaze. Throughout the novel, Susanna mentions her eyes as means of gazing: “I looked up and down the glorious river,” (11) “I cast a lingering look at the beautiful shores we were leaving,” (18) and “I long to see the lovely island” (13). By gazing and exerting herself as a center, Susanna develops her “arborescent” thinking toward her host country. Before “sublimity” of the river that she gazes, her mind “soars upward” (18), and she internalizes herself with nature. In this internalization, she affiliates “herself, aloft, with God” (Johnston). In fact, for Deleuze this is a “representational thought” which “posits the self-identity of the thinking subject” (Leitch 1565).

However, as soon as the distance disappears and she takes steps to the shore, her sublimation of nature is undermined. She sighs, “Alas! That man’s stern spirit should mar / A scene so pure-so exquisite as this.” (*Roughing* 7) The crisis of proximity to nature becomes more tangible once Susanna is settled in Canada because life of the Upper Canada is spine-tingling to her as she is doomed to experience its oddities from various animals to natural disasters. Susanna and her children survived the natural disasters such as two fires and the severe climate but these events were in direct contrast to her expectations of Canada.

## 2.2 A HIERARCHICAL VIEW IN SOCIETY

Sheffer as a modern theorist believes that “In their host countries diasporas preserve their ethnic, or ethnic-religious identity and communal solidarity.” (9) Correspondingly, investigating the several autobiographical novels of the eighteenth century which Moodie’s novel is a case in point, Whitlock claims that their authors considered emigration as a crucial phase in their “development and consolidation of the cult of domesticity as Englishness” (48).

Of course, Susanna chose Canada as the best choice for removing their poverty but she wanted to apply her English prestige in a new society too. By doing so, she kept her “arborescent” manner in her host country because Deleuze maintains that arbore is also found in “quest for a national identity and even for a European ancestry or genealogy.” (19)

Susanna’s consideration of class distinction is quite palpable once she asks Uncle Joe’s wife to “pay a little more respect to those who are possessed of superior advantages.” (*Roughing* 96) Moreover, Whitlock clarifies that these novels implicated “ideological work which constructed ... a national community in terms of an ‘Englishness’ or ‘Britishness’ which marginalizes Welsh, Scottish and Irish ethnicity” (51). Susanna also addresses the Irish as “semi-barbarous,” “low-born,” and “rascal” whom she cannot get along with at all. (*Roughing*)

However, unlike Susanna’s anticipation, the protection of this class boundary is at stake at the moment they touch the melting pot of Canada. For instance, more scrupulous attention she heeds to the principled manners, less consideration she finds in the settlers’ behavior. In this case, diasporas feel “alienated and insulated from it [hostland]” (Safran 83). Admittedly, Susanna complains that “All was ... distasteful to us; we shrank from the rude, coarse familiarity of the uneducated people among whom we were thrown” (*Roughing* 140).

## 2.3 FAMILY AS A UNITY

Whitlock believes that Susanna and John’s evangelicalism is entangled with their matrimonial life and domesticity in order to preserve their Englishness (51). Evidently, it is for the mere sake of “call of duty” that the Moodies’ tended to emigrate (*Roughing* 299). By “call of duty,” Susanna exactly means the duty of protecting the family and expanding it with their English principles.

Thus, in order to meet their familial objectives, possessing a suitable home is essential. In her article Christa Thomas Zeller asserts that Susanna’s novel revolves on the “narrative of home” which is “manifest in two ... specifications: home as house - and in the broader sense, as homeland - and home as family.” After arriving in Canada, from the outset, the Moodies are confronted with “failed-homecoming” (Thomas). For instance, John had purchased a land but it was still occupied by the previous owner.

Safran declares that diasporas “regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home” (83). Susanna also anticipated possessing a house like the ones in England. Nevertheless, in Canada, she was “bewildered” to see the “miserable hut” that was “not a house, but a cattle-shed, or a pig-sty” (*Roughing* 59). On the other hand, they can never establish a house in which they can seek shelter from the stress and vicissitudes of outside life and when they find it, the very structure of the house is exposed to the natural disasters such as 2 fires that broke out and left the Moodies homeless. Therefore, possessing a fixed, safe house which is one of the requisites of the family is hardly obtained in Susanna’s life.

Investigating Moodie’s narrative from an aspect of family, Whitlock declares that femininity was associated with “dependency through marriage, with the private and domestic life,” and masculinity was linked with having “dependents and independence,” but the “conditions in the backwoods made these distinctions of class, gender and ethnicity hard to sustain” (51-52).

John Moodie’s inefficiencies are evident throughout their matrimony. In most of the hazards, such as the outbreak of two fires, he is absent. And once he is at home, they suffer “long series of losses and troubles” (*Roughing* 119). Whereas John is not a perfect husband and father in Canada, Susanna is not an experienced, mature mother either. Considering Moodie’s novel on the basis of “maternal idiom,” BinaFreiwald believes that by bearing children

and becoming a mother, Susanna tries to connect herself to her “mother country” (166). Nonetheless, the very condition of hostland fails her to be a perfect mother. She is totally dependent on her non-English servants and in successive experiences, she just accompanies her children on their death bed. As a result, longing for union with home country is suspended and conclusively, the unity of the Moodies’ family according to the British ideologies is not obtainable.

## 2.4 SUSANNA AS BEING

Modern diaspora thinkers believe that dangled between binaries of homeland and hostland, the diasporas experience “a troubled relationship with host societies,” (Cohen 180) and “feel partly alienated” (Safran 23). Furthermore, although the diasporas in quest of a more comfortable life have settled in a host country, “they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home” (Safran 23) and it is conspicuously “imbued with an emotional ... reverential dimension” (Conner 16). All in all, they consider returning to homeland as a hope “to make life more tolerable by holding out a utopia – or eutopia – that stands in contrast to the perceived *dystopia* in which actual life is lived” (Safran 94).

Incapable of fulfilling her British objectives in Canada, Susanna starts comparing two countries. It is in this comparison that she makes England, her homeland as a holy shrine and Canada a “confounded country” (*Roughing* 49). She sees herself as a “stranger in a strange land” (27) because Canada is a “prison” and she makes an effort to “get rid of it” (65). She cannot consider Canada as home when she says “Home! the word had ceased to belong to my present-it was doomed to live in the past” (27).

The only and only remedy for her distress is her “sacred home” when she longs that “Oh, that I might be permitted to return and die upon your wave-encircled shores” (46). Conspicuously, she prefers to “die at home” than live in Canada (58). Outstandingly, due to Susanna’s emphasis on geographical places, she solely focuses on the national identity that is her being. Admittedly, as Hall confines being in reference to the past, he delineates it as an identity that reflects “the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provides us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (223).

## 3. FLOATING IN THE CURRENT OF LIFE: THE “RHIZOMATIC” INTERACTIONS OF DIASPORA IN HOSTLAND

Unlike the modern theorists, the postmodernists claim that diaspora or “cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture.” (Hall 226) In addition to their “being,” diaporas possess “becoming” too who are “constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall 235). Interestingly enough, “rhizome” paves the way for “becoming.” Semetskey in his description of Deleuzian “becoming” delineates that “one’s identity ... is always contested: the seemingly paradoxical element of changing one’s identity leads to self-identity itself losing its stable meaning. It reflects on the dynamics of becoming-other and discarding or transforming the values that were once established” (12).

At the outset, Susanna is a mere “observer” (Lucas 149) who presumes an “arborescent” thinking toward her hostland and wants to set out her English rules there but her “paradigms have failed her” (Johnston). As a result, if she tends to survive the host country, she should dispense with her ideological beliefs and act “rhizomatically.” Ergo, Susanna in the laterality of the diasporic condition as Hall claims is produced and reproduced in a way that she attempts to “rise above the prideful woman” as a mere observer and not only does she involve herself as a “wife and mother” but also she “synthesizes her chief preoccupations with society, nature” (Lucas 149-53). Accordingly, this section represents how Susanna acts “rhizomatically” and how this “rhizomatic” involvement is conducive to her becoming.

### 3.1 Force of Nature

As mentioned before, Deleuze believes that one of the “arborescent” tendencies is the “representational thought” which “posits the self-identity of the thinking subject” (Leitch 1565). Nonetheless, Deleuze’s philosophy is “rhizoamtic.” Two prominent features of rhizome are “Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order.” (Deleuze and Guattari 7)

Also, Susanna finds that if she wants to delve into society, she should stop gazing nature as an overriding element in Canadian life and be connected with every part of it. However, she is caught up in a sheer dilemma due to being a coward of nature and craving for it. For instance, she is hysterically afraid of cows but in order to feed her children, she ventures into milking them. This is a great success for her because she learned a “useful lesson of independence,” (*Roughing* 130) and she boasts that: “I felt prouder of that milk than many an author of the best thing he ever wrote” (130). Moreover, the hardship of life in Canada teaches her to discard the fragility of womanhood and work as hard as the others as she says: “We are all obliged to work to obtain bread” (272). Of course, at that time in Canada, there was not any other job except working on a farm. So, once more she had to delve herself into the heart of nature. Laboring on a farm, Susanna is too busy to gaze the beauty of nature and as a result, she dispenses with her “arborescent” thinking. Conclusively, living in the bush transformed Susanna in such a way that when they were going to leave the bush for the city, she pointed out “My person had been rendered coarse by hard work and exposure to the weather. I looked double the age I really was, and my hair was already thickly sprinkled with grey.” (346)

### 3.2 DESCENDING FROM THE LADDER OF HIERARCHY

Post modern thinkers believe that diaspora is an incomplete entity that is permanently en route (Hall 222) and “displacement, suffering, and adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the protection of a specific origin” (Clifford 306). Admittedly, other characters “mark a new phase in the growth of Mrs. Moodie’s personality” (Lucas 152) and challenge her Englishness as she is in interaction with them.

The very condition of hostland drives Susanna to involve with other settlers until she does it of her own volition. Their debt is one of the first factors of their attachment to others. The prominent example of their dependence on others is confined to the relation of master and servant. The servants in England are grown in “servile fear of the higher classes” (*Roughing* 142). This is in sharp contrast to the master-servant relation in Canada. Owing to the “mutual obligation” which binds them together, the servants are not inferior to their servants anymore (142). This “mutual obligation” exists between John Monaghan and Susanna’s family. Even in this obligation, they are interwoven in such an inextricable way that the servant becomes a family member. Susanna used to condescend to the Irish but Monaghan, an Irish himself and representing appropriate behavior “challenges her [Susanna’s] disposition towards the Irish” (Lucas 150).

To Deleuze, “The rhizome is antigenealogy.” (Deleuze and Guattari 19-21) In fact, “The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance” (25). Contrary to her initial tendencies, Susanna has been acting “rhizomatically” in a way that she exceeds these normal interactions and communicates with Indians too. While the Canadian settlers themselves consider it “crime to approach a red-skin,” (*Roughing* 203) Susanna finds the Indians as “Nature’s gentlemen” (14). Indeed, as Mary Louise Pratt asserts, Susanna is in “contact zone” with Indians (qtd. in Gerson). By “contact zone,” Gerson clarifies that “In contrast to the pattern of Europea/Aboriginal, real/ideal binarism considered thus far,” Susanna’s interaction offers “accounts of direct engagements with women from another culture.”

### 3.3 REDEFINITION OF FAMILY

As previously mentioned, Susanna learns that she cannot preserve the English paradigms of family. Thus, she needs to redefine family according to the Canadian conditions. The first challenge that the Moodies’ family is exposed to is the challenge of the position of husband and wife. Whitlock mentions that the nineteenth century

ideology of England was based on the dependency of woman on man and it was man who was responsible to provide his family with their rudimentary requirements (51). But the severe condition of Canada undermined the credibility of this ideology. Regarding that John was unable to meet the basics of life, Susanna says that "I was called upon to work—that it was not only my duty to obey that call, but to exert myself to the utmost to assist my husband, and help to maintain my family" (*Roughing* 253). Nonetheless, this internalization of the role of genders is so intense that Susanna confesses, "I had a hard struggle with my pride before I would consent to render the least assistance on the farm, but reflection convinced me that I was wrong" (253).

The next important constituent of family is the mother-child relation. Interestingly, indulging herself as a mother, Susanna yearned to attach herself to homeland but her children rendered her to become more adapted to her host country. This can be illustrated by the role of her children as intermediaries between her and the settlers. Malcolm was an unscrupulous, wild man who was a burden on the Moodies' but Susanna tolerated her because she believed: "I could not entirely hate a man who was so fondly attached to my child" (270).

On the other hand, in her indulgence as a mother, she is not exclusively the mother of her own children. She treats different settlers like a mother too. For instance, she provided Malcolm and Monaghan with trousers and socks or when Phoebe was in death bed, she nursed her like a real mother while Phoebe's own mother ignored her. Conclusively, the role of her children as intermediaries and her own surrogate role paved the way to be well adapted there but as Atwood asserts "she never felt really at home in Canada until she had buried some of her children in it" (qtd. in Freiwald 162).

### 3.4 DIASPORA AS BECOMING

As mentioned above, diasporas as becoming are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew" and they are not pinpointed as "fixed essence" (Hall 235). In this self production, Susanna also does not tangle herself to nationality anymore and she dispenses with her "arborescence" as she confesses "Many a hard battle had we to fight with old prejudices, and many proud swellings of the heart to subdue" (*Roughing* 140). She is an exemplar of transformation in Canada when she admits that "I endeavored to reconcile myself to the change" (20).

Postmodernists believe that this becoming renders no room for either fixity or complacency: "there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" (Hall 226). Accordingly, Susanna who initially used to compare her homeland with hostland and did consecrate her home country, now, she warns her countrymen "But, oh! beware of drawing disparaging contrasts between the colony and its illustrious parent. All such comparisons are cruel and unjust;—you cannot exalt the one at the expense of the other without committing an act of treason against both." (*Roughing* 20) Moreover, she encourages them to adore hostland like her: "love Canada as I love it, who once viewed it with hatred so intense that I longed to die" (20).

### 4. CONCLUSION

Considering Susanna Moodie's novel, *Roughing It in the Bush*, it can be concluded that Susanna's identity as a diasporic identity is not any fixed being that is exclusively defined by her national border, but she is defined through her movements and interactions too which lead to her becoming. This research attempted to show that as the modern diaspora thinkers emphasize, diasporic subject maintains her allegiance to her homeland and exerts her arborescent tendencies in the host countries and in doing so, she is only a being that cannot be affected by any change. But on the other hand, as the postmodern diaspora thinkers believe, this resistance to transformation endures only a short period of time and diaspora identity is on the verge of change and becoming due to the very reason of traveling.



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