



Unhomed Lives: Displacement, Memory, And Cultural Continuity In Roma Tearne's Bone China

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Abstract: Roma Tearne's *Bone China* explores the deep emotional and cultural consequences of migration and displacement across generations. Focusing on the de Silva family's move from Sri Lanka to Britain, the novel examines how migration disrupts identity, family bonds, and cultural continuity. This paper argues that Tearne portrays displacement not only as a physical relocation but as an emotional and cultural rupture. Using Homi Bhabha's idea of the "unhomed," alongside trauma and memory theories, this study analyzes how objects, homes, and family rituals in the novel act as anchors of memory and strategies for emotional survival in diasporic life.

Index Terms - Diaspora, Displacement, Memory, Trauma, Migration, Cultural Continuity, Bone China

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Bone China*, Roma Tearne presents a poignant narrative about migration, displacement, and the subtle yet profound intergenerational impact of leaving one's homeland. Set between Sri Lanka's politically tense landscapes and the emotionally sterile environments of Britain, the story traces the slow unraveling of the de Silva family as they flee ethnic tensions and attempt to rebuild their lives abroad. Migration, in Tearne's depiction, is more than a change of location—it disrupts cultural inheritance, identity formation, and emotional cohesion (Brah, 1996).

The notion of the "unhomed" (Bhabha, 1994) provides a lens to understand the family's experiences: even when physically situated in a home or country, individuals can feel emotionally displaced. The elder generation, Grace and Aloysius de Silva, retain vivid memories of their lost homeland, while their children — Meeka, Fredrick, and Jacob — struggle to reconcile inherited cultural traditions with Western norms, resulting in fragmented identities and emotional disconnection (Hall, 1990).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Homi Bhabha: The Unhomed Subject

Bhabha's concept highlights the psychological estrangement that comes with migration. The de Silva family's ancestral home, "Serendipity," becomes a site of loss and symbolic rupture, reflecting how displacement affects both space and psyche (Bhabha, 1994).

Trauma and Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory explains how subsequent generations experience the emotional effects of their ancestors' traumas (Hirsch, 1997). The de Silva children inherit the cultural and emotional fractures caused by forced displacement, war, and migration.

Memory and Cultural Continuity

Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* identifies objects, spaces, and rituals as carriers of memory. In *Bone China*, heirlooms, domestic spaces, and family rituals function as anchors of cultural identity, helping the family preserve continuity across generations (Nora, 1989; Assmann, 2011; Connerton, 1989).

III. ANALYSIS

1. Serendipity: Home as a Site of Loss

The de Silva family's ancestral home, "the House of Many Balconies," symbolizes cultural pride, history, and stability. When forced to move to Colombo, this relocation marks the first rupture in their identity. Once a sanctuary, the house is appropriated by colonial and military forces, transforming into a space of absence and loss. The displacement of Serendipity initiates intergenerational cultural and emotional fractures, demonstrating Bhabha's idea of the "unhomed" (Bhabha, 1994).

2. Bone China: Objects as Carriers of Memory

Grace de Silva's treasured bone china becomes a vessel for memory and cultural continuity. Entrusted to her daughter-in-law Savitha, it symbolizes hope for preserving heritage in a new land. As Avtar Brah (1996) notes, diaspora involves not just dispersion but the "homing of desire," where objects, rituals, and memories help recreate a sense of home. In this way, the bone china embodies the family's cultural survival and intergenerational responsibility.

3. Rituals and Cultural Preservation: Alicia's Wedding

Alicia's wedding serves as a performative act that reinforces family identity and tradition. Music, culinary preparation, and ceremony all act as mediums for memory and belonging. The elaborate wedding cake, combining Eastern and Western ingredients, symbolizes cultural hybridity and continuity. In a family of mixed Tamil and Sinhalese heritage, these rituals momentarily bridge ethnic and generational divides, offering unity before the disruptions of war and migration (Connerton, 1989; Appadurai, 1996; Said, 1993).

4. Intergenerational Impacts of Migration

Meeka, Fredrick, and Jacob navigate the complex legacies of displacement. Tearne illustrates how cultural and emotional ruptures affect identity formation, communication, and familial relationships. Migration displaces not only physical presence but language, rituals, and emotional stability. Yet, through memory, art, and human connection, the characters find ways to reconstruct a sense of home and belonging (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 2004).

IV. CONCLUSION

Bone China presents a sensitive depiction of displacement, memory, and cultural preservation. The de Silva family's story demonstrates how migration fractures identity and tradition, while also showing the resilience possible through memory, ritual, and human connection. Tearne's novel underscores that "home" is not merely a physical space but an emotionally reconstructed, living concept shaped by objects, rituals, and relationships. By exploring the intergenerational consequences of migration, the novel offers valuable insight into the cultural, emotional, and psychic challenges faced by diasporic families.

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