





Remembering Homeland: Negotiating Migration Through Dual Belonging in Roma Tearne's *Brixton Beach*

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Abstract

Migration may lead to emotional, psychological, and cultural dislocation for individuals who are living between their homeland and host nation but this does not always result in a loss of belonging. Migrants frequently develop simultaneous attachments to both the homeland and the host nation. The article conceptualizes migration as a condition of dual belonging in which identity is constructed by overlapping cultural, emotional, and imaginative affiliations with both spaces. The article examines Roma Tearne's Brixton Beach to analyse how characters in this work negotiate their connections between Sri Lanka and Britain. This research uses Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the third space, Vertovec's theory of transnationalism, and Levitt and Glick-Schiller's notion of simultaneity to argue that Tearne represents dual belonging as a hybrid mode of existence rather than as a fractured one. The study further demonstrates how memory, cultural continuity, and transnational relationships enable migrants to sustain meaningful attachments across national boundaries.

Keywords: Transnationalism, dual belonging, third space, displacement, identity, hybridity

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Introduction

Migration is becoming one of the main features of modern society. Colonial history, global mobility, ethnic conflict, and economic changes are producing layered identities in the postcolonial world. In addition to experiencing displacement, alienation, and cultural disintegration, migrants often maintain strong emotional, cultural and imaginative links to their home country, even when they live in another country. It can thus be argued that migration produces dual belonging: a condition in which migrants maintain meaningful ties to more than one cultural world simultaneously.

In Roma Tearne's novel *Brixton Beach* captures migration as both a source of trauma and a force of transformation. Through her portrayal of four major characters Alice, Stanley, Sita, and Bee, Tearne depicts the ways in which migrants create lasting bonds across geographical, emotional, and temporal divides. Consequently, *Brixton Beach* is a significant contribution to literature on diaspora, hybridity, and transnational identity.

The title *Brixton Beach* is symbolic of the two geographical locations it brings together. "Brixton" evokes images of multicultural London and immigration in Britain. "Beach", however, evokes Sri Lanka's tropical coast and memories of the homeland. Therefore, the title of the novel conveys how two separate worlds coexist within a single migrant consciousness. Furthermore, Tearne demonstrates that an individual can belong to more than one national community and that an individual's sense of belonging arises from multiple levels of affiliation. Migration as a state of dual belonging, for migrants who establish simultaneous attachment to both homeland and host nation. "Transnationalism was found to provide a useful framework for the migrants' lived experiences of a dual belonging, providing distinct benefits for both migrants and their new society" (Klingenberg et al. 460). The research article posits that Tearne challenges binaristic notions of identity and rather portrays migrant subjectivities as hybrid and fluid. Using the theoretical frameworks of Homi K. Bhabha's third space, Vertovec's Transnationalism, and Levitt & Glick-Schiller's Simultaneity, this paper investigates how Tearne constructs migration as a positive means of negotiating culture rather than dividing identity.

Aims and Objectives

The study examines the ways in which migration creates dual belonging for Roma Tearne's migrant characters within her novel *Brixton Beach*. This study will explore how migrant characters negotiate their emotional, psychological, and cultural connections to Sri Lanka and Britain. Furthermore, this study also intends to assess how migration is represented by Tearne in her work; that is, not merely as a form of divided identity but as a hybrid mode of existence in which migrants can hold simultaneous connections to homeland and host nation.

Homeland Memory and Migration

Migration has become one of the most studied phenomena in contemporary

scholarship. Scholars increasingly recognise how fluid and multidimensional migrant identities have become. Since contemporary migration no longer fits the traditional assimilationist model, which assumed that migrants would eventually abandon their homeland identities entirely, scholars have turned to transnational frameworks to understand migrant identity more fully. Transnational identities create links between migrants' experiences in their home countries and in their host countries. This understanding of identity is borne out in Tearne's *Brixton Beach* when she portrays migration as rooted in emotional multiplicity rather than cultural division. In her portrayal of migration, Tearne shows that migrants never fully separate themselves from the homeland; memory, language, sensory recall, and emotional ties sustain connections between places separated by geographical distance.

Brixton Beach opens with dramatic force with the London bombings of July 7 and introduces several immediate themes relevant to migrant lives: fear, violence, uncertainty. Tearne starts off with a powerful statement that sets the tone for a fearful atmosphere and a feeling of chaos: "THERE ARE POLICE EVERYWHERE" (Tearne 1). Right away, this statement establishes a panicked and unstable atmosphere. Simon observes "a red, double-decker bus" with "black smoke pouring out of its windows" while "glass everywhere" crunches beneath his feet (Tearne 1). The visual imagery of destruction transforms London into a space of terror and vulnerability. When the story shifts to Sri Lanka during the 1970s, the opening scene of the bombings provides an essential thematic link between the migrant's homeland and host country. Terror and insecurity can occur in both locations and disrupt the idea that migrating would automatically result in safety and belonging. As with other migrants in the novel, Simon becomes emotionally disoriented during the bombings and illustrates that trauma knows no national bounds.

Migration and memory are two key issues presented in *Brixton Beach*. Memory serves to enable migrant identity, enabling migrants to maintain emotional relationships with their homeland even if they have been physically displaced. As Sita and Stanley's experiences reveal, ethnic violence creates emotional isolation that is not necessarily caused by migration, but is created prior to migration. When Stanley becomes the victim of a racist attack, the police officer dismisses the violence and advises Sita that her husband should "go back to Jaffna" (Tearne 32). The officer's comment illustrates how the host society can reinforce instability and division, and how migration may result from both political insecurity and emotional exclusion.

While Tearne does illustrate how migration results in separation from homeland, she does not suggest complete separation. Rather, Sri Lanka is emotionally and imaginatively present in the minds of the migrants at all times regardless of their physical location. This condition corresponds closely to Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller's concept of "simultaneity," where migrants inhabit "transnational social fields" that allow identities and relationships to operate across borders rather than within isolated national spaces (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 1009). Migration therefore produces overlapping affiliations instead of absolute rupture

from homeland.

In a manner consistent with James Clifford, who argues that diaspora identities exist as a simultaneous existence of “being here and being there”, the characters in *Brixton Beach* do not belong solely to one place. Diasporic communities continue to connect with the histories, memories and cultural practices associated with their homeland while continuing to adapt socially in their adopted countries. The food in the Sea House serves as a source of cultural continuity. At the Sea House, Alice is surrounded by “rasa kavili,” “hoppers,” “love cake” and “freshly squeezed lime juice” (Tearne 34). Such domestic rituals preserve emotional attachment to Sri Lanka. Even Kamala’s embrace is described as “a juggery-scented hug” (Tearne 35), linking affection itself with cultural memory. This condition of simultaneity is strongly reflected throughout *Brixton Beach*. The characters are never completely separate from Sri Lanka after migrating. Instead, homeland continues to live on in memory, language, food, climate and sensory experience. Britain, too, serves as another space of negotiation and attachment for the characters.

This notion of simultaneity is best illustrated through embodied sensory memory. Homeland lives on within the body through smells, sounds, tastes and atmospheres. Alice’s identity remains heavily influenced by Sri Lanka even though migration changes her external world. Sitting in Bee’s Morris Minor, she experiences “the familiar smell of warm leather and love” while the car itself “held the memory of sticky Lanka lime and hot winds blowing” (Tearne 33). Memory here is not abstract or intellectualized; it is sensory and physical. Homeland persists through climate, texture and smell. Similarly, the station atmosphere “smelled of salty batter, frying fish and suduru, white cumin seed” (Tearne 23). These sensory details transform Sri Lanka into an emotionally embodied presence that migrants continue to carry inside them.

Language also reflects this condition of dual belonging. Although Stanley insists that Alice should “speak only English,” Tearne notes that “both Singhalese and Tamil slipped into her vocabulary” (Tearne 30). Language becomes a form of hybridity as opposed to assimilation. Alice speaks with the cultural influences of Tamil, Singhalese, and British English, illustrating the permeability of cultural boundaries. Throughout the novel, memory is shown to keep the homeland psychologically alive within the migrant consciousness. During Alice’s train journey to the Sea House, “the view took on a mysterious, luminescent quality that made it almost too painful to behold” (Tearne 21). The landscape is emotionally overwhelming, showing that homeland exists not just geographically but also emotionally as a sense of consciousness. The “tight drum of blue sky” wrapping itself around Alice mirrors her intense emotional attachment to place (Tearne 21). These types of examples illustrate how sensory memory collapses temporal/spatial distances. Even after migration, Sri Lanka remains vividly present in her emotional memory.

Bee's reflections further reinforce this idea of emotional continuity across generations and borders. Imagining Alice before her birth, he reflects that "They would be bathers in the same sea" (Tearne 29). The sea is a powerful representation of connection between generations based upon common memories and a sense of belonging. To Bee, homeland is not only a territorial entity but an imaginative or emotional space that carries forward across time. This continued emotional connection ultimately forms the basis for Alice's sense of identity. "Diaspora organisations are also formed by individuals with shared interests and they play a crucial role in constructing, maintaining and transmitting collective identity discourses among migrants" (Bela and Mieriņa 315).

The novel therefore demonstrates that the diaspora is not a discontinuity among places but a continuum across them. Her characters negotiate multiple attachments simultaneously, without surrendering their ties to either the homeland or the host country. "Diaspora organisations play a vital role in connecting migrants to their cultural roots, fostering community-building and strengthening the ties between a diaspora and its country of origin" (Bela and Mieriņa 313). Thus, Britain emerges for the characters as yet another emotional and social world; however, this does not eradicate their awareness of Sri Lanka. Rather, both locations exist together within migrant identity. Tearne therefore challenges the either/or logic embedded in conventional notions of belonging. She portrays her characters' identities as evolving through continuous negotiations with several different cultural worlds. Ultimately, *Brixton Beach* portrays migration as a condition of sustained, simultaneous engagement rather than a brief transitional phase. Furthermore, through layered representations of imagery, sensory memory and emotional recollections, Tearne illustrates that a hybrid diasporic consciousness develops out of the convergence of memory and modernity, trauma and adaptation, origins and settlement. Migration in the novel, thus, produces no complete. Instead, it produces complex configurations of dual belonging in which a sense of home survives through memory, imagination, and sensory experience.

The Role of Art and Sensory Memory

In Roma Tearne's *Brixton Beach*, the themes of art and sensory memory operate both as structural devices, through which displaced people can process trauma and create a sense of belonging, and as aesthetic mechanisms, by which they may convert experiences of exile into cognitive and creative forms of resilience. Therefore, aesthetic awareness serves as a form of survival, enabling characters to transform their memories of exile into creative expression. Through the characterizations of artistic imagination and sensory recollection, Tearne represents 'home' as an internalised, affective space rather than merely a physical location. Throughout the novel, memory is presented as an artistic act, layered through color, image and emotion. An example of this idea is seen in Bee's paintings; his paintings record the emotional continuity he carries since leaving Sri Lanka. After Alice's birth, he "stopped the sweeping watercolours of the ocean and began

to paint in miniature: small sea plants... minute white seashells... fragments of marine life” (Tearne 29). His paintings capture passing moments and transform everyday objects into emotional archives. The dealer who buys Bee’s work in Colombo calls this body of work “Life in Miniature,” highlighting how art uses observation to capture memory.

In *Brixton Beach*, colors and shadows. At one point during the London bombing scene, Simon instantly relates the destruction caused by the bombing to Picasso’s “Guernica.” Artistic imagination mediates the psychological effects of displacement. “The nature of artistic legitimacy is intuitively more internal as raw imagination is channelled in order to create a purposeful work of art” (Wawrzyszczuk and Hume 234). For example, Alice’s ability to tell stories and to observe or visualize will enable her to redefine displacement as a possible story rather than solely as a form of passive victimhood. Thus, creativity gives her distance from her traumatic experience, allowing her to reflect rather than be paralysed by it. As such, art becomes a mediator between Sri Lanka and Britain, connecting two separate geographic spaces through a single imaginative framework. Frequently, Tearne uses visual metaphors to describe the traumatic experiences of the characters in the novel. This metaphorical use of visual imagery implies that memory itself is layered like a painting, built from colour and shadow.

Violence is immediately transformed into visual memory and artistic reference. Similarly, Alice’s grandfather encourages her to draw Mrs Perris after the death of her husband during the riots. When Alice tells him that Mrs Perris looks “transparent,” Bee replies, “It’s called an afterglow... Like a blessing. Why don’t you try to draw her?” (Tearne 19). Art becomes a means of interpreting grief and emotional absence. Alice later admits, “I didn’t want to draw her as if she was crying, because she never cries” (Tearne 19). Through drawing, emotional pain finds expression rather than repression.

The contrasting representation of tropical colour and British light emphasizes the presence of two distinct visual worlds within the same consciousness. Sri Lanka is repeatedly described through vivid painterly imagery. During Alice’s train journey to the Sea House, “the view took on a mysterious, luminescent quality that made it almost too painful to behold” (Tearne 21). Her surroundings were characterized by a “blue sky tightly bound around her” that resembled her intense emotional state (Tearne 21). She then refers back to the drive down to the Sea House where there were “magenta and white” bougainvillea flowers that were so bright they required her eyes to be closed to avoid looking directly at them, and also where “A golden-fronted Leaf Bird flashes past...leaving behind an afterburn of colour” (Tearne 34). These visual elements transform her homeland into an objectified artwork stored in memory. Ultimately, art creates a structure in which Sri Lanka and Britain exist side-by-side in migrant consciousness, rather than existing separately. The migrant imagination resists the erasure of cultural difference; it insists on plurality.

Memory can be recalled at the most unlikely times or places. A particular scent or a specific temperature could evoke memories of another time and place. In *Brixton Beach*, London's greyness is frequently interrupted by memories of the heat of Sri Lanka, the smell of monsoons and the aromas of spices. This collapsing of time and space through the use of sensory stimuli allows the character to travel continents without actually moving. Sensory memory allows migrants to experience their homeland as something lived and felt, not merely recalled in the abstract.

Smell functions especially powerfully as a trigger of memory. Inside Bee's Morris Minor, Alice encounters "the familiar smell of warm leather and love" The car also carries "the memory of sticky Lanka lime and hot winds blowing" (Tearne 33). The memory is embodied rather than intellectual. Homeland survives through climate, texture and atmosphere. Similarly, the station air "smelled of salty batter, frying fish and suduru, white cumin seed" (Tearne 23), which grounds identity in sensory experience. Even Kamala's embrace becomes sensory memory when Alice is enveloped in "a juggery-scented hug" (Tearne 35). These examples illustrate how the homeland continues to exist through the body's memory.

Art and sensory recollections allow Tearne's characters to recreate "home" as an interiorized space. They create a sense of home as something carried within both mind and body, allowing them to connect to both their past and present. This contrasts with assimilationist demands that individuals abandon their previous identity entirely. Instead of giving up Sri Lanka so that they can become part of Britain, Tearne's characters incorporate both cultures into a single hybrid form of consciousness. Stanley states that he wants to migrate because everything is taken away from Tamils in Sri Lanka (Tearne 26), however, even after migrating towards Britain, Sri Lanka exists emotionally through memories and sensations. Both linguistically and culturally, Alice represents this hybrid identity. Although Stanley "wanted her to speak only English," "both Singhalese and Tamil slipped into her vocabulary" (Tearne 30). Identity thus develops through overlap and accumulation rather than replacement.

This aesthetic construction supports the theory of the interstitial logic created by Homi K. Bhabha. The third space does not occur solely through cultural negotiation, but also through creative representation. Bee himself recognizes this emotional continuity when he imagines his future grandchild before Alice is born: "They would be bathers in the same sea" (Tearne 29). The sea represents continuity across generations, memory and migration. Additionally, sensory memory secures identity in embodied recollections. Together, art and sensory memory guard against cultural disintegration and affirm the legitimacy of hybrid affiliation.

Finally, through aesthetic mediation, Tearne illustrates that home is not lost during exile; instead, it is reimaged, redrawn, and held alive through memory. The Sea House, Bee's paintings, the colors of bougainvillea and the scents of cumin and sea salt etc., all endure within the migrant's consciousness long after departure from the homeland. As such, *Brixton Beach* portrays migration not simply as a story of

loss, but as an ongoing dialogue between memory, imagination, and allegiance.

Conclusion

This article has reviewed the dual belonging in Roma Tearne's *Brixton Beach* through transnational and postcolonial frameworks. The findings demonstrate how migration can create overlapping emotional, cultural, and psychological connections with both homeland and host nation. Contrary to, models that treat migration as a movement from one fixed identity to another, Tearne describes displacement as an ongoing process of negotiation in which migrants exist within many worlds at once. Memory, sensory recall, language, and imagination are woven throughout the novel to show that, despite physical migration, the homeland continues to reside within the migrant consciousness.

Sri Lanka remains emotionally present through climate, smell, food, language, and family ties. Britain does not eradicate the homeland; instead, both continue to co-exist within migrant identity. Tearne thus contests assimilationist models that demand singular cultural allegiance and the erasure of prior attachments. Instead, the characters in the novel construct their own forms of belonging via hybridity; constructing identities formed through the simultaneous experience of more than one culture. Therefore, the novel illustrates Levitt & Glick-Schiller's concept of transnational social fields and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of third space; spaces of identity constructed through cultural negotiation and overlap.

In the same vein, this study highlights the significance of creative expression, such as art and sensory memory, in helping individuals reclaim a sense of belonging. Through Bee's paintings, Alice's imagination, and the novels' vividly descriptive sensory experiences, Tearne represents memory as both embodied and affective. Furthermore, these forms of creative expression enable migrants to reinterpret trauma and maintain an emotional connection across time and place. Similarly, sensory memory allows migrants to transform "home" into an inwardly felt space that resides within both body and imagination. *Brixton Beach* redefines migration as neither a division nor a fractured identity, but as a complex condition of dual belonging. Additionally, Tearne's fiction offers a richer understanding of diaspora identity as it moves across overlapping geographies of exile and belonging.

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