

## Revealing Diasporic Characters through Setting in Elaine Chew's "The Heartsick Diaspora" (2019)

Dian Ari Safitri<sup>1</sup>, Safira Nur Fitriani<sup>2</sup>, Nur Alifia Putri Saptiadi<sup>3</sup>, Ulya Raisya Puti<sup>4</sup>, Rahayu Kurnia Dewi<sup>5</sup>, Aini Salsabila<sup>6</sup>  
Universitas Jenderal Soedirman<sup>1-5</sup>, Universitas Nasional<sup>6</sup>  
[dian.safitri021@mhs.unsoed.ac.id](mailto:dian.safitri021@mhs.unsoed.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>

### Article History:

First Received:  
06/12/2022

Final Revision:  
11/03/2023

Available online:  
30/06/2023

**Abstract.** Elaine Chew exposes the impact of diaspora, dimensions of human mobility, and connectivity, in "The Heartsick Diaspora" (2019). It is about an ethnic writing group of mixed-Asian blood in London. The striking cultural differences between their native culture (Eastern) and foreign culture (Western) significantly affect the characters in the story. This study belongs to literary criticism using a formalism approach to analyze the diasporic phenomenon in the literary work. It explores the connection between the settings and qualities of the two characters in the story, namely Chandra and Wei. Chandra's personality is different from the typical Asian woman because she is cynical, often dresses androgynous, and upholds individual freedom. On the other hand, Wei, a new member of the ethnic group, seems to hide his sexual orientation from the group because it considers immoral in Eastern culture. Eventually, Elaine Chew portrays the influence of the diaspora which affects the characterization of someone because they have to adapt to their new environment but also cannot be completely separated from their roots.

**Keywords:** *characters, diaspora, setting*

<http://jos.unsoed.ac.id/index.php/jes>

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of diaspora is always an interesting topic to discuss. The term diaspora is derived from the Greek words *dia* (over) and *speiro* (to sow) which means dispersion. In the Hebrew language, the term referred to "the setting of

colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general connotation of people settled away from their ancestral homelands" (Shuval, 2003). At that moment, Jews people who left their homeland and fled to neighboring countries used the term diaspora to convey feelings of connectedness. However, the term expanded and was not only addressed to Jews. It is even stated that "Since the 1960s, with increasing transnational and global migrant movements, 'diaspora' was employed to denote a national, cultural or religious group living in a foreign land" (Knott and McLoughlin, 2010). This is the most known concept that most of us understand nowadays: a person/group performs mobility from one place to another or migrates socially and culturally.

*The Heartsick Diaspora* (2019) by Elaine Chew, a collection of fourteen short stories, is one of the books that raise the issue of diaspora. Each story is written in ten years, mainly covering the lives of the Singaporean diaspora who have migrated across the world and are set in Singapore, London, and New York. The stories in the book also touch on many aspects of Singaporean cultures, such as the relationship between parents and children, the importance of being filial, love, migration and its complexities, and friendships across ethnic lines. During an interview, Chew admitted to the long process of making *The Heartsick Diaspora* (2019). She claimed that the earliest story was written ten years ago and it won 1<sup>st</sup> Prize in the Bridport Short Story Competition. Chew stated that "I wanted to flush out the psyche that attends this phenomenon of the diaspora in my short stories," as a reason why she chose *The Heartsick Diaspora* as the main title of the story (Tay, 2020). Due to her value in writing that often shows how geography and culture infiltrate voice and story building, she is often told by the readers that her stories are all incredibly varied in style, tone, setting, subject matter, and protagonist.

This paper discusses a short story that has the same title as the book "The Heartsick Diaspora". The story revolves around a group of Asian writers domiciled in England or outside their home country. These Asian writers form a group because they have the same background as a minority amid the majority. With the entrance of an additional member who is gorgeous, Wei, the group flipped upside down. They have to adapt and deal with Western culture but they also cannot disregard their native culture as Chinese descendant. When the group gathered, it was clear that they were still very much influenced by their native culture as Asians. In addition, they find some legal and normal things in Western culture but are considered bad and taboo in Eastern culture. So, it feels like there is a conflict that flared up within them about which culture they should hold. Keeping our native culture wherever we go is good, but being different from the majority in another region we do not belong to is hard. This kind of conflict experienced by these diasporic characters is relevant to many of us who moved to another region or even country and are trying to adapt and fit in their culture but we have a hard time because we are not used to it.

The researchers concentrate on the setting and its impact on the characters' qualities, in which the characters that will be the main focus to analyze are Chandra and Wei. The setting that will be discussed in this paper is not only limited to place and time but also includes the cultural and historical background of the diasporic characters. The encounter of two different cultures that arose because of

the diaspora phenomenon had a big role in shaping the diaspora character in the story. We examine specifically how the settings, cultural and historical included, interact and shape the characters in the story.

There are a couple of existing studies that tackle the issue of diaspora identity as well. Those existing studies are being used as a benchmark for this current study to be able to, hopefully, offer more insights into the discourse of diaspora studies. The first study is *British by Right, Punjabi by Heart' Diaspora portrayals in Punjabi films* (2011) by Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra. This study discusses the representation of the Punjabi diaspora in Punjabi films concerning gender aspects, and the intersection between male and female. The study also explores how respective gender roles are portrayed in the media, both in the Western setting and homeland setting, providing how stark of a difference it is. Thus, we found this previous study to be knowledgeable and useful for us to gain more perspectives to conduct the research for the current study. Moreover, one of the characters that we are discussing from *The Heartsick Diaspora* (Chiew, 2019) is also an Indian descent. The second previous study is *Religion, Partition, Identity, and Diaspora: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy-Man* (2011) by Paromita Deb. This previous study discusses the relationship between diaspora identity and setting due to the partition of the Indian sub-continent. This previous study differs from the current study in a way that it discussed the issues from the historical aspect as well. Nonetheless, we still found this previous study to be relevant because it also discusses how the setting, a different place from the homeland, is affecting how the diaspora characters mold their identities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The current study belongs to literary criticism using a formalism approach. It is emphasizing the practice of close reading of the literary text and looking at it as an object that is worth to be studied (Dobie, 2011). It means that the researchers focused on the literary work as the object of the study to gather data and information related to the topic of discussion. The object of the current study is a short story by Elaine Chew entitled "The Heartsick Diaspora" (2019). It is one of the stories in the book entitle *The Heartsick Diaspora and Other Stories* (2019). As its title implies, it tells about the diasporic phenomenon of Asians in Western countries. The primary data used in this study were taken from conversations and narrations contained in the short story. Thus, these data were used to analyze the influence of setting, cultural, and historical background shaping the diasporic characters in the short story.

Furthermore, several steps were taken to complete this study. First, the researchers did a close reading to gain a deeper understanding of the events and storyline of the short story. The next step was taken by collecting data that was under the diaspora theme to narrow down the scope of analysis. In this step, the researchers only focused on the influence of the setting on two characters in the story, namely Chandra and Wei. Then, the researchers grouped and eliminated data that were considered not related to the topic of analysis. After that, the researcher began to carry out the analysis along with reading secondary readings

to support the data. Finally, conclusions were drawn from the results of the analysis that has been done.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the researchers discuss the diaspora phenomenon, particularly the relationship between the setting and the diasporic characters. The two characters that will be discussed are the characters named Chandra and Wei.

The setting has a significant effect on the diasporic characters. Diaspora is a dispersed people with origins in a different geographical location. It was originally used to describe the extensive dispersion of a population from its native lands, notably the dispersion of Jews (Pokharel, 2020). In the story, Chandra is the only character who is biracial, and she is the narrator of this short story. She describes herself as the "different" one; she is a girl who dresses androgynous, is ambidextrous and is ambiguous. She exudes a more dominating aura and confidence than the rest of the females in the writing group; she also labeled herself as cynical; "I'm too cynical." (Chew, 2019, p. 128). Cynicism is an attitude characterized by a general distrust of the motives of "others", mainly driven by prudence (Navia, 1996). It is often associated with modern society as the word's meaning is straying further away from its Greek origin. A cynic is what we describe as people who distrust others' apparent motives and ambitions; they also have pessimistic approaches to life, are sarcastic, and display offensive behaviors. In modern society, it is entirely used to describe a hypocritical and negative person (Papadopoulos, 2021). Furthermore, as much as cynicism is associated with modernity, modernity is also associated with the Western world. Modernity does not by any means, only belongs to the Western world but it is possible for many observers to unconsciously refer to the Western world when they discuss modernity (Dinc, 2007).

Chandra's characteristic of being quirky, judgmental, or liberated is an influence of her biracial background plus her experience living in a European country amongst the majority of white people. Chandra might have picked some habits and principles of the Westerner for the sake of blending in and changed her personality trait, hence, her contradicting behaviors to the values of her Southeast Asian blood. What Chandra experiences is becoming the uncanny imitation of the real thing that is doomed to inauthenticity (Bhabha, 1984). She adopts the Western world's androgynous, more liberating dressing codes and cynic attitudes which is one of the traits of a member of modern society. Furthermore, emancipation from tradition has been named to be one of the checkpoints to categorize what a modern society is (Dinc, 2007). Chandra discards parts of herself that are not modern to become one of the Westerners; to be in the progress of inclusion in the majority by achieving the Western self and conforming to its norms, while on the other hand, neglecting and hiding the excluded and marginalized other of the identity (Yeegenoglu, 1998).

The reason that Chandra was made the narrator of this story could be because of her strong and opinionated way of describing. In Scene One Act One, Chandra was not shy to admit her crush on Wei, the newcomer, at first sight. "Instant, crushing, an overpowering jolt of emotion, straight to the solar plexus." (Chew, 2019, p. 129). In another paragraph, Chandra called Phoebe a "pretentious git"

(Chew, 2019, p. 129) while also posing a statement that seems to call out some stereotypes or discriminations towards Asian living in Western countries. She stated that "...in this world of ours, Asian people can't cook French gourmet but they can surely write sci-fi." (Chew, 2019, p. 129). This statement could be recognized as a 'cynical' remark. One active aspect of cynicism involves the desire to expose hypocrisy and point out gaps between ideals and practices (Midgley, 1998). Chandra does not think that Phoebe's story is realistic, seen from the perspective of her ideals. Furthermore, Asia in its culture is rich in literary tradition, especially folklore, and myths, hence the sci-fi (Laranjo, Martinez-Erbite, and Santos, 2013). White people have also done several trials to replicate Asian cuisines, but the fact that the character in Miranda's story has to hire a French native as a fake head chef in their restaurant is a piece of evidence that Asians who immigrated to Western countries still experience small oppression and discrimination as such.

Chandra's cynical trait is more clearly shown in Act One Scene Two. She got jealous because Phoebe seems effortlessly making progress in her story, unlike her, "As Phoebe relates the plot of her new story... I begin to feel jealousy, sharp and acrid, worm its way through my innards." (Chew, 2019, p. 130). The way Chandra compares her story with Phoebe's is showing Chandra's suspicion toward Phoebe's "borrowing" which adds to her rage, "Her story involves three Singaporean Chinese sisters residing in New York (mine reside in London)." (Chew, 2019, p. 131). In addition, Chandra thinks Phoebe's story, which includes food, is cliché. She said, "It is such a cliché too—Malaysians and Singaporeans obsessed with food; it is practically our national culture to polemicize food." (Chew, 2019, p. 131). It is clear that Chandra's jealousy is growing as she witnesses and doubts their 'lack of originality' idea. While both Wei and Phoebe were excited about it, Chandra replied, "Isn't that a little gimmicky? And trite?" (Chew, 2019, p. 132). She seems not truly proud even of her roots. It shows that she is not just judgmental but also xenocentric. Xenocentric is someone who despises their own culture and preferred another group's culture as a reference for anything. It is influenced by three possible reasons: second or third-generation immigrants who have familial connections with foreign countries, opposite political choices of their own country, and also exposure to other cultures coupled with dissatisfaction with their own culture (Kent and Burnight, 1951). Since Chandra lives in Britain, it is most likely she grows accustomed to its culture thus she views her own culture as lame.

Another side of Chandra's personality is also shown in Act One, Scene Three. Wei contemplated whether to use Singaporean English (Singlish) in his short story or not. Miranda and Phoebe rejected the idea completely; they said "It makes Western readers laugh at us." (Chew, 2019, p. 133). It is because Singapore English has significant differences from American and British English in the writing, the way of speaking, and especially, the pronunciation. After all, it expands its lexicon by "borrowing" words from the many languages spoken in Singapore: Malay, Hokkien, Teochew, and Mandarin (Goh, 2016). Thus, non-Singaporeans will need a sufficient shared experience to truly comprehend it. Those who do not familiar with Singlish may think that the writer makes mistakes or could not use proper English. However, Chandra surprised us with a different piece of opinion and went out of her way to put Wei's uncertainty at ease. "Write what you want, Wei. Don't

sweat it. Existential creative anxiety does not lead to the yellow-brick lane, only inertia and crippling self-doubt." (Chew, 2019, p. 133). In this scene, we can see that Chandra who seemed to be the one with the least Southeast Asian quality is also the one who was not ashamed of 'Singlish'. She even encouraged Wei to use it in his short story. It was able to prove that the mixture of her adoptive Western behavior and her initial respect for her Southeast Asian blood exist. At the end of the paragraph, Chandra, with her narration, is also shown using "liddat lor" which is a Singlish version of "like that". It made Wei look grateful. This is indicated by Chandra's narration that said "Wei looks at me gratefully" (Chew, 2019, p. 134). The gratefulness Wei felt towards Chandra's input that day is what initially leads their relationship to happen.

Following the Singlish discussion, later that day Wei had joined Chandra's smoking break in between the meeting. Wei then said, "You know, I can't make you out.' His look is contemplative." (Chew, 2019, p. 134) to Chandra. It might seem like a casual conversation pick-up but if examined deeper, what Wei had said could mean that he seldom meets someone with a personality like Chandra, who came from the same background as a diasporic Asian living far away abroad. The contradiction between the two main characters that we examine is once again shown; how Wei is always unsure and mysterious and how Chandra is always unwavering and straightforward.

Moreover, Chandra's distinctive personality oftentimes makes her excluded from the group. In Act Two, Scene Two, Chandra knew that Wei seemed to be avoiding her and that he had been hanging out with Miranda and Phoebe as of late. Feeling left out, Chandra said, "I would've liked to come but no one thought to invite me," (Chew, 2019, p. 140/141), yet the others appeared to be reluctant to respond to her. Chandra is then further confronted about the news of Phoebe and her husband's separation. "You know what, I'm just going to come out with it. Phoebe, I feel hijacked by this news of yours. How could you not tell us you got separated?" (Chew, 2019, p. 140/141). In this sentence, Chandra used "us" instead of "me" although it was obvious that the others already knew about the separation news; being unable to accept that she was the only one who did not know, once again, she was left out.

In Act Two, Scene One, the setting where the ethnic writer club gathered is a warm place of trees shedding blossom. Miranda has brought a large thermos of hot chocolate to share. "She has done it before, and no one in the group thought her hot chocolate is any good—it is thick and sludgy, but we don't have the heart to tell her. Phoebe brought a pandan cake" (Chew, 2019, p. 134). In Japanese philosophy, gathering at that place with your family or close ones means enjoying our own passing time on earth with the same joy and passion (Helen, 2017, para 8). It is precisely what Chandra and her friends do; they enjoy their time together, discussing their progress in writing. This warm setting also appears when Chandra and Kevan talk about their problems, especially about Chandra's relationship with Wei. They talk underneath a blossoming tree. "We stand away from the group, underneath a tree shedding blossoms. Some land in Kevan's hair" (Chew, 2019, p. 138). A blossom tree in Japanese philosophy means a new beginning; it depicts a new relationship between Chandra and Wei. Another meaning of it is the end, and it depicts the end of Chandra and Kevan's relationship in a bitter way, "We slept

together months ago, once. I thought we had worked it out, clarified like oil and vinegar." (Chew, 2019, p. 139). Chandra's behavior, once again, contradicts her South-East Asian values to respect a partner by the way she settles things with Kevan. After having a one-night stand with him, she runs away, leaving Kevan as if there was nothing between them, and starts pursuing another man to sleep with.

In addition, several scenes indicate the ambiguity of Wei's sexual orientation. The story is based in Britain. However, all members of the writer group are Asian. Asian people are mostly oriented towards Eastern culture which is known for its conservatism. Thus, those who identify themselves as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) often encounter obstacles that non-LGBT people do not; even if the relationship is consensual and takes place in private. In the short story, Wei seems trying to hide his sexuality from the group. Contradicting Chandra's constant, unwavering bringing, Wei's mysteriousness continues in one of the plots of his accused metafiction that he's working on. "His protagonist is a young man who gets haunted by a hungry ghost with a confused identity, so he has to keep feeding it joss paper products that the Chinese burn for their dead," (Chew, 2019, p. 130). Authors oftentimes unconsciously use literary works as a form of self-reflection and portray themselves as one of the characters (Nurhamidah, Purwanto, and Ekaningsih, 2019). Putting an emphasis on the "confused identity" part, the ghost character in Wei's short story could very well mirror his conflicting sexuality, and as we later know that the protagonist in his story is portrayed to be gay. The part where the protagonist in Wei's story "has to keep feeding the ghost joss paper products that the Chinese burn for their dead," is likely to have a meaning that Wei planned to keep his sexual orientation in the closet and continue to act like a straight man in front of others as a result of his confusion and deniability. He might be afraid that his new friends figure out about his sexuality. It makes him feel compelled to hide his true identity so that others do not know.

Moreover, it is also supported by Miranda and Phoebe's supposition of Wei's ambiguous sexuality. Phoebe implies that Wei is a closeted homosexual man because she commented that it was inappropriate to write about a homosexual character when the writer is not even homosexual. "I think it is a problem writing about a gay protagonist if you are not gay. Isn't that appropriation?" (Chew, 2019, p. 133). However, Wei immediately changed the subject by asking them, "More to the point, can short stories have footnotes?" (Chew, 2019, p. 133). It might be revealed that he is reluctant to declare his sexuality because he is the only newcomer there. The formation of male sexualities and sexual identities is also influenced by men's public and private lives (Seidler, 1992). In other words, men can maintain a masculine persona in public while identifying as homosexual in private. Men experience and identify with their sexualities concerning class, age, ethnicity, peers, and personalities, as well as social and cultural beliefs (Ellis and Mitchell, 2000). For instance, most people who still have not come out are afraid of a response from someone they trust, and Wei is no exception. Wei does not want his sexual identity known for fear of being ridiculed as LGBTQ+ is often considered taboo and immoral in East culture. The fact that he is an LGBTQ+ member within a minority makes him have to be careful in everything from his actions to his words.

The way characters respond and adjust to the setting can reveal their emotion. During their break, Wei approached Chandra outside and asked her to drink just

the two of them. "You wanna grab a drink sometime? Not with the group, I mean..." (Chew, 2019, p. 134). It might be revealed that Wei is trying to cover up their thoughts about himself as a homosexual man, so he asked Chandra out so that they all did not suspect him as gay. However, Miranda and Phoebe are pissed with Wei and Chandra in this scene, which causes them to tap the glass behind Wei and Chandra. "I hear a tap on the glass behind me. It is Miranda and Phoebe." (Chew, 2019, p. 134). While they are frowning and motioning for them to return inside, they demonstrate their displeasure with Chandra and Wei, who both seemed to be having a little fun time outside the Mexican eatery during the break. The reason why they are pissed might be revealed in "It's not sexual, per se, because Phoebe is married and Miranda has a bloke. We just can't help ourselves. It's liddat lor" (Chew, 2019, p. 134). It indicates that they are always envious of each other, whether one of them is happy or not.

The new relationship between Chandra and Wei continues when they decide to have a drinking date in a bar, "Wei and I started laughing. For a moment, there was a rhythm, a beat, and that was our hidden transcript." (Chew, 2019, p. 135). As the same diasporic characters in the United Kingdom, they feel connected after talking about their experience living in a foreign country. However, when the bartender gives Wei a gay signal with a drawing in the paycheck and a wink, the moment becomes awkward. The bartender is sure that Wei is gay. Surprisingly, Wei admits that he is straight and willing to have a passionate night with Chandra. Unlike Kevan, Wei does not finish his night with Chandra, "A tent had been set up between our bodies, and he said he was not ready." (Chew, 2019, p. 137). The reason Wei is not ready probably because he is still uncertain about his sexual orientation after the uncertain flirt with the bartender. Wei wants to confirm it by doing an intimate session with Chandra; however, his heart denies it. He chooses to hide it again, refusing to unveil his sexuality to anyone because being a minority as an Asian in a foreign country is already enough for him. Europeans or Westerners often see Asian as one whole race and culture and it is East Asian, also it can be more specified as Chinese. It happens because there is a lack of Asian representation in the West, thus it developed to stereotyping Asians as 'they are all alike outgroup (Weiss, 1970). Most Westerners close their eyes regarding the fact that Asians exist in four other regions; East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia. The Chinese Civil Rights in the United Kingdom, Min Quan (2009), did their research on discrimination and racism against Chinese people in the United Kingdom and they reported that Chinese-origin people in the United Kingdom experience substantial racism, perhaps as much as or more than any other minority ethnic group. According to their research, it is also possible for migrants to get discriminated against for their race. This is exactly what happened to Chandra and Wei; they call themselves "The Heartsick Diaspora" in the bar (Chew, 2019, p. 135).

The discrimination may be the root of Wei's decision to stay in the closet. He cannot imagine the discrimination he would get if he comes out as a part of the LGBT community seeing the reaction he got when he told his plan to make a gay character. Phoebe and Miranda's reactions were not welcoming, except for Chandra's who told him, "Write what you want, Wei. Don't sweat it" (Chew, 2019, p. 133). Wei may think that Chandra is also part of the LGBT community and tries to be open about his sexuality to her, but he is just imagining it in his head. "I said



we should go halves; Wei said, the bill or the bartender;" (Chew, 2019, p. 136). When Wei told that joke he wanted to test if Chandra was a part of the LGBT community as him or not, Chandra did not catch that joke and moved forward for Wei instead for an intimate intercourse. It is the moment where Wei closes his closet tightly again by playing along with Chandra's flow even though he cannot endure it in the end. He is afraid of the discrimination he would get from his new small group. LGBT in the United Kingdom is not safe from hate crime and discrimination. According to the research on LGBT in Britain by Bachmann and Gooch (2017), their report shows that two in five trans people (41 percent) have experienced a hate speech and incident because of their gender identity in the last 12 months, and one in six LGBT people, who are not trans (16 percent), have experienced a hate crime or incident due to their sexual orientation in the same period. Then, there is no wonder why Wei does not want to be open about his sexuality to others as he feels they will not accept him by attacking him with hate speech or discrimination acts, for he is the minority among the minorities.

The setting also clarifies the ambiguity of the relationship between Chandra and Wei. In Act 2, Scene 2, Chandra and Wei have not been in contact for a week. So, Chandra decided to send a photo of a poster ad for rescreening a movie entitled *Eat Drink Man Woman*. Based on Noel Murray's review, the movie revolves around Chu's family, an aging master chef, to show many foods. Chandra sent the message hoping that Wei will be interested and reply because he is also working on a story related to food. "Wei nods. Like Phoebe, he's also working on a story that incorporates food" (Chew, 2019, 130). Chandra attempted to communicate with Wei again. After all, she fell in love at first sight with Wei and she thought he had the same feeling, especially after the incident in Wei's apartment. However, Wei has turned off his WhatsApp read reports as if he wanted to avoid Chandra completely. Chandra felt more uncomfortable when Wei came with Phoebe because she felt familiar with the vibe "There's a familiarity in their body dynamics-the laughter," (Chew, 2019, 140). The closeness between Phoebe and Wei is just like how close they were a few days ago. On the other hand, Wei acted as if nothing had happened. When Chandra confronted Wei about the text, he replied quickly that he was busy working on the play with Phoebe. We can notice it was just a lame excuse that he used as a way to ignore Chandra. Wei's playboy-like actions can also be intended to make the group believe that he is normal, just like most men who like to play with women since being a playboy is one of the conformity to masculine norms in society (Mahalik et al., 2003). We can also consider that action as a sign that he was not interested in Chandra and everything that happened before was a mistake but he didn't dare to say it directly to her.

Wei also was able to subtly convey the closure between him and Chandra, which he had started and initiated one-sidedly. When Chandra asked about the progress of his short story, he said, "My story? The teenage boy and the ghost are friends. The story is about friendship. I'm really tired of the conventional love story, aren't you?" (Chew, 2019, p. 140). Looking at this sentence, Wei seemed to be emphasizing the part where he admitted to being "tired of the conventional love story," which is what happened between him and Chandra. This statement could also be driven by the situation of his conflicting sexuality, when one is unsure of their sexuality; it is hard to engage in a relationship that is other than platonic and

non-physical. Wei is likely being watchful of not wanting his sexuality to be discussed out in the open by other people and not repeating the same mistake he made by forcing himself onto Chandra, which often results in an awkward situation if things did not go well.

Moreover, during their meeting at the borrowed theatre in Chiswick, they got in a circle on the stage. Chew gave us a description of their sitting position, "...we all take a seat in a circle, Wei to my right, Miranda to my left, Phoebe to her left, then Kevan." (Chew, 2019, p. 140). At one moment, their discussion leads to a fight between Phoebe and Chandra. Miranda shouted the word "MARLIN", a code word that she made for them to end Phoebe's nonstop talking. After that, those who were already sitting in a circle did a kind of staring game. "Wei is not looking at me. Kevan is. Phoebe is looking at Wei. Miranda is looking at Kevan. We're all not allowed to look at the person outright." (Chew, 2019, p. 142). Despite knowing the rule that they cannot look at the person to their right, Chandra still looks at Wei, who is clearly on her right. It strengthens Chandra's character who is not afraid to go against the rules and dares to be different from most people. It is just like what she said before in the introductory paragraph that she was a unique person with a different view and personality, "Everything about me is ambiguous." (Chew, 2019, p. 128). Miranda and Phoebe even said that she was filled with extreme emotion and personality "Miranda and Phoebe think I vacillate between extremes of emotion and personality" (Chew, 2019, p. 128). We can get the idea that she has strong feelings for Wei and couldn't take her eyes off him.

Furthermore, we can dive further to analyze the character by noticing how each character looks at the other characters. "Wei is not looking at me. Kevan is. Phoebe is looking at Wei. Miranda is looking at Kevan." (Chew, 2019, p. 142). So, Chandra and Phoebe were looking at Wei, Kevan was looking at Chandra, and Miranda was looking at Kevan. This can be seen as indicating who they are interested in or who's the person that they like. In other words, through this description, we can know their sexuality. They each stared at the opposite sex, except Wei. We do not know whom he is looking at. Chew even ends Scene 2 Act 2 with a question "So, who is Wei looking at?" (Chew, 2019, p. 142). She gave us no certainty about Wei's sexuality. We never know whether he is attracted to females or males, both, or not at all. Thus, this situation stated and clarifies indirectly about Wei's sexuality that he is a closeted LGBTQ+ member who is afraid to admit it, especially with his fellow minorities. In the end, Wei's sexuality was never fully disclosed.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has explained the relationship between the settings and their roles in accentuating the qualities of the diasporic characters, Chandra and Wei, in "The Heartsick Diaspora" (2019). This diaspora phenomenon affects the characters in the story who try to blend into their current circumstances in the Western country. This situation eventually made them change their personality; both adopted certain Western practices and values. Therefore, some of their actions and behavior contradict the ideals standard as Asians.

Chandra is biracial as she is half-Indian and half-Malaysian Chinese. However, she is already accustomed to Western culture that upholds individual freedom and

liberation. Sometimes, she also seems not proud of her own culture and refers to it as lame or boring. It influences Chandra's choice of outfits in which she chooses to dress androgynously. In addition, she also considers sex, not a sacred thing anymore since she has done it before marrying. Chandra slowly turns her lifestyle into what she thinks she fits into without considering her native background as an Asian woman. Nevertheless, she still not completely forgets or despises her native culture.

On the other hand, Wei is still confused about his sexuality and tries to hide it from his Asian friends in the group for fear of being ridiculed. It is because Asians considered homosexuality as a deviant act in their culture even though they are in a place whose people saw it as common and legal. As an immigrant, Wei tries so hard to fit in since he belongs to a minority group. Thus, even though Wei lives in a Western country, he cannot be honest about his sexual orientation among his Asian friends. It shows that both the current place and the hometown of the diasporic characters have huge influences on their personality, ways of thinking, and actions. In short, through this short story, Chew carries the idea that even when we are far from our hometown, especially if it is for a long time, we cannot separate our native culture and tradition since we always carry it within ourselves.

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, S., Cole, B., Craig, G., Hussain, B., Smith, L., Law, I., . . . Cheung, T. (2009). *Hidden from Public View? Racism against the UK Chinese Population*. London: The Monitoring Group/DCLG.
- Ahmad, WIU, and Bradby, H. (2007) 'Locating Ethnicity and health: Exploring concepts and contexts'. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 29, 795-810.
- Bachmann, C., and Gooch, B. (2017, September). *LGBT in Britain - Hate Crime and Discrimination*. Retrieved from Stonewall: [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_hate\\_crime.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf)
- Bhabha, H. (1984). Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. *October*, 28, 125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/778467>.
- Chew, E. (2019). *The Heartsick Diaspora*. Brighton: Myriad Editions.
- Deb, P. (2011). Religion, partition, identity, and diaspora: A study of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*. *South Asian Diaspora*, 3(2), 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2011.579459>
- Dinc, C. (2007). Modernity and the West: Evolution of their Relationship. *Kocaeli Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*.
- Dobie, A. B. (2011). *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Ellis, A. L. and Robert. W. Mitchell. (2000). Sexual orientation. In L.T. Szuchman and F. Muscarella (Eds.), *Psychological Perspective on Human Sexuality* (pp. 196-231). USA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Goh, R. B. (2016). The anatomy of Singlish: globalisation, multiculturalism and the construction of the 'local' in Singapore. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(8), 748-758.
- Kent, D. P., and Burnight, R. G. (1951). Group centrism in complex societies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 57(3), 256-259.

- Kieran, M. and Midgley, M. (1998). *The Problem of Humbug in Media Ethics: A Philosophical Approach*. Routledge.
- Knott, K., and McLoughlin, S. (2010). *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*. London: Zed Books.
- Laranjo, R., Martinez-Erbite, K., and Santos, Z. J. (2013). Intersection of Asian supernatural beings in Asian folk literature: A pan-Asian identity. *The Asian Conference on Asian Studies* (pp. 16-24). Osaka: The International Academic Forum.
- Mahalik, J. R., Locke, B. D., Ludlow, L. H., Diemer, M. A., Scott, R. P. J., Gottfried, M., and Freitas, G. (2003). Development of the conformity to masculine norms inventory. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 4(1), 3-25.
- Nagra, R. K. (2011). 'British by right, Punjabi by heart.' *Sikh Formations*, 7(2), 161–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2011.593298>
- Navia, L. E. (1996). *Classical Cynicism: A Critical Study*. Greenwood Press.
- Nurhamidah, I., Purwanto, S., and Ekaningsih, N. (2019). A literary work as self-reflection of the author: Why and how it is manifested. *EduLite: Journal of English Education, Literature, and Culture*, 4(2), 194-203.
- Pokharel, B. (2020). Diaspora and diasporic literature: Condition to consciousness. *The Outlook: Journal of English Studies*, 11, 86-98.
- Seidler, V. J. (1992). *Men, Sex, and Relationships: Writings from Achilles Heel* (ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Shuval, J. T. (2003). The dynamics of diaspora: Theoretical implications of ambiguous concepts. In R. M. Ohliger, *Diasporas, and Ethnic Migrants: Germany, Israel and Russia in Comparative Perspective*. London: Frank Cass.
- Tay, J. (2020, April 20). *The Heartsick Diaspora by Elaine Chew: Author QandA*. Retrieved from <https://jessicabooksblog.wordpress.com/2020/04/04/the-heartsick-diaspora-by-elaine-chew-author-qa/>
- Weiss, M. S. (1970). *Selective Acculturation and the Dating Process: The Patterning of Chinese-Caucasian Interracial Dating*. J. Marriage Family
- Yegenoglu, M. (1998). Veiled fantasies: Cultural and sexual difference in the discourse of Orientalism. *Colonial Fantasies*, 39–67.