



Nomadic Narratives: Digital Nomadism and Identity in Andrew X. Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*

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Abstract

This paper examines the work of Andrew X. Pham, *Catfish and Mandala* (2000), in the light of the theoretical perspective of the book by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Nomadology in A Thousand Plateaus*. Although the memoir is historically analyzed in the context of diaspora, trauma and postcolonial identity, the presented research predicts mobility as a form of identity. The story of Pham cycling through the United States, Mexico and Vietnam embodies a deterritorialized subject that identity is not solved in America or recreated in Vietnam but is constantly created through motion. His mind, e.g. that he is neither American nor Vietnamese, not exactly is a liminality and rhizomatic identity, that is destabilizing the notions of home and belonging. The trauma is another way of organizing mobility, as the death of Chi stalks the progression of Pham and catalyzes compulsive repetitiveness as evidenced in the memoir. When *Catfish and Mandala* are put into the context of Nomadology, the work shows how the narrative of Pham predicts the modern-day digital nomadism in which the identity is built through circulation and not rootedness. The strategy extends critical discourse to the exile and hybridity and places the memoir by Pham in a more philosophical context on mobility as ontology. Finally, the study highlights the potential of literature to anticipate socio-cultural shifts, as it provides some information about identity formation in a more mobile and networked world. **Keywords:** Nomadology, deterritorialization, rhizomatic identity, mobility studies, trauma, diaspora, digital nomadism

Introduction

In the age of globalization, both technological mobility and the establishment of a culture of remote working, the notion of digital nomadism has become one of the characteristics of forming the identity of the modern age. Digital nomads cross geographical borders and maintain professional and personal identities through mobile networks other than territorial attachment. Digital nomadism is generally discussed as a new socio-economic phenomenon; nevertheless, the literature has long been covering the topics of nomadic consciousness and displacement, deterritorialized identity. *Catfish and Mandala* (2000) narrates the story of his trip on a bicycle in the United States, Mexico and Vietnam as a Vietnamese American goes back home. The exile studies, the diaspora theory, and the postcolonial identity theories

have often been used as a perspective to interpret the text. Nevertheless, this work analyses the experience of Pham as an act of Nomadology as the concept of Gilles Deleuze and Felix A Thousand Plateaus. Their ideas on deterritorialization, rhizomatic structures, and fluid subjectivity provide a strong paradigm of understanding the story presented by Pham as one of the earliest statements on nomadic identity. Instead of considering the journey of Pham as a diasporic return, this study places it in mobility studies and the discourse of digital nomads. The memoir prefigures the existential, cultural, and philosophical conflict that modern digital nomads, individuals who find their identity through mobility and not rootedness, experience. By placing *Catfish and Mandala* in the context of Nomadology, mobility is prefigured in the study as a productive element of identity formation. This paper takes the position that *Catfish and Mandala* is a proto-digital account of nomadic identity where Andrew X. Pham creates a rhizomatic, deterritorialized self that disrupts the settled ideas of home, nation, and belonging in a manner that predicts the philosophical and existential challenges of the digital age of nomadism. This research hypothesis suggests that, when approached through the framework of Deleuze and Guattari on Nomadology, identity in the memoir by Pham, is unstable, territorially-based but a rhizomatic process through constant mobility and deterritorialization- so that it fits into the theoretical framework of digital nomadic subjectivity. This paper aims at critically discussing *Catfish and Mandala* in the theoretical framework of Nomadology to redefine the autobiographical experience of Andrew X. Pham as a deterritorialized and rhizomatic identity-making process. It tries to review how the memoir shakes the traditional concept of home, nation, and belonging through the introduction of mobility as a structuring power of subjectivity. Moreover, the study will place the story of Pham in the context of modern debates of digital nomadism and mobility studies to show how the text implicitly predicts contemporary practices of fluid, networked and non-territorial identity. In this way, the research makes an attempt to extend the critical discourse beyond the paradigms of diaspora and exile and foreground movement as an epistemological and ontological condition.

Although there has been a lot of literature on diaspora, exile and post-colonial identity in *Catfish and Mandala*, there has been little research done on the text in terms of Nomadology and modern theory of mobility. Current literature is inclined towards highlighting the concepts of cultural hybridity and immigrant trauma rather than the ways in which the story of Pham provides a pattern of deterritorialized, mobile subjectivity that can be compared to digital nomadism. Such theoretical gap restricts the general insights into the way mobility itself works as a constitutive power in the process of identity formation. Hence, it is necessary to reevaluate the memoir in the context of nomadology in order to identify the connection with the contemporary digital nomadic discourse. This study will be informed by three questions that relate to each other. To begin with, what does *Catfish and Mandala* represent of the Deleuzian idea of deterritorialization in its presentation of travel, displacement and return? Second, how does Pham construct his story and his own image to indicate a rhizomatic approach to identity instead of a linear or rooted understanding of belonging? Third, in what ways does the mem-

oir presuppose modern-day digital nomadism, specifically in the way it presents mobility as an act of self-building and opposition to national or cultural identity? All these questions define the theoretical and analytical orientation of the study. This paper follows a qualitative, theoretical textual analysis which is mostly based on the Nomadology of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as put forward in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This study relies on the close reading as the main approach in analyzing the work: the narrative pattern, the spatial metaphors, the descriptions of movement, the constructions of selfhood in *Catfish* and *Mandala*. The interpretative process is informed by central theoretical principles like deterritorialization, reterritorialization, rhizomatic connectivity, and smooth/striated space. Interdisciplinary insights into mobility studies and the discourse of digital nomads are also utilized in the study to make the narrative of Pham contextual to the greater socio-cultural changes. Instead of applying empirical or ethnographic research, the approach is still textual and interpretative in the sense that it focuses on philosophical analysis and literary theory to indicate how nomadic subjectivity works in the memoir. The research is important as it enlarges the critical interpretation of *Catfish* and *Mandala* beyond the traditional interpretations based mostly on the interpretation of the questions of diaspora, exile and postcolonial identity. Using the Nomadology of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the study presents a poststructuralist mobility model that retheorizes identity as fluid, rhizomatic, and deterritorialized and not territorial. By so doing, the work fills the gap between literary analysis and modern discourses of digital nomadism and globalization through showing how Pham foresaw the present trends of mobile subjectivity in his memoir. It theorizes the nomadic consciousness by putting it into the context of autobiographical narrative and methodologically through combining philosophy, mobility studies, and literary criticism. In addition, the study has a larger academic implication: it highlights the ability of literature to anticipate socio-cultural change and thus *Catfish* and *Mandala* can be seen as a valuable source of knowledge about the identity formation in a more mobile and networked world. The study is circumscribed by a textual review of *Catfish* and *Mandala*, and it does not perform an empirical study of the modern digital nomads. The paper is mostly concerned with the concept of nomadology by Deleuze and Guattari and does not extensively address other theories of nationalism, psychoanalysis, or trauma unless it is directly related to nomadic identity. Moreover, the study does not strive to compare it with other mobility stories, yet focuses solely on the memoir of Pham in the given theoretical framework.

Nomadology

Nomadology as the concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* becomes the theoretical basis of this study. In their conceptualization, the nomad is not only physically mobile but a state of mind, which opposes centralized entities and identities. They differentiate between smooth space and striated space, according to them, nomadic movement occurs in the smooth space, which is fluid and open whereas the striated space is an organized state-regulated space (474-500). Their notion of deterritorialization also puts into question the

fixed ideas of identity by implying that the subjectivity is constantly displaced and reconstituted in the context of evolving networks of power and meaning (508). These concepts offer an insightful approach to the discussion of mobility and identity as presented in modern literary texts. Nevertheless, the concept of Deleuze and Guattari has been critically evaluated.

Although Manuel DeLanda employs their philosophy to a large extent in *A New Philosophy of Society*, states that Assemblage theory must be more socio-historically grounded otherwise it risks being too abstract (3-4). Lacking empirical anchoring, DeLanda argues, concepts like deterritorialization will be metaphorical and not analytically accurate. The significance of this critique to literary studies is the tendency of abstraction theory to disregard textual specificity in favor of theoretical abstraction. To counter this, the current research presupposes nomadological notions based on the close textual analysis to prevent overgeneralization. Likewise, in *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti redefines the concept of nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari into feminist and posthumanist context. Braidotti does confirm the political possibilities of nomadic subjectivity nonetheless, she cautions that mobility should not be romanticized as necessarily liberatory (4-5). Nomadism to her should be seen as critical consciousness which is the negotiating power relations and not an exaltation of the movement. This is especially true when considering how Nomadology is used in relation to the stories of travel, since mobility can equally involve vulnerability, displacement and structural constraint.

Deleuzian nomadism has also been questioned by postcolonial critics. Timothy S. Murphy notes that Deleuze and Guattari celebrate the idea of deterritorialization, but global capitalism actually generates types of deterritorialized flow that strengthen inequality (102). In this respect, nomadism might be paradoxical to neoliberal mobility instead of opposing it. These criticisms make any straightforward connection between nomadism and freedom difficult. When looking at mobility narratives, then, one needs to look at how mobility gets into a collision with global power systems as opposed to assuming that it is emancipatory. John Urry states that contemporary identities are becoming constituted in relation to networks of travel, communication and technological connectivity (Urry 47-48). Although Urry does not explicitly address the Nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari, his writing is an addition to their focus on fluid spatial relations. Simultaneously, Urry highlights material infrastructures and social systems fostering mobility so that the criticism that Deleuzian theory is not empirically grounded can be resolved. Combined, these critics support and oppose the usefulness of Nomadology as a theory. Although Deleuze and Guattari introduce a philosophical vocabulary of the rhizomatic identity and deterritorialization, DeLanda, Braidotti, Murphy, and Urry warn about the abstraction, romanticism, and depoliticization. Their interventions make the current study sound because they persuade to exercise nomadological theory in the analysis of literature in a balanced and critically founded approach.

Diaspora Identity

In Asian American studies, diaspora theory, and travel writing scholarship, Catfish and Mandala has elicited a lot of critical attention. Critics often place the memoir in the context of narratives of return of refugees that focus on the theme of displacement, memory, and divided belonging. Pham uses the story of his bicycle ride between the United States and Vietnam to describe this journey as one of finding coherence after a personal and family-related trauma, specifically, the death of his transgender sibling Chi. As scholars note, this homecoming is not restorative or reconciling, but it reveals how unstable the diasporic identity can be. Pham himself describes it, saying that he was not exactly American, not exactly Vietnamese (Pham 246), which is often quoted in order to depict his liminal state. This expression of in-betweenness has made critics view the memoir as the symbolic representation of what Lisa Lowe calls the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of the Asian American identity (Lowe 67). In the context of the Vietnamese American literary studies, Viet Thanh Nguyen interprets the narratives of refugees as memory practices that mediate both individual loss as well as the national past. In *Nothing Ever Dies*, Nguyen claims that refugee memoirs are ethical projects, which challenge the mainstream American memory of war and attempt to deal with the weight of memory (Nguyen 7-8). The story by Pham can be related to this observation, since his path is a conflict against the repressed histories both family and national. According to critics, Vietnam is not presented in the memoir as a home country but as a place of alienation. Pham tells of his going back to what he terms as a land of intimacy and foreignness (Pham 152), pointing at what Nguyen refers to, as the double consciousness of memory and forgetting of the refugee (Nguyen 12).

Memoir in Trauma

The memoir has been discussed by scholars as well in terms of trauma studies, especially concerning the suicide of Chi and its psychological implication. Even though the story is not described in graphic detail, critics can see how the death of Chi lingers in the text as an unresolved break that drives the Pham to move. In her argument, Cathy Caruth demonstrates that the nature of trauma is belated and repetitive by pointing out that trauma is something that comes to haunt the survivor at a later point (Caruth 4). The obsessive cycling across continents that Pham takes up and the repetitions of Chi that he invokes repeatedly can be viewed as some of the manifestations of this repetition that is traumatic in nature. The adventure turns into not just a simple travel story, but a neurotic motion ordered by loss. The experts of gender and sexuality have also highlighted the importance of the transgender status of Chi in the memoir. According to Susan Stryker, the transgender plot tends to subvert the normative structures of national and cultural affiliation, as the trans subject matter is frequently put into the margins of ethnic minority groups, as well as the mainstream society (Stryker 1-2). The fact that Chi is marginalized in both Vietnamese and American life only goes to support the general questioning of the fixed identity categories in the memoir. According to the critics, although Pham focuses on the story of his own experience, the story is

implicit in revealing cultural limitations that further alienated Chi. Moreover, travel writing theorists regard *Catfish and Mandala* as a parody of the classic Western travel texts. Instead of making Vietnam an exoticized other, Pham disrupts the power of the traveler. In the idea of contact zone, Mary Louise Pratt characterizes the social spaces where the cultures interact under unequal power relates (7).

The Vietnam trip of Pham is one that literally works within such contact zone, but in contrast to the imperial travel writers he is in a gray position of being both an insider and an outsider. Such a dual role makes the gaze of travel writing complicated and mobility a negotiation of fragmented identity instead of conquest or discovery. Taken together, these critical views indicate that *Catfish and Mandala* cannot be interpreted in a single way. Regardless of being read in the context of diaspora theory, in trauma studies, gender studies, or in travel writing criticism, the memoir prefigures instability, liminality, and disputed belonging. With these academic interventions offering an excellent basis of continued theoretical work, it can be seen that the narrative by Pham is not only a retelling of the individual experience but also challenges the bigger systems of nation, memory, gender, and mobility processes.

Catfish and Mandala has come under a wide range of analysis in the interdisciplinary Asian American studies, diaspora studies, and refugee narratives, as well as in the theory of trauma and travel writing. The memoir is always considered by critics as a complicated negotiation of identity that is formed through exile, memory and return. Instead of giving a linear homecoming story, Pham creates what most scholars view as a disrupted autobiographical experience that cannot be brought to a close. One of the key schools of thought interprets *Catfish and Mandala* in terms of diaspora and Asian American identity. Lisa Lowe believes that the identity of Asian Americans is not coherent, but characteristics of “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” (67). The memoir of Pham illustrates this state especially when he admits that he is not exactly American, neither is he Vietnamese (Pham 246). Those who have employed Lowe to envision this liminality see it as representative of second generation refugee consciousness. The historical back-and-forth shift between the United States and Vietnam in the memoir helps to shatter the dichotomous national identities and strengthens the so-called contradiction of the citizenship and the cultural identity that Lowe describes as such (67-68). Therefore, in Asian American literary studies, the text is usually placed as a story of in-betweenness and not assimilation or coming home.

The body of criticism of refugee memory and war historiography is also quite substantial. In his book, *Nothing Ever Dies*, Viet Thanh Nguyen argues that refugee stories disrupt the mainstream story of American war memory by presupposing the voices of the displaced (8). Critics use this model to the memoir by Pham saying that his trip through Vietnam uncovers a mismatch between the images of the war that are portrayed by Americans and the life realities of the Vietnamese. The experiences of rural poverty, the hostility of the locals, and the loss of connection with the native culture make Pham a difficult figure to go through with easy heroic escape or victorious homecoming. Following Nguyen, though, refugee memory exists in a dual state of remembering and forgetting (12), which is

quite noticeable in the interest and non-interest that Pham has towards Vietnam. Trauma theory has also influenced the understanding of the memoir especially as applied to the case of the transgender sibling of Pham, Chi, whose death came back later on and was not clearly understood at the time of the incident (Caruth 4). According to critics, the lack on the part of Chi forms the emotional heart of the memoir; the bike ride is an obsessive gesture driven by unprocessed loss. Instead of facing the trauma directly, Pham continuously re-experiences memories of Chi, which is the way Caruth refers to the repetition of the traumatic event (4-5). In this regard, the mobility in the memoir is not geographical but rather a psychological one which is guided by haunting and returning.

Marginalization

Another dimension to the critical conversation is provided by gender and sexuality studies. According to Susan Stryker, transgender histories reveal lack of stability of normative identity categories (1-2). By using transgender theory to analyse *Catfish* and *Mandala*, scholars highlight how the marginalization of Chi in the Vietnamese as well as the American setting brings to view their strict sense of cultural expectations in relation to gender and family honor. Although Pham makes his own voice to be the center action of the story, critics note that the experience by Chi highlights the social constraints inherent in the diasporic communities. This approach makes intracommunal tension readings and gender politics complicated by presupposing them. The scholarship of travel writing also places the memoir in a larger context of the issues of mobility and representation. According to Pratt, the concept of the contact zone presupposes a social space where two distinct cultures collide on unequal power relations (7). The fact that Pham goes back to Vietnam can be perceived as a visit to such a contact zone because he is in an in between position as an insider and a foreigner. According to the critics, the memoir perverts the traditional Western travel stories by undermining the authority of the narrator. Instead of taking command of the space, Pham is often made vulnerable, misinterpreted, or out of place, thus flipping the tropes of colonial traveling. Even though all these critical approaches provide good insights, comparatively less scholarly work has been conducted to examine the memoir within the context of the poststructuralist mobility theory or Nomadology. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari understand nomadism as a form of deterritorialized subjectivity in resisting structures (*A Thousand Plateaus* 474-500). Although the liminality and displacement of Pham have been examined by scholars, minimal scholars have made a direct link between the dynamics and rhizomatic identity or smooth and striated spatial structures. This lapse is especially important in the context of modern mobility studies. John Urry explains that the contemporary subjectivity is becoming constituted by the networks of mobility and circulation (Urry 48). However, it is admitted that the available interpretations of the *Catfish* and *Mandala* do not place the memoir in this larger theoretical turn to mobility as ontology very often. Hence, the current work is bound to the academic discourse in that it fills the gap between the diaspora and studies of trauma and the nomadological theory. Mobility, Deterritorialization and Rhizomatic Connectivity

Though earlier critics have workingly shed light on the problem of exile, memory, gender and return, they tend to carry with them an unspoken belief that identity attempts to find eventual footing or resolution. In comparison, a nomadological reading provides an anticipation of endless mobility, deterritorialization and rhizomatic connectivity as permanent states and not as transitional stages. This technique does not only supplement the existing body of knowledge, but also remakes the text with new directions of the contemporary discourse of digital nomadism and fluid subjectivity. Overall, the sources show that Catfish and Mandala has been studied extensively with the help of the diaspora theory, the memory of refugees, trauma criticism, gender studies, and analysis of travel writings. Nevertheless, an enduring interest in Nomadology and theory of mobility has not been done well. Filling this hole enables one to reinterpret the story of Pham not only as a story of returning but also as a philosophical reflection on movement itself as identity formation.

Andrew X. Pham foreshadows his broken identity several times. At some point he says: I was neither American nor Vietnamese (246). This pronunciation is a typical example of what Deleuze and Guattari call deterritorialized subjectivity a state of the identity which is not tied to a specific national or cultural locality but is constantly displaced and reformed. The liminality of Pham cannot be closed, instead of a reconciliation of his dual heritage, he possesses the rhizomatic identity, which extends outwards across cultural and geographical boundaries. The fact that Pham goes back to Vietnam builds up estrangement instead of resolving it. He notes: Vietnam was where I was close and distant at the same time (152). This irony disrupts the homeland as a solid point. Here, in Deleuzian terms, identity functions rhizomatically - that is, made via memory, trauma and movement as opposed to linear descent or territorial affiliation. It brings back the suicide of Chi the transgender sibling of Pham, a memory he carries around: "The loss of Chi was a curse that did not heal up" (89). This repetition indicates the idea of trauma in a latitude and repetitive sense articulated by Caruth: trauma is encountered too early, too suddenly to be known completely (4). The obsessive cycling of Pham all over the continents turns into a kind of traumatic repetition--movement as an escape and confrontation. This mobility can be explained by the differentiation between smooth space and striated space by Deleuze and Guattari. The nervous cycling by Pham is experienced in a flowing space, which is opposed to the stratified space that is controlled by the state, i.e., the striated space of the national identity. In this way, the motif of mobility in the memoir is both psychological and spatial; nomadic response to trauma.

The turning point comes at the time when Pham contemplates his alienation in Vietnam: "I had imagined return as a circle completed, a restoration of something lost. Instead, I found myself a stranger among my own people, my language fractured, my gestures foreign." (210) This text destroys the myth of the diasporic closure. The philosophical analogy of the circle, which denotes completeness, disintegrates into pieces. This theoretically depicts deterritorialization in the absence of reterritorialization. It does not assimilate the subject into the homeland but causes an additional displacement. Nomadologically, this unsuccessful re-appearing

strengthens identity as a processual, mobile form of identity, not rooted in territories. The circle yields to rhizomatic multiplicity, which is nonlinear, networked and continuously formed. Lowe puts an emphasis on hybridity and multiplicity (67). This is definitely the case with Pham in his memoir, yet, a nomadological reading puts the focus in another direction: identity is not a blend of two cultures, but nomadic in the full extent of the term. Pham lives as ontology mobility: Pham lives in movement itself. His identity is not settled in America nor is it restored in Vietnam but is constantly created in circulation.

As expressed by Deleuze and Guattari, the experience of the nomad in the case of Pham is that of the anti-fixity of the structures, which dwells in the smooth space and rhizomatic structures. Therefore, it is possible to interpret *Catfish and Mandala* as the story of a refugee coming back home and meditation on the philosophical concept of mobility as a form of existence in the future of digital nomadism. The crystallization of deterritorialized subjectivity is in the confession of Pham, who states that he was not quite American, not quite Vietnamese (246). Deleuze and Guattari hold that deterritorialization renders the identity disconnected with definite coordinates to create an ever-shifting subject (508-510). Pham is not in the middle but he is a constitutive liminality: he exists in an in between land that is difficult to close. His identity is rhizomatic, spreading horizontally between cultural and geographical nodes, rather than vertically, through the lineage or national affiliation. This shaking of established identity is even heightened when Pham talks about how intimate and foreign Vietnam is: “both intimate and foreign” (152). Instead of providing reconciliation, the homeland is another location of estrangement. This is a rejection of the reterritorialization in Deleuzian language, something that does not revert to a fixed point of origin but remains in circulation in smooth space; boundaries become indistinct, and identity is never fixed but re-assembled.

Pham is plagued by the fact that Chi committed suicide, something that Chi remembers as “a wound that never closed” (89). The theory of trauma as delayed and repetitive developed by Caruth, that is, something one has experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to know, fully (*Unclaimed Experience*, 4) sheds light on the compulsive cycling across continents by Pham. His movement is not purely spatial but emotional and is organized by unrecovered loss. The reason behind this movement is made clear through the distinction by Deleuze and Guattari between the smooth space and the striated space. The bicycle journey by Pham takes place in smooth space, and it opposes the striated order of the national identity and state boundaries. His locomotion is a way to escape trauma, a way to fight it, and it is a nomadic subjectivity as a survival strategy.

When *Catfish and Mandala* is considered in terms of the so-called Nomadology by Deleuze and Guattari, several important things can be pointed out. To start with, the memoir by Pham always upsets static concepts of identity, home, and belonging. His assertion of liminality, which is frequent, i.e., “not quite American, not quite Vietnamese” (246), represents deterritorialization, when a sense of identity is torn out of fixed cultural points and recreated through wandering. Instead of overcoming this situation by way of reversion, Pham further alienates by calling

“both intimate and foreign” (152). This contradiction highlights the point that the identity is not reclaimed but perpetually created via circulation. Second, the memoir shows how the traumatic processes organize the mobility. The death of Chi serves as a ghostly nothingness that drives Pham to his obsessive cycling around continents. His thought of how each rotation of the wheel brought him back to Chi: “every turn of the wheel was a return to Chi” (92) is one such example of such trauma as repetition, which corresponds with the theory of belated return by Caruth.

Mobility is not merely physical but a mental one that depicts how nomadic subjectivity can be mixed with not only liberation but also bereavement and repetition. Third, the story by Pham describes home as being in motion instead of being a location. Nomadic ontology is summed up by his words that “home was not a house, not a village, not even a country... home was departure, the rhythm of leaving and returning” (255). The identity is rhizomatic, in a continuous state of formation, and is even composed of mobility. This foresees the modern mobility researches, where subjectivity is also becoming more networked and fluid in nature. Lastly, the narrative framework used in the memoir resembles rhizomatic connectivity. Its swings between the past and present, America and Vietnam, trauma and estrangement does not allow it to be closed linearly. This non hierarchical structure is a reflection of the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari when relationships are created laterally, but not vertically. The text by Pham is therefore a nomadic consciousness in its theme and form.

Conclusion

To sum it up, *Catfish and Mandala* can be treated as a proto digital nomadic story that foreshadows the existential problems of modern mobility. Combining the autobiographical experience of Pham with the work of Deleuze and Guattari in *Nomadology*, the paper proves that the identity in the memoir is deterritorialized, rhizomatic, and in a continuous process of movement. It is a challenge to teleological exile and homecoming stories where mobility is a transition state but is rather a state of being. There is no resolution of trauma, estrangement and liminality, but instead, the process is re articulated through movement. This redefinition widens the critical discourse of the paradigms of diasporas and exiles and places the memoir of Pham in the context of wider philosophical and cultural discussions that revolve around the topic of mobility and globalization. It emphasizes the anticipatory role of literature in bringing out socio cultural changes and as such, *Catfish and Mandala* can be a text that can be used to understand the constructs of identity in the more mobile and networked world of the present. Finally, the story of Pham validates that during the era of the deterritorialization, identity cannot be located in rootedness but in the rhythms of departure, repetition, and circulation.

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