

Interview

Abdi Hersi

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Q1. The concept of diaspora is used to define almost any community who has a distinct identity tied with an imagined or territorialized nation outside the resident country. Nationalization of the concept of “victim” diaspora seems no longer prevailing but communities beyond the territory of a nation generally fit the picture. Migration or exile is not the only cause to form diasporic communities. To some studies, socially, culturally, religiously, ethnically, linguistically, and/or geopolitically amalgamated communities are also deemed to form diaspora. Having said that, what do you think about the impact of the proliferation of the usage on the conceptualization of diaspora? And/or, how would you conceptualize diaspora?

A1. Within the literature on diasporas, there are disagreements as to whether the term diaspora should be applied narrowly, to mean communities that have experienced forced migration, or more broadly to include any overseas populations. I believe that the proliferation of the usage of the term “Diaspora” is a result of the divergence of motivations and causes of mobility including both the forced and voluntary migration of people. Whilst I agree that socially, culturally, religiously, ethnically, linguistically, and/or geopolitically amalgamated communities form a diasporic identity, it is also the case that the size of a community and its visibility in the public sphere of the host community is an important factor in this identity formation. Using Somalis who migrated over half a century to the Middle East, Europe and North America as a case study, one comes to the conclusion that they have not referred themselves to Diaspora until the sheer size of their numbers substantially increased. Other parallel examples can be drawn from the Somali people who migrated to the US and Europe who initially referred themselves as new refugees. So, the length of time the community spends in a location is also another determinant factor of Diasporic identity formation.

Q2. States are increasing their efforts all around the world for diaspora engagement; however, they still lack in giving efforts in internationally debated policies. This does not mean that states do not have diaspora policies of their own but we don't see the diasporic issues discussed among states perhaps due to political and socio-cultural sensibility. Is it possible for states to consider debating diaspora internationally beyond assimilation or nationalization policies?

A2. There is now an increasing interest in this subject globally. Diaspora communities and migrant organisations are now considered to be an important stakeholder in the development and prosperity of both their places of origin and host countries. The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) underlines the importance of consulting diaspora communities and seeking their contributions and input into the development of safe, regular and orderly migration. Both

Cluster 4 of the Global Compact for Migration Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda stress the contributions of the diaspora to all dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including sending remittances and transfer of knowledge and skills to their respective regions and member states. The debates and discussions have now shifted beyond assimilation and nationalisation policies.


Q3. Since the world entered into the nation-state system, territorial states have not been able to contain nations, rather led to increasing diasporas. So how do globalized nations and governance impact territorial state and diaspora relations?

A3. The nation-state, sovereignty, nationalism and having control over a territory is important. However, advancement in telecommunications and transportation technology and the internet, make movement/mobility at an unprecedented level. These levels of movements with the sheer diversity of individuals involved have blurred the boundaries of nation-states. Consequently, this has changed how individuals identify themselves. For example, today, you can no longer assume an American to be a blonde hair, blue-eyed, white Anglo Saxon background person. We also see new forms of identity such as cosmopolitanism with universal focus taking root.

Q4. In general, diaspora studies are not at their peak values. A small number of scholars dedicate their time to diaspora issues. For those who are eager to study this subject, what are the fundamental approaches to studying the concept of diaspora? Why is it important to study and how do you see where diaspora studies are heading to or need to go?

A4. Fundamentally, it is important to study the concept and discourse of Diaspora from a holistic perspective. Multiple actors play a role and influence in this process and it involves a country of origin and destination countries culture, faith, age, gender, etc. Most research on Diaspora is focused on one or another of these interlinked variables. This then means there is an understanding that Diaspora identity and belonging take place in a complex web of challenges/ issues. In the post-national discourse, one must integrate into Diaspora study not only the nation-state at the centre but culture, society, government, politics, and the economics of an individual nation and one must insert these components into an increased regional, continental, hemispheric, and global perspective narrative.

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