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Interview

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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. In her article published in 2001, Kim Butler says "it is increasingly rare to live and die on the land of our ancient forebears."[1] This basic fact is the reality of the 20th century, especially after the new waves of international migration that emerged in the wake of the Second World War. However, human mobility is not a new phenomenon in our history. As Saskia Sassen discusses in her book *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (2008), we have always been on the move for various reasons. Let me remind you that "Central Asia" is a significant reference in explaining who we are as "Turks" here in Anatolia in the Turkish national histography, as also portrayed in Nazım Himet's well-known poem, *Invitation* (circa 1940s): "Like the head of a mare riding at full gallop out of far Asia to the Mediterranean, this land is ours!" What is new about human mobility is more about the terrain through which we move, which became globally nationalized after the Second World War. We became citizens of particular nation-states, which are accepted as legitimately sovereign over a piece of land and representative of a group of people: We.

As this fixation among states, territories, and human groups emerged, nationality became the only reference point in defining our belonging. If you are a member of a particular nation, you cannot hold a second membership with another one. I am not talking about citizenship, obviously. The emergence of nation-states inevitably transformed "geography" into mutually exclusive "homelands." I don't argue that national belongings are the only form of being a member of a particular group. Ethnic and religious identities have always had and still have a significant role in defining who we are, but national borders have emerged as the only reference point in understanding human mobility in this new age: customs, passports, immigration quotas, the Schengen Agreement. Here, an ironic note: Some of those people who fled from Bulgaria to

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[1] Kim Butler, "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse", *Diaspora* 19, no. 2 (2001): 214.

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Turkey in 1989 due to increasing political pressures due to their identity started reclaiming their citizenship from Bulgaria when the country became a member of the EU in 2007. Is this about changing their ethnic-religious identity or basically about having access to the right of freedom of movement throughout a new territory – the Schengen Area?

In brief, "diaspora" is a concept that historically refers to a very specific group of people on the move, but this does not mean that all human groups on the move are necessarily diasporas. Colin Palmer, for instance, problematizes the usage of "African diaspora" popularized during the 1990s and questions what we need to understand by this concept. If we need to understand anyone who originated from the continent, then "all of humanity may be considered as a part of the African diaspora."[2] Of course, this is an ironic comment, but this irony indicates that we need to be, theoretically and methodologically, clear in the understanding of such social phenomena.

Going back to the origin, the Greek term "diaspora" etymologically builds upon two words: speiro, "to sow", and dia, "over". Early usage of the term referred to the general concept of migration within the frame of colonial demographic relocations of certain human groups, specifically the deportation of the Aegean population after the Peloponnesian War. Afterwards, with the expatriation of Jews from the Middle East following the demolition of Jerusalem in 586 BC and 70 BC, the term gained a religious connotation that specifically made reference to being exiled. This is an important nuance. Not all human groups on the move are diasporas; rather, only those who are forced to move in relation to their differences that are considered by the power elites, for some reason, to be unassimilable and menacing to their authority. In that sense, the notion of *shibboleth* is worth recalling.

For instance, in his book *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (2006), Engseng Ho studies the Hadhrami Yemeni, who originated from the settlement of Tarim and sailed all over the Indian Ocean, ranging from Arabia to India and Southeast Asia, over the past five hundred years. They left gravestones all over that area; hence, even today it is possible to trace their footsteps and find tiny human groups identifying themselves with this location as their place of origin. This is similar to the Horosan reference for Alevis. However, I don't think that it is possible to regard the Hadhrami Yemeni as a group similar to the Jews in reference to the concept of diaspora.

Thus, we need to come back to the question of definition. How can we operationalize the concept of diaspora to be able to study this phenomenon? If we understand the concept as covering any human group on the move, then it becomes an "empty signifier" and loses its analytical power for us.

It is true, as Robin Cohen argues, that there is a kind of effective affinity between diasporization and globalization. We have gone through major transformations regarding the fixation among states, territories, and human groups since the end of the 1980s and various phenomena emerged or became visible during this period. In the wake of the Collapse of the Soviet Union (until the 9/11), "globalization" was the main concept for addressing all these phenomena that were difficult to study with some other conceptions formed in the age of nationalism. Accordingly, "diaspora" functioned to cover any human groups on the move, but this was an attempt to fill the theoretical void and understand the newly emerging phenomena behind national conceptions, and it would not last long.

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[2] Colin A. Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora", *American Historical Association Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (1998): 22-25.

Scholars such as Steven Vertovec[3] and Robin Cohen tried to expand on the concept of diaspora by designating new subcategories of diasporas. For instance, Vertovec introduces three forms of diaspora: (a) *social forms* (classical diaspora communities like Jews or Armenians; having experienced victimization and alienation corresponding to traumatic displacement, this form of community establishes institutional social networks on the basis of ethnic myths of common origin between/among other compatriot communities in diverse host-lands); (b) *a type of consciousness* (having awareness of being multi-local, such as Euro-Turks); and (c) *a mode of culture* (creolization in relation to globalization as the flow of cultural objects, images, and meanings). Cohen classifies the concept of diaspora into five new categories: *victim diaspora* (Jews, the Irish, and Armenians), *labor diaspora* (Turkish immigration to Western Europe), *merchant diaspora* (historical Chinese or Indian communities), *imperial diaspora* (related to colonial histories, such as the Dutch community in Africa), and *homeland diaspora* (referring to actual or imaginary homelands such as those of the Zionists and the Sikhs).[4] Later, some new categorizations were introduced, such as "failed diaspora" for Somalians or "dying diaspora" for the Irish.

However, I don't see any point in naming immigrant communities diaspora and I do agree with Thomas Faist, who concludes that instead of stretching the term "diaspora" beyond its limits, it is more meaningful to speak of a segmented and transnationalized socio-cultural space, characterized by syncretistic identities and populated by various ethnic, national, religious, and subcultural groups.[5]

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. I am not sure if it is true. If you consider that the Ottoman Empire tried to keep an eye on its subjects that emigrated from Syria to Argentina at the end of the 19th century or that Czarist Russia attempted to put a ban on socialist journals published in the Yiddish language by the Jewish diaspora in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century, or that the American government closely monitored German immigrants during the First World War and forced Japanese immigrants into detention camps during the Second World War – diasporic communities, and especially those that intend to engage in politics, have always been of great interest to sending and receiving states.

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[3] Steven Vertovec, "Three Meaning of 'Diaspora', Exemplified among South Asian Religions", Working Paper (1999): 1.

[4] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[5] Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000): 235

Let me give you another very clear and more recent example. In three massive gatherings organized in Germany (February 2008 in Cologne, March 2011 in Düsseldorf, and May 2014 in Cologne), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addressed Turkish immigrants living in Europe with the maxim of "integrate but not assimilate." On the surface, this maxim sounds like a homeland-originated parental attitude, which is very common for many other sending states, simply because immigrants keep sending remittances only if they preserve their feeling of belonging to the homeland. However, in this case, Mr. Erdoğan, as the leader of Turkey, also introduced some policies to support Turkish immigrants in Europe "not to be assimilated." Thereafter, since the second half of the 2010s, we have witnessed certain controversies between Turkey and some European countries under the leadership of Germany regarding the activities of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB). I think this tension looks likely to continue if you consider the recent January 2021 case about Belgium planning to deport a Turkish imam.

In this sense, it is a complicated question of who can stand for or speak for a diaspora community, especially if the community is not a diaspora but merely an immigrant group, as is the case for Turkish immigrants in Europe.

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. I tried to touch on this question briefly above. I understand the contemporary "refugee crisis" as a symptom of the crisis of the global territorial regime established in the wake of the Second World War. If we consider global migration flows, it is obvious that what I call "buffer zonification" is happening all over the world. Let's consider the notion of "Fortress Europe". There are gates that enable you to access this fortress, but there are also ditches that leave some others outside. If the Schengen Agreement can be considered as the gate to Europe, then we can understand FRONTEX as the ditch of this fortress. If you try to map Europe not by counting gates (Schengen) but rather by measuring ditches (FRONTEX), then you will see that vast geographical areas (including highly technologized new border-controlling systems installed on the border between Georgia and Armenia, the walls built by Turkey on the Syrian border and by Greece on the Turkish border, and the holding camps in North Africa from Morocco to Libya) have already turned into buffer zones of Fortress Europe.

Or, if you consider the very recent phenomenon known as "Migrant Caravans", which first emerged in Latin America in 2017 as a direct outcome of climate change and its effect on agricultural production, it is obvious that we need to find a new way of thinking about the notion of territoriality beyond the categories of nationhood.

In this sense, as the main global line has shifted from lying between the West (First World) and East (Second World) to lying between the Global North and South, and as global inequalities have intensified, countries located along this fault line, such as Turkey or Mexico, have been facing challenges in coping with the mobility pressures from the South, and, therefore, they have been gradually becoming a kind of buffer zone between the Global North and South.

In the midst of these territorial ambiguities, diaspora appears as a very specific category bridging gaps in national territorial systems. In his recent book, *The Transnationalized Social Question Migration and the Politics of Social Inequalities in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), Thomas Faist attempts to build a very interesting framework to understand international population movements in this new age. According to him, the act of migration became a strategy to cope with various social and economic problems. If you are not comfortable where you are located, then *exit* may be an option for you to overcome these problems. Of course, this is not a costless choice. Depending on your personal qualifications, you might have different options, ranging from skilled immigration schemes (as a seasonal agricultural worker or as a programmer) to a boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

I think that immigrant communities all over the world will develop certain diaspora abilities in the coming decades as a response to the crisis of the global territorial regime. The relatively new area of interest in migration studies that emerged in the early 2000s to build a link between international population movements and socio-economic development is an indicator of this process.

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. As I said, diaspora communities or immigrant communities will gradually develop diaspora abilities and it will be increasingly important to understand many other issues regarding the crisis of the global territorial regime. In this sense, it is important to develop a clear understanding of the border-crossing movements of these communities for all of us who are studying migration. As far as I understand, some nation-states, including Turkey, have also realized the importance of such communities (originating from their territory yet currently living in another territory) and began to introduce some new diaspora-making policies, such as those addressing the rights of expat voting citizens since the 2010s. However, it is still too early to draw any conclusion about the possible outcomes of these policies. If I were to go back to my own desk, it would be important to develop a new understanding of diaspora communities beyond what is known as "methodological nationalism" in the literature. Instead of taking nation-states as the only unit of analysis, we need to find new ways of thinking about the place-making of immigrant communities on the basis of their border-crossing movements in our research imaginaries.

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