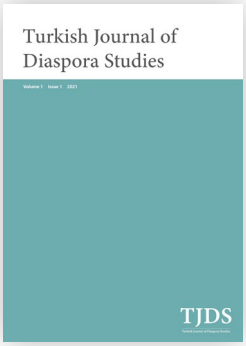

Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies

ISSN: 2717-7408 (Print and Online)
Journal Homepage: tjds.org.tr

Interview

Elizabeth Mavroudi

To cite this article: Elizabeth Mavroudi (2021, February 8) Personal communication [Email interview], Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies, 1(1), 132-139, DOI: 10.52241/TJDS.2021.0014

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.52241/TJDS.2021.0014

Published online: 30 March 2021

Turkish Journal of Diaspora Studies
2021, Vol. 1, No. 1, 132-139
https://doi.org/10.52241/TJDS.2021.0014

Interview

Elizabeth Mavroudi
Department of Geography and Environment, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, UK

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. Since Brubaker's (2005) much cited paper on the proliferation of the word diaspora, there has been much debate on the notion of diaspora and what exactly it does and does not encompass. There are those who view diasporas more in terms of distinct ethno-national communities spread out through space but who are tied somehow to a homeland and to one another through shared consciousness, identities, imagined communities, and collective memories. However, more poststructural views of diaspora, influenced by cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and James Clifford, view diasporas in more flexible ways and will unravel the ways in which migrants construct and practice their identities and lives 'here' and 'there', 'on the move' and as within and across boundaries in grounded and situated ways. I have certainly been influenced more by the latter in my thinking and also by work of scholars, such as Homi Bhabha (1994), Yasemin N. Soysal (2000), Edward Said (2000), Pnina Werbner (2004), and Floya Anthias (1998). Within Geography, I have been influenced by the work of Alison Blunt (2007), Claire Dwyer (2000), Caitríona Ní Laoire (2003), Divya Tolia Kelly (2004), Sean Carter (2003), Elaine Ho, Mark Boyle and Brenda Yeoh (individually but also see their joint paper in 2015 e.g.) and Anastasia Christou (2011) amongst many others who argue for a nuanced approach to diaspora which takes into account the myriad intersectionalities which have an impact on how those in diaspora operate through time and space and in relation to place. Rather than making assumptions about diasporic lives and identities, or trying to fit people into typologies and classifications, I and these authors believe that it is important to listen to the voices and experiences of those who see themselves as being part of a diaspora and who may e.g. have complicated or ambivalent relationships with homeland(s). This body of work challenges any simplistic understandings that one might have around identity making and stresses the need to dismantle essentialist notions of identity and belonging whilst at the same time paying attention to power inequalities and relations within and between groups. I have written, as have others about the idea of diaspora as process (Mavroudi 2007; Morawska 2011; Houston and Wright 2003); I have taken such

CONTACT *Elizabeth Mavroudi* *E.Mavroudi@lboro.ac.uk*

a dynamic notion and have extended it to discuss and in relation to performative timespace (Mavroudi 2019) as I believe this can help us strike a balance between more open-ended notions of diaspora which stress fluidity and hybridity and the reality of the limitations that many in diaspora also face. Living and feeling in-between is not necessarily easy and it is important to pay attention to the embodied, emotional and material aspects of such lives and identities. Finally, for me and other who write about diaspora, the notion itself is potentially a celebratory one which reminds us of the need to transgress essentialism, borders and boundaries, even as we also recognise that they still continue to exist and to constrain. By using diaspora to discuss migrant experiences we are paying explicit attention to all these processes and issues: we are recognising the importance of the sometimes uneasy juxtaposition between here, there, past, present, future, time, space, and place which jostle for position in people's lives and have to be actively and sometimes strategically negotiated.

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. Yes, sending states have pursued their own diaspora strategies, often as a means to reap socio-economic and political benefits from those who are in diaspora, for example through remittances, voting and investment. They have gone from seeing those who emigrate as traitors to their homeland to loyal members of the extra territorial state. They often make assumptions around diasporic obligations to the homeland based around sometimes quite narrow notions of ethno-national identity i.e., they assume that people will want to contribute and help their homeland because they are from there originally and feel part of this ethno-nationally constructed nation. However, in reality, research has shown that there are complex ways to be and feel in diaspora and that sending and receiving states shouldn't make simplistic assumptions around national belonging, integration and assimilation (see e.g. Mavroudi and Holt 2015 on the relationships between nationalism and schooling in relation to this). The same applies to receiving states who have equated migration with development and see diaspora strategies and diasporic involvement with their homelands as a way to increase development there. However, again, this makes assumptions around loyalty to homeland(s) and feelings of belonging towards them - work I have done, e.g., on the Greek diaspora in Australia has demonstrated that although they feel connected to Greece emotionally and culturally, they do not necessarily wish to help it economically (see Mavroudi 2017).

What is arguably needed is more co-operation between states and a realisation that people live within and across borders to varying degrees and in different ways. People can and do negotiate belonging to multiple nations, regions, places, and so forth. People may therefore want to contribute in multiple contexts or may struggle to contribute in any contexts. What is paramount, however, is that receiving states enable people to live and work to their full capacity and skill level so that issues such as brain waste are avoided. There is a need also to go beyond simplistic assumptions around assimilation, integration and protectionist nationalization and to

recognise not only the diversity which exists but also the very real hardships that many migrants continue to face because of how they are positioned in the labour market as well as socially and politically in the host countries as well as issues such as prejudice and intolerance. A more nuanced conversation around migrants and those in diaspora is needed, one which recognises this diversity but also pays attention to the ways in which people still construct more narrowly defined and potentially exclusionary nationalism and national identity (Mavroudi 2010a; Mavroudi 2020).

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. States need to respect the wishes of groups who wish to realise self-determination and engage in dialogue with them to understand why they seek this. However, the reality is that this is a difficult process, not least because those seeking self-determination may themselves not be united and because there is a lack of political will to allow it. There may be fears of violence, instability and fragmentation but states should not oppress those who wish to govern more autonomously. It may be, e.g., that desires for self-determination are driven by feelings of past and present suffering and injustices so if these are addressed, this can pave the way potentially for living together in diversity, whilst respecting differences, rather than living apart in ever more fragmented national units (see e.g. Mavroudi 2010b). There needs to be a move away from states which imagine themselves are somehow homogenous or even in majority-minority terms, as this potentially ignores complexities of belonging on the ground. Unfortunately, although self-determination can be seen as a positive and empowering idea, it does also potentially serve to divide and encourage nation-building around more narrow ethno-national and religious notions of nationalism. This does not encourage people to live together but rather, separates them: it also creates problems in terms of immigration because if people perceive their state as homogenous, they may not want others coming in. However, if people are going to live together in larger states, in which there are multiple and complex identities and in which the nation is imagined and performed in inclusive ways, then people need to feel like they belong there. They should not have to choose allegiances or citizenship. The reality is that societies and cultures are mixed and complex and this is not just the result of more recent migration. However, in addition, by viewing states and nationalism as diverse and inclusive, we pave the way to manage and encourage encounters in positive ways in which people feel valued and included, have a voice and are not subject to racism, discrimination, or prejudice. This is an ideal scenario, for sure, but one that we need to work towards. The world is divided into a nation-state system and we are blinded by methodological nationalism as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) reminded us; however, we can ensure that nationalism is constructed and enacted in positive and inclusionary ways and not based around narrow interpretations of culture, language, history, identity and religion. This goes for states, but also for diasporas too, and there are those within diasporic groups who have resorted to constructing more extreme and exclusionary notions of national identity in order to try and achieve unity, control and/or self-determination (Conversi 2012; Carter 2003). This also relates to issues of representation, tensions and power relations: who is representing what, for whom, and what are the consequences of this for diasporas and sending/receiving contexts (see

e.g. Godin and Doná 2016 on young people in diaspora and online representations).

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. I would say that although the field of diaspora studies is quite small and within geography, it is even smaller, I am heartened by the increasing interest in it by scholars and by states. Diaspora, as a word, is more in use by the media, and the public has perhaps a growing appreciation of it. Having said that, I think it's necessary to see diaspora studies as interdisciplinary not just in the sense that many scholars of different disciplines study diaspora in their own ways but that we need more interactions between such scholars. There are many scholars working in the field of diaspora politics, diaspora mobilisation and diaspora strategies as well as in the field of diasporic identities and belonging. I would like to see more work using a more joined up approach to diaspora whereby all aspects of diasporic lives are considered, not just one facet for example, and across scales and spaces. A good example of recent work which does this is Vathi and Burrell (2020).

There is interesting research coming out which stresses how those in diaspora can negotiate national belongings, but also realise that they are connected to wider groups of people beyond their own diaspora. They are then using such connections to make political claims in transnational ways, which are aimed at dealing with wider issues of human rights and injustices which although may be based around specific causes, are also linked to a wider need to create a better world (see e.g. Blachnicka-Ciacek 2018 and Salih et al 2020). In general, there is a need for more research, conceptualisation, and uses of diaspora to help create positive social and political change. This can be seen for example in the work of Ho et al (2015), who call for a feminist ethics of care within diaspora studies and diaspora strategies in particular, in which uneven relationships between people and countries are interrogated and there is a commitment to social and political justice in the relationships and interactions across scales and spaces. A large part of this is also a recognition of past injustices, (dis)connections and oppressions which continue to have an impact on current lives and identities, as the work of Gilroy (1991), Upadhyay (2013), and Ndhlovu (2016) amongst others has demonstrated, and which governments need to be aware of and address (Dickinson 2012), such colonial/postcolonial collisions. More recent work also examines this from an LGBT+ perspective (see Rouhani 2019; Koegler 2020; Dhoest 2020 and Sandal 2020 e.g.) and this stresses the need to examine sub-groups within diasporas and webs of interactions in which they are positioned. This is also important because of the ways in which sending countries attempt to try and monitor, control and shape those they see as 'their' diasporas and can lead to in/exclusions, intimidation and fear (see e.g. Baser and Ozturk 2020; Moss 2018 and Tsourapas 2020). We need to continue with work on generational and other differences in diaspora - it is important to demonstrate how diasporas are diverse and what their interactions are with others within Global North and Global South contexts (see e.g. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020). There is a need also for more research which focuses on diaspora in different contexts, beyond the Anglo and euro centric powers, written by scholars from these places (and

which is arguably made available in different languages) but which is analytically as well as empirically rich. This is definitely happening but more is needed.

Diaspora studies needs to continue its commitment to transgressing borders and boundaries by ensuring that as many voices are heard as possible: from the academic, the policy maker, to third plus generations to younger generations, rich, poor, women, men children, LGBT+, connected and disconnected to one other and to other places and people, paying attention to intersectionalities and how people are positioned. Finally, and as research is increasingly stressing (see e.g., Ponzanesi 2020), it is necessary to further examine online-offline interactions and the ways in which material and virtual worlds collide and intersect within people's lives.

References

Anthias, F. (1998) Evaluating diaspora: beyond 'ethnicity'? *Sociology* 32 3 557-580

Baser, B. & Ozturk, A.E (2020) Positive and Negative Diaspora Governance in Context: From Public Diplomacy to Transnational Authoritarianism, *Middle East Critique*, 29:3, 319-334, DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2020.1770449

Blachnicka-Ciacek, D. (2018) Palestine as 'a State of Mind': Second-Generation Polish and British Palestinians' Search for Home and Belonging. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 44 (11), 1915-1931, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1369868

Bhabha, H. (1994) *The location of culture* Routledge, London

Blunt, A. (2007) Cultural geographies of migration: mobility, transnationality and diaspora, *Progress in Human Geography,* 31(5), 684-694

Brubaker, R. (2005) "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28 (1):1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000289997.

Christou, A. (2011) Narrating Lives in (E)motion: Embodiment, Belongingness and Displacement in Diasporic Spaces of Home and Return. *Emotion, Space and Society* 4: 249-257.

Dhoest, A. (2020) 'Intersectional identifications: Ethnicity and sexuality among diasporic queer women in Belgium', *Ethnicities*, 20(5), pp. 1025–1043. doi: 10.1177/1468796819873255.

Dickinson, J. (2012), Decolonising the diaspora: neo-colonial performances of Indian history in East Africa. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37: 609-623. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00496.x

Dwyer, C. (2000) Negotiating diasporic identities: Young British South Asian Muslim women, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23 (4), 475-486.

Carter, S. (2005), The geopolitics of diaspora. Area, 37: 54-63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2005.00601.x

Conversi, D. (2012) Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38 (9) 1357-1379

Clifford, J. (1997) *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2020) Introduction: recentering the South in studies of migration, *Migration and Society*, 3, 1, 1-18.

Gilroy, P. (1991) It Ain't where you're from, it's where you're At..., *Third Text,* 5:13, 3-16, DOI: 10.1080/09528829108576284

Godin, M. and Doná, G. (2016) New Social Media and Politics of Representation: Young Congolese in the Diaspora and Beyond, *Refuge*, 32 (1) 1-12

Hall, S. 1999. Cultural identity and diaspora. In: S. Vertovec and R. Cohen (Eds.) *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism.* Elgar, Cheltenham, pp. 299-314.

Ho, E., Boyle, M. and Yeoh, B. (2015) Recasting diaspora strategies through feminist care ethics, *Geoforum*,59, 206-214

Houston, H. and Wright, R. (2003) Making and remaking Tibetan diasporic identities. *Social & Cultural Geography 4*, 217-232.

Koegler, C. (2020) Queer Home-Making and Black Britain: Claiming, Ageing, Living, *Interventions*, 22:7, 879-896, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2020.1718536

Mavroudi, E. (2020) Feeling Greek, speaking Greek? National identity and language negotiation amongst the Greek diaspora in Australia, *Geoforum*,

116,130-139.

Mavroudi, E. (2019) Revisiting diaspora as process: timespace, performative diasporas?. In K. Mitchell, R. Jones & J.L. Fluri (Eds.), *Handbook on Critical Geographies of Migration*, Edward Elgar

Mavroudi, E. and Holt, L. (2015) (Re)constructing nationalisms in schools in the context of diverse globalized societies, in T. Matesjkova and M. Antonsich *Governing through Diversity: Migration Societies in Post-Multiculturalist Times*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Mavroudi, E. (2017) Deconstructing diasporic mobilisation at a time of crisis: perspectives from the Palestinian and Greek diasporas, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 44 (8), 1309-1324

Mavroudi, E.(2010a) Nationalism, the Nation and Migration: Searching for Purity and Diversity, *Space and Polity*, 14:3, 219-233, DOI: 10.1080/13562576.2010.532951

Mavroudi, E. (2010b), Imagining a Shared State in Palestine–Israel. *Antipode*, 42: 152-178. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00735.x

Mavroudi, E. (2007) Diaspora as Process: (De)Constructing Boundaries. *Geography Compass*, 1: 467-479. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2007.00033.x

Morawska, E. T. (2011) 'Diaspora' diasporas' representations of their homelands: exploring the polymorphs. Ethnic and Racial Studies 34, 1029–1048.

Moss, D.M. (2018) The ties that bind: Internet communication technologies, networked authoritarianism, and 'voice' in the Syrian diaspora, *Globalizations*, 15:2, 265-282, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2016.1263079

Ndhlovu, F. (2016) A decolonial critique of diaspora identity theories and the notion of superdiversity, *Diaspora Studies*, 9:1, 28 40, DOI: 10.1080/09739572.2015.1088612

Ní Laoire, C. (2003) "Editorial Introduction: Locating Geographies of Diaspora" *International Journal of Population Geography,* 9. 275-80.

Ponzanesi, S. (2020) Digital Diasporas: Postcoloniality, Media and Affect, *Interventions*, 22:8, 977-993, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2020.1718537

Rouhani, F. (2019) Belonging, desire, and queer Iranian diasporic politics,

Emotion, Space and Society, 31,126-132

Said E (2000) Invention, memory and place *Critical Inquiry* 26 175-192

Salih, R., Zambelli, E.& L. Welchman (2020) "From Standing Rock to Palestine we are United": diaspora politics, decolonization and the intersectionality of struggles, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2020.1779948

Sandal, H. (2020) Radical Queer Epistemic Network: Kurdish Diaspora, Futurity, and Sexual Politics, *Migration Letters* 17, 81-90

Soysal, Y.S. (2000) Citizenship and identity: living in diasporas in post-war Europe?, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23:1, 1-15, DOI: 10.1080/014198700329105

Tolia-Kelly, D. (2004) "Locating Processes of Identification: Studying the Precipitates of Re-Memory through Artefacts in the British Asian Home." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29 (3). 314–29. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-2754.2004.00303.x.

Tsourapas, G. (2020) The long arm of the Arab state, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43:2, 351-370, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2019.1585558

Upadhyay, N. (2013) Un/settling Im/migrants: Towards Decolonising Immigrant-Indigenous Relationships, in: Renata Seredyńska-Abou Eid (ed) *Diasporic Choices*, Inter-Disciplinary Press Oxford, United Kingdom 185-199

Vathi, Z. and Burrell, K. (2020) 'The making and unmaking of an urban diaspora: The role of the physical environment and materialities in belongingness, displacement and mobilisation in Toxteth, Liverpool', *Urban Studies*. doi: 10.1177/0042098020909079

Werbner, P. (2004) Theorising complex diasporas: purity and hybridity in the

South Asian public sphere in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, 895-911.

Wimmer, A., and Schiller, N.G. (2002). Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences. *Global Networks, 2(4)*, 301-334.