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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. I argue in *Global diasporas: an Introduction* (2008) that it is important to avoid a formal definition of diaspora and deliberately use the expression ‘common features’ to signify that not every diaspora will exhibit every feature listed, nor will they be present to the same degree over time and in all settings. I analogize the following features as the main ‘strands’ that go into the making of a ‘diasporic rope’.

Common features of a diaspora

Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;

alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;

a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;

an idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;

the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;

a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;

a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;

a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and

the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

I have no problem with the extension of the original group of 'victim diasporas' and identify other types, such as, labour, imperial, trade and deterritorialized diasporas. This can (and has) been extended further by other writers. Obviously, this proliferation can continue to the point of absurdity when, for example, the newly fashionable word is applied to any identifiable social group or minority.

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 little likelihood that states collectively will discuss diaspora policies, but many states are actively looking at how other states engage 'their' diasporas and seek to emulate what are seen as successful policies. I put the word 'their' in inverted commas to indicate that many states, and some scholars, imagine that diasporas 'belong' to states. This is not true. Many diasporas existed before particular states came into existence and, in any case, most diasporas will resist being seen, in any simple way, as an arm of particular states.

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. As my answer to question 2 indicates, I see many diasporas as existing before the nation-state system (most states are post-Second World War inventions). Diasporas live uneasily alongside states and may outlive states. In other words, nation-states and diasporas should be seen as separate forms of social affiliation, which sometimes overlap and intermesh, but not always. I concur with the implication of your question – namely that nation-states are not the only or the best way of managing diversity. Too great an assertion of nationalism will lead, and has led, to more diasporas.

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 an older scholar, I see this somewhat differently than the question implies. When I started in the field, there was no such thing as ‘diaspora studies’, although there were studies of individual diasporas. Now there are many dedicated courses and a number of journals explicitly using the title ‘diaspora studies’. The main tendency in the last few years has been to explore the subjective dimensions of diasporic identification – how diaspora is experienced, performed, enacted, even created. The *Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies* (eds. Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer), published in 2019 has a good selection of subjective accounts of diaspora, in addition to earlier perspectives.