

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. As an analytic concept, diaspora is one of the contested phenomena in the field of immigration studies. Indeed, the term has been associated with the expulsion of Jewish from Palestine by the Babylonians in the late 6th century BC. These forced migrants' descendants were scattered in different parts of the world and were originally connoted as diaspora. However, since the second half of the last century, diaspora started losing its original meaning. The term was deployed to describe significantly different groups of people living in the migration/ minority context. Scholars of modern diaspora, in addition to Jewish and other traditional Diasporas, scrutinized the experience of other minority groups, including the economic and political practices of the Turkish, Africans and East Europeans in Western Europe, Latinos in the USA, as well as Indians and Philippines in the Middle East, to name just a few. These groups are considered actors connecting their host countries to their homelands. In this understanding, the victimhood, as a key factor in the diaspora formation, is weaned. As William Safran noted, since the second half of the past century, the term 'diaspora' has been transformed from a name for a specific group to a common name for several categories of people. Here he draws a parallel with the term 'ghetto', as it changed from a name for a particular geographical location (Jewish area of Venice) to a name for all urban areas populated by least-privileged sections of the society.

To develop an analytic framework for the concept, social scientists fashioned working definitions for the concept, while others developed typologies describing what the term modern diaspora stands for. In addition to expanding the concept beyond the expulsion and victimhood frame, several other factors generate the divide among scholars regarding how to conceptualize the diaspora. One aspect relates to the dimension at which the concept is looked at. For instance, some analysts approach the phenomenon from the hostland perspective, such as integrating and inclusion of immigrants to the host society. Conversely, others listed typologies that describe the diaspora in which the homeland is the main reference point.

Although these definitions and typologies of diaspora sharpened our conceptual understanding of the term and are in one way or another adopted in the literature, the extensive conceptual proliferation of the term is yet to produce an analytically consensual definition of the diaspora in the field of immigration. It has been accurately noted that in all these proliferations of the concept, there are three core elements for the understanding diaspora, namely: dispersions in hostlands; orientation to a homeland; and self-awareness of group identity (or boundary-maintenance, as some calls it) in the hostland.

Having said that, in practice, I lean towards definitions that focus on diasporic practices and projects rather than those that consider diaspora as a specific actual entity.

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. The diaspora's two core characteristics are 1) they are dispersed into different political domains (host-lands), and 2) they are collectively oriented into other political domains (homelands). Furthermore, globalization and technological advances extensively increased the interconnection and interdependence of these political domains (host-lands and homelands). In that context, diaspora became a sword with two edges for both host-lands and homelands. In both domains, diaspora may pose challenges and/or generate opportunities. In the host-land, they could develop parallel lives and create security concerns, but they can also be a vital carrier of national interests in the international arenas. For the homelands, diaspora can generate internal instability and contribute to civil conflicts. Still, they are also a source of enormous financial, human, and social capital and may form a strategic political player internally and externally. In short, there might be real incentives for both homelands and host-lands states to mobilize diaspora for their political, economic, and social interests internationally. I can think of the daughter of today's Somali mother in Turkey will be a Turkish-Somali mother tomorrow. Therefore, the diaspora's loyalty is vital for both states, but yes, I think, instead of competing strategies, states would benefit more from cooperation strategies.

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. There is no doubt that globalization shapes the nation-state's nature; however, I am not a proponent of the argument that globalization is sweepingly wiping the nation-state as the main actor in the international arenas. As globalization weakens some aspects of the nation-state, it strengthens some other elements of the nation-state. For instance, globalization generates opportunities for terrorism to thrive and thus undermine the state. On the other hand, to ensure its citizens' security, the state is obliged to improve its capabilities to challenge the impact of globalization on terrorism. Again, globalization generates incentives for capital and goods

to flow internationally and people to migrate in to escape insecurities and search for better lives. However, research findings show that these same globalization forces have stimulated the protectionist voices and contributed to the eventual rise of right-wing populist parties in the West. Therefore, I think the relationship between globalization and the nation-state, on the one hand, and the nation-state and diaspora, on the other, is not linear.

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. Again, the core characteristics of the diaspora have implications on the methodological approach of studying the phenomenon. A central concern relates to the role of the nation-state in the analysis. For example, together, dispersion in host-lands and orientation to a homeland generates the need for theoretically and empirically a method that may comprehend diasporic practices across state borders. Therefore, research on diaspora needs new methodological tools that could realize beyond nation-state borders. Thus, methodological nationalism is unsuitable for understanding diaspora. There is a growing significant and growing research interest in transnational migration. I consider diaspora studies as part of this scholarship. Besides, transnational migration scholars are devoting efforts to dealing with methodological challenges of studying the ties, networks, and practices that transcend national borders. Valentina Mazzucato's 'Simultaneous Matched Sample' method is one of those efforts. I think diaspora studies would benefit from these efforts.