

## From Exile to Diaspora and from National to Transnational Binds under the Driving Forces of Globalization

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**Abstract.** The easiness with which borders are crossed, the ever increasing international flows and the free movement of capital or financial means across any given region of the globe, as well as the ease with which the citizen of the 21st century pictures oneself a citizen of the world, have challenged theorization to produce new epistemological instances able to conceptualize contemporary transformations. Ensuing, the present paper takes an informed look at the transitions from the categories of “exile” to “diaspora”, or from “international” to “transnational” as concepts better able to reflect the complex sociological changes at work in the 21st century. By use of classic and contemporary theorization, along with examples, the paper marks the gradual, but definite movement towards the latter categories.

**Received:**  
October, 2012  
**1st Revision:**  
January, 2013  
**Accepted:**  
March, 2013

**Keywords:** exile, diaspora, transnationalism, globalization, transition.

**JEL classification:** A13, A14

### INTRODUCTION – CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION MOVEMENTS

Starting with the 1980s, migration movements grew rapidly, in many more directions than before, to such a degree that regions previously considered areas of emigration became spaces of immigration, as Australia, Western Europe and, recently, Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union states embody major sites of population movements. Among the factors leading to such massive movements, inequalities within and between regions, the continuous expansion of capital, occupational mobility directly related to people’s desire for a better life, as well as civil and political wars, stand out. Illustrating the mentioned causes for the desire or need to re-locate, the people on the move are labor migrants (legal or illegal), highly-qualified specialists, businessmen, exchange students, refugees, intellectuals and asylum seekers. As documented in Avtar Brah’s study (1996), in 1990, the International Organization for Migration counted more than 80 million such ‘migrants’. Out of them, 30 million were accounted to be in a somewhat “irregular situation”, while 15 million were refugees or asylum seekers. Moving on, the World Migration Report for 2008, accounts for more than 200 million estimated international migrants in the world today (2). Almost half of all migrants are women – 49.6% (more women than men in every region of the world except in Africa and Asia/Middle East (32). South-South migration (i.e. movement from developing countries to developing countries) is as signifi-

cant (61 million people) as South-North migration (i.e. movement from developing countries to developed countries) which comprised 62 million people in 2005 (80). The projected annual net figure of migrants moving to more developed regions for 2005-2010 is 2.5 million people and that of 2005-2050 is 2.3 million. This is 40% higher than the average annual net migration figure of 1.6 million people flowing to developed countries during 1960-2005 (36). Europe (including Central Asian countries) hosts largest numbers of migrants – nearly 70.6 million people in 2005 (523). North America is second, hosting more than 45.1 million migrants, followed by Asia with nearly 25.3 million migrants. The Middle East hosts 18.8 million migrants, Africa 16.9 million, South America 6.6 million with Oceania having the least at 5 million (523)<sup>1</sup>.

As noted in Brah's study (178), the notion of 'economic migrant', challenged previous theorization in migration studies, as it referred to newly observed categories of people on the move (industrialists, commercial entrepreneurs, YUPEEs (Young Urban Professionals) benefiting from 'fluid citizenship'), all of them susceptible to be placed under the traditional categories of political or economic refugees. Along the category of the 'tourist', these people's movements are further contextualized against a background of a reshaped world order, where globalization is not the only engine behind growing capital accumulation, heightened networking and inter-connectivity across all regions of the globe, flexible specialization of work, new division of labor, but especially a new transnational configuration articulating every aspect of human activity, rendering the 21<sup>st</sup> century slogan "act local, think global" part of the common discourse of contemporary times.

## THE CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE TRANSITION FROM EXILE, MIGRATION, TO DIASPORA

The easiness with which borders are crossed, the speed and effectiveness of communication under any form, in any part of the globe, the ever increasing international flows and the free movement of capital and financial means across any given region of the globe, as well as the ease with which the citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century pictures oneself as citizen of the world, able to adapt to any region, absorb and live comfortably in almost any culture, as well as the privileged status of becoming anywhere and at any point a tourist, have challenged theorization to produce new epistemological instances able to compete with and conceptualize these ontological transformations.

Already mentioned, but not insisted upon in Kaplan's *Questions of Travel* (127), as a notion concluding the postmodern discourse on migration, *diaspora* comes into focus as a notion more able to sustain modern people migration, in step with new forms of displacement. Still, in 2000, Hammed Shahidian quotes Joseph Brodsky who proposes 'exile' (1990) as nothing more than the "very moment of departure, of expulsion" (Brodsky in Shahidian 71). Moreover, what happens after that "is both too comfortable and too autonomous to be called by this name: "If we have a common denominator, it lacks a name" (71). In 2003, Gabriel Sheffer proposes that such terms as "diaspora", "diasporism", "diasporic", "diasporan" be clarified and help to a better understanding of nowadays society especially since, in time, they have been applied to a variety of social-political phenomena and institutions as documented by Safran (1991). In fact, as argued by the editor of the field's journal, *Diaspora*, Khacig Tölölyan, the plural of diaspora – diasporas is a recent creation, while still electronic spellers in 2011 do not recognize either the singular or the plural form. Starting from the usually utilized connection of the term 'diaspora' to the Jewish exile existence in closed communities outside the Holy Land, the origin of the term is relegated to the Greek *speiro* which means 'to sow', *dia* means 'over', as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iom.org.ph/imagelibraryoutput/WMRpresskit/Facts%20and%20Figures/Facts%20and%20Figures%20Eng.pdf>

it appears in the Old Testament – “Thou shalt be a diaspora in all kingdoms of the earth” (Deut.28, 25) and in the History of the Peloponnesian War (II, 27) by Thucydides to describe the dispersal of Aeginetans.

The definition provided by Sheffer as primary working frame, facilitates points of entry into the concept:

an ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. Based on aggregate decision to settle permanently in host countries, but to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and their entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. Among their various activities, members of such diasporas establish trans-state networks that reflect complex relationships among the diasporas, their host countries, their homelands, and international actors. (Sheffer 10)

Going beyond the individual or collective movement of people, diaspora includes the idea of community, of inter-connection, of sharing a set of *diaporic*, constitutive features. The term ‘diaspora’ has been applied not only to dislocated communities, but also to members of clashing civilizations (Huntington 1993), to members of pan-diasporas, like the Muslims and members of universal churches like Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican. Already present in scholar journals since the 1990s, the term is used to analyze above-mentioned contemporary displacement and forms of aggregation, but not itself analyzed as Avtar Brah (1996) observes, further noticing that James Clifford (in 1994) underlined that it is not an easy task to break ‘diaspora’ – the theoretical concept from ‘diasporic discourse’ and distinguish among historical ‘experiences’ of diaspora (Clifford in Brah 179). According to Webster Dictionary, ‘diaspora’ means ‘dispersion from’. As such, the notion implies the pre-existence of a center, a core locus from which dispersion occurs, while, at the same time, implying the existence of several places resulting from the dispersion, multiple locations and multiple journeys. In dictionaries, the term is associated with the dispersion of the Jews after the Babylonian exile and hence it bears connotation to the European cartography of displacement. Yet, what is more important is that in the context of late 20<sup>th</sup> century, early 21<sup>st</sup> century, *diaspora* takes this traditional type of dispersion only as point of origin, primary locus of departure.

Consistent with the notion of diaspora are the notions of ‘border’ and ‘journey’. The notion of border denotes the line that is at the same time geographical, political, psychological and cultural; territory to be delineated and defended if circumstances call for it against outsiders, foreigners, the Other; “forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression” (Brah 198). Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization of border uses the term to reflect on the social conditions of life at the Texas-US Southwest or Mexican threshold where “the Third World grates against the First and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 3). At the core of the notion of diaspora lies the motif of “the journey” but this notion is not necessarily connected to diaspora, as not every journey or “casual travel” (Brah 182) is a diasporic one. One particular detail stands out, as diasporic journeys are not temporary ones, but settling down ones, making a home in the place of destination and trying to re-grow roots. In the case of diasporic journeying, the circumstances of departure and arrival are very important. If one is to use most efficiently the devices offered by diaspora, it is necessary to know whether the diasporic community has been formed by conquest or colonization (case of European diasporas), or whether it has been formed by capture and removal of the group through slavery or labor (case of African, Asian, Caribbean diasporas). On the other hand, people may have to leave originary homes because of expul-

sion (Jewish groups) or persecution (Eastern Europe), as political regimes made it impossible for certain to envisage life in the native country (contemporary refugees - Sri Lankans, Somalis, Bosnian, Muslims etc). When causes derive from wars which result in the emergence of a new nation on the territory previously occupied by others (Palestine since the formation of Israel), or when people move for reasons related to work, the lures of a better life, away from certain political regimes and frail economies (African-Caribbean, Asians, Romanians, Irish), then again, the concept of diaspora better reflects the process. As experiences of diasporas are different, there are multiple journeys to speak of, but because all refer, in essence, to a certain kind of displacement, at some point, they lead to a confluence of narratives (Brah 183) that point to the one journey lived and re-lived, reproduced, partially or entirely repeated, as each diasporan and diasporic community goes through this journey and registers its parameters into the collective discourse. By ever repeating, transforming and reshaping, the identity of each such community is not fixed, but fluid and subject to various circumstances shaping the journey. It comes alive through everyday practices and is individually or collectively shared. Furthermore, the individual and the community populate the diasporic individual and collective imaginary not only with the symbolism of the journey, but also with the culture of the host society, together with many other items: gender, class, age, race, language etc. Completing the model of multiple journeys, the term diaspora becomes heterogeneous, a complex unit of multiplicities, aiding to construct the “we” vs. “them” (diasporans vs. natives), paradoxically leading back to the bipolar oppositions us/them, black/white, insider/outsider. Moreover, drawing upon the heterogeneous aspect, as well as implicit/explicit oppositions, diaspora led to a ramification of significations for the term, engendering vocabulary borrowed, newly born, or molded so as reflect the multiple definitions and symbolism of the dislocation experience. Automatically then, each diasporic community should be treated in its specificity and each diasporic discourse takes on the imprints of the specific diasporic group or individual experience, further developed into the concept of relational multi-locationality (Brah 185). To conclude,

the concept of diaspora concerns the historically variable forms of relationality within and between diasporic formations. It is about relations of power that similarise and differentiate between and across changing diasporic constellations; the concept of diaspora centers on the configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another. (Brah 183)

Another important issue involved in the features of diasporism (understood as discernible, visible phenomenon of dislocation, as used by Sheffer 12), is the distinction that should be made between ‘migrants’ and ‘diaspora’, as well as ‘diaspora’ and ‘minority’. Primarily, according to Gabriel Sheffer (2003), the difference between migrants and diaspora – although highly variable – is the difference between transient individuals and groups before settling in host countries and permanent formations, sometimes even second, third, fourth generation citizens and even these are sometimes “formally and informally considered and widely referred to as immigrants or migrants (Sheffer 16). The idea to showcase individuals and groups as migrants or members of a diaspora according to this criterion of periodization and temporization of stay, proves blurry and insufficient. A conceptual clarification of the point in time where migrants informally and formally (surveys, dates of arrival, dates of departure, application for citizenship, purchase of a home in the host country etc) switch from the status of immigrant to that of diasporan is needed to better understand this complex social phenomenon and in this sense Sheffer (19) re-enacts the concept of “involved social actors” together with individual-choice and collective-choice models (as discussed in Shain 2004). In the other direction, diaspora versus minority, Brah mentions Britain’s tendency to discuss diaspora along a majority/

minority axis (186), where the discourse of minority marks histories of immigration control, policing racial violence, inferiorisation and discrimination of these groups.

In Brah's attempt to theorize the term 'diaspora', he departs from the argument that 'diaspora' offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a 'homing' desire which is not the same thing as desire for a 'homeland': "his distinction is important [...] because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of return" (180). This ideology of return is a constitutive feature of diaspora which individualizes the diasporic discourse against the exilic one. Suggestively entitling his article "Sociology and Exile: Banishment and Tensional Loyalties" (2000), Hammed Shahidian re-iterates the vocabulary and associated feelings of social alienation and spatial displacement (see also Featherstone and Lash 1995), the discussion of the stranger in the writings of Simmel (1971), focusing on the actuality of exilic condition which implies social 'otherness', the feeling of exclusion.

## THE MOVE TOWARDS TRANSNATIONALISM UNDER THE FORCES OF GLOBALIZATION

Diasporic ideology, while keeping some of the feelings associated with estrangement, takes perspective steps further, and leads towards a personality more involved in the fabric of the new society and moment, and, at the same time sustains a permanent gaze back to the origin homeland, holding on to the possibility of return; roots are not permanently cut. What has been ignored in field writings is the on-going process of incorporation of these same immigrants into the society and politics of the host country. As such, the significance of the migrants to the country of origin rests on the extent of their incorporation into the host country. Consequently, it is necessary to re-think the migration process not only in terms of up-rooted-ness and changing status, but also in terms of the remaining relationship with the 'home' nation-states, immigrant incorporation and identity. Trying to define the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together the society of origin and the host society, towards social fields that cross geographic, political and cultural borders, led to the concept of transnationalism and the transition from 'immigrant' to 'transmigrant'. The concept of 'transnationalism' is tackled almost simultaneously by Appadurai 1988, Gupta 1992 and concludes the "transnational turn" in 1994, when in the frequently quoted or referred back to anthropological study *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation States*, Basch et al. (1994), recognize the practice of transnationalism in the lives of migrant communities and acknowledge the fact that migrant actions have multiple and simultaneous effects in both societies - home and host - , as "transmigrants take actions, make decisions, develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states" (Basch et al. 7). At the same time, scholar work becomes less concerned with conflicting inner identity, but more with daily practices and empirical realities which forge different alliances and connections to the state – whether receiving or sending – as illustrated in the work of Shain (1999), Sheffer (2003), or Laguerre (2005). Included often times in the broader and more complex concept of transnationalism, diaspora acquires the features of trans – national phenomena, crossing territorial borders and connecting inner-state and outer-state communities.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Aside from the main contribution of transnationalism, that of conceiving diaspora/diasporic communities not only as local agents, but inscribing these communities into the global flows, adding content to the

theoretical terminology of internationalism, transnationalism allowed for a remapping of the boundaries of the state and national identity and made possible the incorporation of diaspora into International Relations theorizing, informing the more complex reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bridging between anthropological, social and cultural research and international relations research.

Associated with a proliferation of research in social sciences that seeks to understand how globalization and the ensuing transnational factor re-structure and/or affect the nation-state (Featherstone et al. 1995, Appadurai 1996, Sassen 1996, Castells 1997), the notion of a transnational identity comes to inform a field of study where Appadurai claims that:

the nationalist genie, never perfectly contained in the bottle of the territorial state, is now itself diasporic. Carried in the repertoires of increasingly mobile populations it is increasingly unrestrained by ideas of spatial boundary and territorial sovereignty. (160)

The concept of transnationalism allowed scholar discussion to move beyond multiculturalism, pluralism, globalization, or postcolonial instances. It allowed for a more comprehensive view of the diasporic movement, it brought into focus concepts such as citizenship, governance, rights requirement, distribution and recognition in the form of diaspora politics, concepts under-addressed in previous discussions more pre-occupied with identity in formation and transformation, nation-national identity, cultural identity. A trademark of almost every process related to contemporary times, transnationalism has come to be associated with late 20<sup>th</sup> century mainly, having as point of origin recent immigration movements, but later, the concept has been applied to include other groups of people, as well as institutions and multiple modern activities. More importantly, transnationalism turned out to be a label to be applied and a concept to describe all forms of activism across borders, religious and ethnic communities, social movements etc. As such, transnationalism evolved as a distinct concept and not a sub-field of the larger domain of international migration (Beck 2000, 2001, 2002, Roudometof 2005). In step with the hastened demise of nationalism and a strong de-hyphenation of the nation-state, in accordance with the transnationalization of institutions and politics, as well as the rise of global hybrid cultures resulting from modern mass migration, consumerism and mass inter-connection, the key words of nowadays are globalization, transnationalism, postnationalism.

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