DIASPORIC COMMUNICATION: TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES AND COMMUNICATIVE SPACES

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Abstract

This article follows the process of development of academic debate and interest in the concept of diaspora and attempts to situate it within current analyses of postmodernity and globalisation as well as within developments in cultural studies and social anthropology. Drawing upon the theoretical conceptualisations of diasporas within these fields, the article is suggesting that diasporic cultural practices constitute ways of "imagination," of "institution" of "spaces" that often extend beyond the boundaries of place, of articulation of "imagined" and "encountered" community and of senses of belonging that straddle the "local versus global" and divide and, in the process, redefine locality and "the global." Crucial in such processes is the development of the "diasporic media spaces" that are increasingly in evidence in transnational and local settings. The article suggests that such spaces of negotiation and exchange are increasingly becoming sites where conflicting claims of belonging as well as common frameworks of identity and solidarity coexist and become articulated.

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Thinking about Diasporas

The concept of diaspora has a fairly long career in social science discourse, reflecting the inextricable connection between human geographical mobility and its various social dimensions, on the one hand, and human societies in their long process of evolution, on the other. As such, the concept of diaspora has reflected the changing nature of processes — and experiences — of displacement, dislocation, mobility and settlement that have marked human societies.

Over the past couple of decades, the concept has progressively come to centre stage in attempts to discuss and understand not only human mobility, but also its relationship to transnational flows of funds, goods, cultural products, ideologies or, to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology, the ethnoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes that are part and parcel of the broader phenomenon of globalisation (1993). This repositioning of the concept in social science discourse has accompanied a shift from debates that focused on human migration in the strict sense, that is, immigration, emigration and their regulation towards debates that attempted to integrate the study of human mobility and diasporic experience into the broader context of debates on citizenship, identity and culture and the theoretical and conceptual contexts of the theorisation and understanding of modernity, postmodernity (or late modernity) and processes of globalisation.

Today, the concept of the diaspora is inseparable from the process of maintaining and negotiating and in some cases reinventing cultural identities. Drawing upon Benedict Anderson's seminal analysis of national identity (1983), diasporic identities are "imagined" and diasporas constitute "imagined communities" where the sense of belonging is socially constructed on the basis of an equally "imagined" common origin, mythic past, diasporic condition or some other raw material upon which identities can be imagined. What is more, Anderson's perspective has given added impetus to ways of thinking about identity that move away from "primordialist" notions and focus on various aspects of their social construction. This new development has provided the much-needed link between the study of migration and its context and perspectives on identity within anthropology and cultural studies

The historical meanings of diaspora are connected with those communities that share some or all of the following characteristics proposed by Safran (1991). There are five characteristics:

- the original community has been spread from the homeland to two or more countries; they are bound from their disparate geographical locations by a common vision, memory or myth about their homelands;
- they have a belief that they will never be accepted by their host societies and therefore develop their autonomous cultural and social needs;
- they or their descendants will return to the homeland should the conditions prove favourable;
- they should continue to maintain support for homeland and therefore the communal consciousness and solidarity enables them to continue these activities (Safran 1991, 83-4).

The above list, although a useful one has many features that concern the relationship of the diasporic group with its homeland. Cohen (1997) proposes that

perhaps these features need to be adjusted and that four other features should be added to the list proposed by Safran. The adjustment concerns the first feature, which is mainly to do with diasporic communities in exile. There is sufficient discourse describing the details of the characteristics and definition of diaspora elsewhere and therefore not necessary to duplicate it here. Suffice to say that Cohen has proposed four additional features to Safran's five definitional desiderata. These are:

- those groups that scatter for voluntary or aggressive reasons should be included in the category diaspora;
- there should be a sufficient time period before any community can be described as a diaspora. There should be indications of strong links to the past or thwart the attempts to assimilate in the present as well as the future;
- more positive aspects of diasporic communities should be recognised. For instance, the tensions between ethnic, national and transnational identities can lead to creative formulations. The Islamic world and the early modern Spain where there were many advances made in the fields of medicine, theology, art, literature, science, commerce and industry is a case in point;
- that diasporic communities not only form a collective identity in the place of settlement or with their homeland, but also share a common identity with members of the same ethnic communities in other countries. What is more, although Cohen does not explicitly recognise this, it is increasingly realised that this sense of common identity is complemented by the establishment of diasporic communicative and cultural networks and spaces.

The original meaning of the word diaspora originated from Greek language concerning migration and colonisation. However, within the context of the Jews, Africans, Palestinian and the Armenians, the concept of diaspora attained an evil and violent meaning. Within this frame, diaspora achieved the connotation of displacement from a homeland, and therefore of a collective traumatic experience. This earlier definition of diaspora has provided a divergent view of the diasporic communities. As Cohen states:

> *The sense of unease or difference that members of the diaspora feel in their countries of settlement often results in a need for protective cover in the bosom of the community or a tendency to identify closely with the imagined homeland and with co-ethnic communities in other countries. Bonds of language, religion, culture and a sense of common history and perhaps a common fate impregnate such a transnational relationship and give it an affective, intimate quality that formal citizenship or even long settlement frequently lack. Thence arises the Catch-22 of many Jewish communities. Their fear breeds an in-group mentality. This is sensed by the peoples among whom they live, which in turn breeds distance, suspicion, hostility and ultimately anti-semitism. The system is complete when manifestations of prejudice engender new sources of apprehension and further inclinations to clannishness and endogamy* (Cohen 1997, 20).

However, there are many communities throughout the world that have maintained fairly strong collective identities and links with their homeland, or place of origin and some of these have not been agents of colonisation or passive victims of persecution. The idea of diaspora varies greatly and although attempts have

been made to provide a typology (Cohen 1997) the categories of victim (Jews, African and Armenians), labour (the Indian indentured labourers), trade (the Chinese and the Lebanese), imperial (the British) and cultural (the Caribbean abroad) are helpful.

Cohen's typology does not really take on board the late modern mobility among people of the world. His typology provides an indication of the types of diaspora that fit into the categories of victims, labourers, and traders, imperial and cultural. Additionally, it seems that the concept of diaspora applies to significant numbers of the population and not quite to the movement among smaller groups. Likewise, it makes a cursory reference to the movement of people through slavery, particularly the Africans to the Caribbean and Americas.

Cohen's work proposes a comprehensive range in the changing conceptions of diasporas, and he provides examples in each of the typologies described above. At the same time, his work leaves room for political and cultural resistance within a strongly global deterministic account.

Mapping the Diaspora: Anthropological and Postmodern Views

Anthropologists like Geertz (1986) have been theorising the changes arising from migration and that the subjects of their studies were no longer "there." As Cohen (1997) states that some of the great anthropologists like Malinowski and Levi-Strauss had a very different approach in methods and theories,

> *what they shared was the idea that the "alien" and the "other" were in "a world elsewhere." This world embodied different ways of thinking, reasoning, judging and behaving that were discontinuous with "our own" and acted as alternative "to us"* (Cohen 1997, 134).

The migration and creation of diasporas has brought the periphery to the centre and to a certain extent the centre to the periphery. The marginal groups or the "other" are now living nearby, co-existing and present. As Geetz warns, we have to be cautious that the reduction in physical space does not necessarily mean that the gaps in understanding cultures have been conquered. It could also mean that group identity is stronger as a response to the shrinking physical space between people. Likewise, that space has to be explored if we are to understand the similarities and how we cannot continue to ignore each other and also how our differences continue to be deep and in some cases insurmountable.

James Clifford (1992) has been the innovative scholar who has attempted to understand the character of spaces between people and has challenged the anthropologists tradition that non-Western people should be "nativised and localised." Clifford prefers to describe ways in which cultures "travel." This is the preferred word to "displacement," "nomadism," "pilgrimage" and "migration" as it conveys a two-way process loaded with cultural and suggestive of interactivity. As Clifford states:

> *To press the point: why not focus on any culture's furthest range of travel, while also looking at its centres, its villages its intensive field sites? How do groups negotiate themselves in external relationship, and how is a culture also a site of travel for others? How are spaces traversed from outside? How is*

> *one group's core another's periphery? Looked at this way, there would be no question of relegating to the margins a long list: missionaries, converts, literate or educated informants, explorers, prospectors, tourists, travellers, ethnographers, migrant labourers, recent immigrants, etc*. (Clifford 1992, 101).

However, Clifford has omitted a major group of people or possibly these come under the category of recent immigrants: the asylum seekers and refugees. The treatment of these people by the media in Western European countries is on the margins of violation of the International Human Rights. This negative media coverage in turn impacts upon politicians who swiftly change their perspectives in relation to public opinion, housing and education policies as well as attitudes among the population at large. These asylum seekers and refugees do not fit into the notions of travel as proposed by Clifford as they have been forced to move or have been uprooted for various political reasons.

Postmodern Views

For postmodernists, the approaches of politics and sociology were inadequate in denoting the fluidity (and travelling cultures as proposed by Clifford above) so prominent within the contemporary world. Writers like Homi Bhabha (1994) argue that in addition to the removal of national languages and national states in the global environment, we should also discard the singularities of class and gender as "primary conceptual and organisational categories." Bhabha states that we should take on board "multiple subject positions" like race, gender, generation institutional location, geopolitical locale and sexual orientation. These are components of the building blocks of identity in the postmodern world and these may be maintained simultaneously, successively or separately with varying degrees of vigour, passion and enthusiasm. Even the sociologists now recognise that social identity cannot be condensed to class identity. Factors such as gender, age, disability, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, civil status, musical styles and dress codes are powerful connections that provide identification and organisation.

Many sociologists and psychologists still assume that identities are solid structures, built in a more complex way, from a variety of "building blocks" (Cohen, 1997). However, writers such as Bhabha (1994) challenge this assumption and state that the articulation of the difference between "spaces" is where we need to focus our attention. He states:

> *The move away from the singularities of "class" or "gender" as primary conceptual and organisational categories, has resulted in the awareness of subject positions — of race, gender, generation, institutional, location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself* (Bhabha 1994, 1-2).

Within the post-modern frame we are asked to explore and celebrate the overlaps, the ambiguities, the displacements of difference, the mixing of cultures, religions, languages and ethnicities, all the factors that global capitalism facilitates. Also within the postmodern frame, the terms "hybridity" and "syncrety" or "syncretism" have been used by several writers to represent the advancement of new, dynamic, mixed cultures.

Hall (1992, 310-14) makes a significant link between the development of hybridity and the changing nature of diasporas. For Hall, the postmodern world is manifested by two contradictory tendencies: firstly the move towards globalisation with the emphasis on assimilation and homogenisation. Second, the reassertion of ethnic, nationalistic and religious identities, that is, the bringing to the fore of localism. Although there is no consensus as to whether such phenomena constitute a reaction to globalisation or part and parcel of the very process of transnationalisation of human interaction (Giddens 1990) or "the globalisation of primordia" (Appadurai 1993), there is, more or less general agreement as to the close link between processes of globalisation and localisation and the cultural and identity processes that these entail. Within this context, Hall argues that the cultural identities emerging are "in transition." They are drawing upon the variety of traditions and that there is the harmonisation of the old and the new without losing the past or assimilating into the new. Hall calls this process the development the "cultures of hybridity" and closely allies this growth with the "new diasporas" created by the colonial experience and the resultant postcolonial migrations.

Hall (1993) distances the cultures of hybridity from the internationalist narrative and the older interpretations of pluralism where boundaries do not intersect and the postmodernist "nomadic voyaging" or the rather simplistic overviews of global homogenisation. The hybrids that Hall refers to are closely linked with one of the characteristics of diaspora as posed by Safran, and referred to at the beginning of the chapter. The hybrid communities maintain strong links and identifications with the traditions of the "homeland." However, Hall differs with Safran in that the hybrid communities will not return to the past or if they do then these places will have transformed beyond recognition on the grounds of modernisation. In that sense, there is no going "home" again. There is detour and no return. But it is not only "back home" that has been caught up in the process of modernisation — diasporas themselves are deeply affected by their position at the centre of contemporary globalisation flows. Diasporas and diasporic experiences, even their apparently more traditionalist variants, should not be dismissed simplistically as backward — looking, as they are almost invariably constituting new transnational spaces of experience that are complexly interfacing with the experiential frameworks that both countries of settlement and purported countries of origin represent.

The diasporic communities have learnt to come to terms with formulating their cultural identities by taking on board several histories and cultures that belong to several "homes." These women and men are the product of a "diasporic consciousness" where identity "is always an open, complex, unfinished — always under construction" (Hall 1993, 362).

There are problems with the debates and issues discussed in postmodernity. One does not dispute that "postmodernity" is a global phenomenon. Yet discus-

sions in postmodernity rarely foreground the oppositional movements that have been globally initiated as part of the intellectual history that critiques and deconstructs the "totalising" tendencies of "the West" (Brah 1986, 224). The "crises of the West' issues were rarely addressed as matters of colonialism or racism and it seems to be looking inwards in terms of the "west" becoming the primary focus of attention as both subject and object in these debates. The conceptualisation of the diaspora within the postmodern context has to deconstruct the historical background of the movement of people following World War II. The communities that have settled in the Western European countries form a substantial part of the diasporic community map and also the main concern in this research.

Diaspora in this issue is being used *not* in the traditional sense of the scattering of tribes whose identity is secured through homeland to which they must return, whatever, the cost. The creation of Israel at the expense of Palestinians (with complicity of some nations) is a case in point. The usage of diaspora within the context of this research is not through purity, but as a recognition of the importance of heterogeneity and diversity, and as a conception of identity that celebrates and lives with difference and has some links with homelands.

The notions of home are also questionable. The issue of home within the contemporary diaspora becomes somewhat irrelevant. As Avtar Brah writes:

> *What is home? On the one hand, "home" is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of "origin." On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day…all this, as mediated by the historically specific of everyday social relations. In other words, the varying experiences of pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be differently experienced sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion compared with standing huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth century England* (Brah 1996, 192).

Brah argues the images conjured by the above text could easily be those of white English men and women. However, this experience of huddling around a makeshift fire in the nineteenth century, could easily consist of men and women brought over from Africa and Asia as servants; the descendants of Africans taken as slaves to the Americas; and it could have consisted the Irish, Jews and other immigrants. As Avtar Brah goes on to say "What range of subjectivities and subject positions would have been produced in this crucible?" Therefore, the notion of home "is intrinsically linked with the way in which the processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'"(Brah 1996, 194).

The issues at the heart of the diasporas are multiplicity of locations through geographical and cultural boundaries. Within the frame of contemporary diasporas, the notions of "home" and when a location becomes home are therefore linked with the issues related to inclusion or exclusion which tend to be subjectively experienced depending upon the circumstances. When does a location become a

home? How can one distinguish between feeling at home and staking a claim to a place as one's own? The first generation migrants still have attachments with home in terms of memories of what they have left behind. On the other hand, the experiences through the hardship of disruption and displacement as one tries to familiarise with the new social networks and learns to engage with the new political, economic and cultural realities have a major influence on staking a claim on home.

Among the second generation of migrants in Britain, the memories of homeland are known through the earlier generation or through visual or other forms of (oral) culture. Also within this second generation, there is a reconfiguration of social relations that are influenced by gender and to a certain extent class relations. And, more generally, as James Clifford has aptly pointed out, diasporic identities are not merely the products of travel or displacement but of the active engagement in "politics" or, in other words, cultural and political action that articulates different elements from different cultures and different frames of action and experience in one, more or less coherent whole (Clifford 1997).

Additionally, the diasporas proliferating at the beginning of the twenty-first century are in some ways quite different to the earlier diasporic identities. The difference being the new technologies and faster communications experienced by the groups in the new century, compared to the months it took to travel and communicate among the earlier diaspora groups. The development of the electronic media and faster modes of travel has meant that the notions of the global village have become attached with new meanings. For instance, there is now greater sharing of events as they occur, through satellite transmission. However, the interpretation of these events varies upon cultural, national and ethnic contexts. Cheap, long-distance travel and the resultant greater mobility also mean that families are able to visit homelands and families and friends in other parts of the world. Likewise, there are people from the homelands who are visiting the diasporic communities settled in various parts of the world. The developments on the Internet and the World Wide Web means that a variety of communities have been constructed through commonality of interests. This does not necessarily result in one-way process of cultural homogenisation. The consumption of visual or other forms of culture is mediated in complex ways at a global level.

Therefore, contemporary diasporas in this special issue will be seen as "exemplary communities" of the forms of migration that occurred in the mid- to late twentieth century. These diasporas echo with meanings of immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This does not necessarily imply that the concept of diaspora can be used to describe the varying conditions underlying the population movements. Rather, the concept of diaspora signals the understanding of historical and contemporary elements.

Diaspora and Hybrid Identities

The concept of ethnicity has been used in recent discourses to map the cultural boundaries between social groups and this chapter has expanded on the concept of national identity and "imagined communities." The aim of this section is to consider the related questions of cultural hybridity that have emerged from the paradigm shift of modernist to the postmodernist, and to evaluate the usefulness of such a concept within the diasporic context. In the postmodern frame, hybridity

has invaded sociological discourse and conflicts with the long-established classes and categories. Hybridity has become celebratory with the "migrant" as an exemplary embodiment of this consciousness.

There is tremendous fascination with the concept of cultural hybridity in that it is celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorised as commonplace and pervasive. However, this dichotomy posed over the transgressive power of and the routineness of hybridity does pose some problems with the postmodern theory. As Werbner and Modood (1997, 1) state, "it makes sense that hybrids are perceived to be endowed with unique powers, good or evil, and that hybrid moments, spaces or objects are hedged in elaborate rituals, carefully guarded and separated from mundane reality. Hybridity is here a theoretical metaconstruction of social order."

There is also the additional question of identity as not being fixed and stable and continuously changing, then what is the meaning of cultural identity? And why do questions of borders, boundaries and "pure" identities remain so important and are difficult to transcend? Too much hybridity leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and racial oppression unresolved. In the postmodern world, the celebration of difference is through a consumer market that offers an endless choice of "unique" identities, subcultures and styles-adapts these within the postmodern context as part of the ever changing world.

The usage of the terms hybridity and syncretic identities has a problem in that there is segmentation and fissure of distinct membership to particular communities. How do people decide which communities they belong to in the "homeland" or do they float from one community to another? The identity of a diaspora community is clearly not rigid or pre-determined. Further, identity is a composite of the ingredients of everyday life. The stories that we tell ourselves individually and collectively constitute the identities within the crucible of life.

How are these cultural identities constructed within the diaspora? The relationship between cultural identity and diaspora is when cultural practices and forms of representation have put the diaspora community at the centre. This practice has questioned the issues around cultural identity, manifested in the practices of representation- the context within which we speak and write or the "positions of enunciation" (Hall 1990). Stuart Hall further states:

> *What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say "in our own name," of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think of, instead, of identity as a "production," which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation* (Hall 1990, 222).

Another well known writer, Edward Said has argued that the experience of diaspora and exile allows us to understand the relationship between cultures in different ways and that the crossing of boundaries between cultures enables a more multifaceted vision and a sense of permeability between cultures. He says it allows us "to see others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted" and therefore can "erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own, not least" (Said 1989, 225).

Some of the highly contested themes of the present moment — difference, pluralism, hybridity, heterogeneity are also underpinned by a notion of "multiplicity."

Development of Diasporic Media Space

The conceptual framework of diaspora that we have attempted to provide above has been used in a variety of ways to understand the movement of people in various parts of the globe in the 19th and the 20th centuries. This movement of populations also meant that there are complex processed involved in the maintenance and negotiations of cultural and social identities of these "travelling" individuals and communities.

During the late nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century, there were mass migrations of people, predominantly from the so-called developing world to the developed world. Examples of these include the Eastern Europeans in the United States, Latin Americans in the USA, South Asians and Caribbeans in Britain, Turkish and the North African communities in mainland Europe. In addition, there has been the movement of refugees from Vietnam, Iran, Cambodia and more recently from the central and eastern European countries. These movements and resettlement of people involves the circulation of money, goods, information, lifestyle, etc. Further, the flow of media and communication services as well as content is understood within the framework of globalisation and beyond. Along with the flow of patterns of media and people or as Arjun Appadurai (1993) refers to them as "mediascapes" and "ethnoscapes" there are the flows of capital, technologies and ideas. Appaduarai says that these are occurring together and are not systematically related and describes them as "disjunctive," where "for people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianisation may be more worrisome than Americanisation, as Japanisation may be for Koreans, Indianisation for Sri Lankans, Vietnamisation for Cambodians, Russianisation for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic Republics" (Appadurai 1993, 328).

This uneven development of globalisation argues Appadurai, involves the movement of people, technology, capital flows and ideas that does not occur via a pre-determined plan, but rather the pace, scope and the impact of these movements are somewhat disjointed and cracked. How these affect the socio-cultural identities of the "travelling" individuals and the subsequent generations is the main premise of this research.

Schlesinger (1991) discusses the idea of the "audio-visual space" within the context of the European identity. He argues that the "audio-visual space" and the socio-cultural identity should not be seen as oppositional or even in substitutable terms, but rather they should be used in conjunction when analysing the conceptions of these terms.

The "audio-visual space" proposed above is somewhat different to what Morley and Robins (1995) put forward as the "new electronic cultural space." They say that within the context of globalisation and global culture, this electronic cultural space is being created that is "a 'placeless' geography of image and simulation" (p. 112). They associate this space with the postmodernist thinking particularly by writers like Baudrillard and Virilio. The actors who are responsible for creating this universal cultural space are the global cultural corporations that are in power due

to their sheer size that enables them to acquire, merge and form strategic alliances within the cultural industries. Both the "audio-visual space" as proposed by Schlesinger and the "universal cultural space" as proposed by Morley and Robins are those that are constructed are located firmly in modernism and political economy. The focus of this research is the construction of "media spaces" at the micro-level and is somewhat located in postmodernism and cultural studies. This issue attempts to discuss the development of the "diasporic media space" that should be used in combination with the development of diasporic communications.

The "diasporic media space" as proposed above, is closer to the diasporic space put forward by Brah (1996). She describes diasporic identities as being at once local and global and they include "imagined" and "encountered" communities within the configuration of transnational identities. She states:

> *My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is "inhabited," not only by those who have migrated and the descendents, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space … includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put." The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native* (Brah 1996, 209).

Therefore, within the context of diasporic space of "England," there are various identities (African-Caribbean, Irish, Jewish, Scottish, Welsh, South Asian and other diasporas) intersect with the component constructed as "Englishness." This entity is constructed within the imperial history both internally as well as with rivalries and conquests abroad. But the encounters by diasporas of Englishness results in the appropriation by both sides: the diaspora communities appropriate Englishness and the dominant cultural formations appropriate from diasporic cultures. And there are various journeys that not only take place vertically from dominant to dominated but also horizontally and crosscutting the dominant culture.

The notions of hybridity, within the accounts of diasporic identity seem to imply continuation of the traditional cultural studies paradigm for issues of representation within the mainstream media and therefore they tend to be connected within the hegemonic discourse. In the context of globalisation, there are no primary or secondary filters, as the audience can access a variety of content through the through the plethora of available media forms.

Another argument supporting the paradigm shift is that people can and continue to make collective as well as individual responses to their negotiations from home to host culture and vice versa. This negotiation requires to a certain extent a wide-ranging and broad knowledge base of both cultures. Within this context, it is fairly difficult to see the applicability of cultural hybridity as a phenomenon. In the diasporic context there is a continuous reconfiguration of cultures from the home to the host countries. In some cases, aspects of culture and social practices from home countries may be sifted by parents or families. This would mean that the subsequent generations may not be exposed to the negative aspects of culture. Further, cultural and social practices are passed on orally to children and therefore have a greater opportunity to be misinterpreted and subject to embellishment by individuals.

This process of negotiation and maintenance, through the weaving of the wide-ranging threads of cultures and the stretching of the values within these has resulted in the regeneration of a new culture. A metaphor for urban regeneration may be applicable here in that the discourse in the area focuses on the revitalisation or the recreation of improved public spaces, better living conditions, better working conditions and so on. This is the metaphor that we would like to extend into the development of new identities or the reconstruction of identities within diaspora communities through the creation of diasporic media spaces, possibly through revitalisation of cultural forms and representations.

The proposition of "floating lives" by Cunningham and Sinclair (2000) may be more appropriate. However, this interpretation need not be restricted to diasporic communities, it can extend both into the home and host communities as well, particularly if the articulation is framed within the context of globalisation. Cunningham and Sinclair also propose that the media space of a diaspora is one where the flow of media not only occurs from the centre to the periphery, but also from the periphery to the centre through centres such as Hong Kong, Mumbai, Mexico City, Cairo which are defining new world regions. They state that "The media space of a diaspora tends to be of this kind, to the extent that it is spread throughout several of the national markets which have been the territorial unit for international media distribution in the past" (p. 3).

Perspectives on Diasporic Media Spaces

Within the context of the discussion that has preceded, it is clear that diasporic cultural practices constitute ways of "imagination," of "institution" of spaces that often extend beyond the boundaries of place, and of senses of belonging that straddle the local v global divide and, in the process, redefine locality and "the global." In this volume, Rajinder Kumar Dudrah focuses on one type of such practices, Bollywood cinema-going in Birmingham and explores the ways in which this practice "embodies notions of diasporic belonging and a remaking of post-war urban British landscapes that sustain and develop Black British public spheres." In a similar vein, Nabil Echchaibi examines ways in which forms of "belonging" are articulated by different diasporic media in France and Germany. Looking closer at media discourses and practices, Echchaibi explores the meaning of the concept of "hybridity," not only in abstract, conceptual terms, but also in terms of how it is experienced within diasporic cultural practices.

With the spread of new technologies, diasporic communities have often developed virtual connections and a host of Information and Communication Technology-premised resources. The existing theoretical debate on the uses of new technologies by minority communities to make connections, transforming identities and challenging traditional notions of community is thus central in our understanding the nature of the diasporic spaces that are being set up and their impact on the communities concerned. In this volume, Elisabeth Poole examines the relevant debate with particular reference to Muslim communities and attempts to steer a course that takes her away from uncritical dystopic as well as utopic visions. Poole's treatment of Muslim communities from different ethnic backgrounds as adiasporic community also raises important points pertaining to the limitations that some definitions of diaspora pose to the researcher. Her choice to focus on

them by using the concept of diaspora and the relevant analytical framework implies that "diasporas" should not necessarily be defined on the basis of ethnic origin but on the process of imagination of common frameworks of reference and experiential horizons and the generation of the appropriate narratives and genealogies.

Finally, moving to the relationship between diasporas (and diasporic communications) on the one hand, and territory on the other, Shih-Hung Lo looks at the particular case of Taiwan where the exilic identity and yearning of an elite originating in mainland China for its lost homeland has striven to become dominant even amongst the "indigenous" Taiwanese population through its extensive support in media and political discourse. Lo, demonstrates the power of this diasporic imagination in shaping an entire society for the best part of the last fifty years but also points out the fissures of this enterprise and the emergence of loci of resistance to the territorialisation of diasporic desire. The theme of the diaspora and territory nexus is also examined by Jolle Demmers in her exploration of :the political mobilisation of diasporic communities and their role intra-state violent conflict. In an attempt to understand more about the dialectics between locality and conflict, the production of (long-distance) nationalism, and the relationship between virtual and spatial communities. She asks how and why are diaspora communities involved in intra-state conflicts in their erstwhile homelands and explores the strategies they develop vis a vis conflict. This perspective on the deterritorialisation of conflict through the increasing diasporic communicative and cultural activity of the end of the twentieth century throws fresh light to the relationship between diasporas and "home."

Although this volume by no means offers an exhaustive examination of the different forms diasporic communicative spaces take and their impact in processes of globalisation, localisation and identity formation, it seeks to constitute a modest contribution towards a better understanding of the complexity of a rapidly emerging phenomenon in the era of globalisation and to glimpse into the relevant research.

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