

# Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Diaspora as Concept

What is the difference between migration and diaspora? Are acculturation and ethnonationalism intrinsic dynamics of diasporas? These and other paradigmatic, if implicit, questions have received relatively little attention from scholars in the emerging field of diaspora studies, despite the exponential increase of scholarship in recent years. Epistemological development has lagged behind the writing of monographs and, to a lesser extent, comparative studies. As the term has been appropriated by African, Asian, and even single-town diasporas and by scholars who study them, we have actually become less clear about what defines diasporas and makes them a distinct category. This article proposes some suggestions as to how the extensive existing research on specific diasporas may be analyzed in comparative context as a means of developing an epistemology of diasporan studies.

Human beings have been in perpetual motion since the dawn of time, but not all their movements have resulted in diasporas. In the remote past, a vast wave of humanity crossed the Bering Strait and migrated southward, eventually to populate the entire Americas. Yet their descendants are not studied today as part of a Eurasian diaspora. As Colin Palmer recently noted, based on the archaeological evidence (Palmer 1), all of humanity may be considered part of the African diaspora. If all movements of people do not result in diasporas, what, then, distinguishes diasporas from other movements of people?

The word "diaspora" is defined, at its simplest, as the dispersal of a people from its original homeland.<sup>2</sup> Until relatively recently, the term was most closely associated with the dispersion of the Jewish people, although there are also extensive historiographies of the Armenian, Greek, and African diasporas. Since the 1980s, usage of the word has become so widespread as to force a re-assessment of its meaning. Khachig Tölölyan has tracked applications of the term that included references to "corporate diasporas" and even an "egg cream diaspora" (Tölölyan, "Diasporama"; see also Baumann).<sup>3</sup>

There are many reasons why self-defined diasporas have proliferated in recent times.<sup>4</sup> Mass movements of people (the physical act of dispersion whose end result may or may not be diasporization) are even more common now than in the ancient world. Communication and transportation technologies greatly facilitate international movement. Geopolitical repartitioning, restructuring of the global economy, and patterns of warfare that create large refugee and exile populations have all transformed the world, so that fewer and fewer people are today living in the land of their ancestors. Some might argue that the nation-state itself is in crisis, as personal allegiances are increasingly defined in terms of “tribalistic” ethnicities (Clifford 307). Whatever the root cause, ethnonational communities are increasingly generating bodies of scholarly literature that adopt the construct of diaspora (see, e.g., Pawliczko; Angelo; Shlapentokh, Sendich, and Payin; Hang).<sup>5</sup>

Even as diasporan populations proliferated, communities that scholars had once labeled as immigrant, nomadic, or exilic also began to be called diasporas. For example, Dipankar Gupta refers to Punjabis who moved to Delhi after 1947 as “these refugees or the diaspora population” (16). Sometimes this re-orientation of identity arises from within the community itself. James Clifford notes that oppressed peoples that may once have conceived of their situation in the context of “majority–minority” power relations are now embracing diasporan discourse as an alternative. This more recent usage is a departure from earlier identifications in which a sense of powerlessness, longing, exile, and displacement was strongly associated with the Jewish diaspora. Membership in a diaspora now implies potential empowerment based on the ability to mobilize international support and influence in both the homeland and hostland (Clifford 311). Additionally, a good part of the proliferation of usage of the term “diaspora” is due to the current “sexiness” of the discourse of diaspora studies in academia, as indicated by such developments as its selection as the theme of the American Historical Association’s annual conference in 1999. Specialists in other fields rush to capitalize on opportunities by recasting their work as diasporan study.

It is time to catch our breath before moving on. We are witnessing and participating in the rise of a new line of intellectual inquiry, which necessitates the articulation of theory and methodology and makes it necessary for diaspora scholars to search for a consensus on the definition of diaspora.

To date, most conceptualizations and definitions of diaspora have been shaped by an intense study of one single diaspora or another, with the intention of discerning its salient characteristics, in what I call an *ethnographic* approach. As a result, each body of literature

tends to reflect the particular conditions of the diaspora under study, which are not always normative for all diasporas. Definitions and understandings of diaspora get modified “in translation” as they are applied to new groups, as illustrated by the seminal conference on the African diaspora held at Howard University in 1979. There, George Shepperson noted that African diaspora scholars, because of their focus on the Atlantic slave trade, effectively ignored the convention within Jewish diaspora studies that distinguishes *galut* (exile) from *tephutzot* (voluntary dispersal).<sup>6</sup> While the centrality of discrimination as part of the experience of both the Jewish and African diasporas might suggest that subaltern status is a defining characteristic of diaspora, it is also possible to have imperial or conquering diasporas, as well as diasporas whose communities have very different kinds of status in the various hostlands they inhabit (Cohen, *Global*; Hu-DeHart).

Despite its limitations, the ethnographic approach to defining diaspora has been extremely valuable insofar as it has brought sophistication and nuance to the discourse. To cite a recent example, scholars of the Armenian diaspora have suggested that diasporan status is not necessarily conferred automatically based on the location of a specific community outside the homeland, or on the fact that most of its individual members were born in dispersal. Rather, they differentiate between a symbolic, ethnic identity of “being” and a more active, “diasporan” identity requiring involvement (Tölölyan, “Rethinking” 15–9). Such a concept of diaspora calls attention to the relationship between identity and active participation in the politics of hostland and homeland. Vehicles such as the journal *Diaspora* are a promising forum for sharing these types of discussions and, in so doing, deepening our understanding of the phenomenon.

The drawback of the ethnographic approach to *defining* diaspora is that, if it is to be a working category of analysis for scholars, a definition is needed that will transcend specific diasporan histories. Such a definition would enable us to do systematic comparative analysis of diasporas that may be very different from one another in terms of the historical era in which they emerged, their size, and the basis of group identity (i.e., political, “racial,” religious). To that end, a number of scholars have culled diasporan literature for a common set of features. William Safran offers a list of defining characteristics of diasporas:

- 1) dispersal to two or more locations
- 2) collective mythology of homeland
- 3) alienation from hostland
- 4) idealization of return to homeland
- 5) and 6) ongoing relationship with homeland (83–4)<sup>7</sup>

Elaborating upon Safran's list, Robin Cohen places greater emphasis on another feature—ethnonational consciousness—and, importantly, on whether a group not living in its homeland had the option of choosing between return and making a permanent home in diaspora ("Diasporas" 515). Tölölyan offers a six-point summary of the Jewish-centered paradigm that has traditionally anchored assumptions about diasporas, noting that the discursive power of groups now claiming diasporan status has effectively modified the original paradigm ("Rethinking" 12–5).<sup>8</sup>

Most diaspora scholars seem to agree upon three basic features of diaspora. First, after dispersal, there must be a minimum of two destinations.<sup>9</sup> The word "diaspora" implies a scattering, rather than a transfer from the homeland to a single destination, and is expressed in English and in other Indo-European languages with words sharing the *spr* root, such as "spores," "disperse," "spread," and "sperm" (Tölölyan, "Rethinking" 10). This specific type of dispersal is a necessary precondition for the formation of links between the various populations in diaspora; the internal networks linking the various segments of a diaspora are a unique feature that differentiates them from communities that result from other types of migrations. Second, there must be some relationship to an actual or imagined homeland. Whatever the form of this bond, it provides the foundation from which diasporan identity may develop. Third, there must be self-awareness of the group's identity. Diasporan communities are *consciously* part of an ethnonational group; this consciousness binds the dispersed peoples not only to the homeland but to each other as well. Especially in the cases of diasporas whose homeland no longer exists, or who have been separated from the homeland for many generations, this element of consciously held and constructed identity has been pivotal to their survival as a cultural unit. Thus, while all diasporas may be "imagined communities,"<sup>10</sup> only communities imagined in certain ways are diasporas.

I would add a fourth distinguishing feature of diaspora, involving the temporal–historical dimension: its existence over at least two generations. A group meeting all of the above criteria, but able to return to its homeland within a single generation, may more appropriately be described as being in temporary exile.<sup>11</sup> Diasporas are multi-generational: they combine the individual migration experience with the collective history of group dispersal and regeneration of communities abroad. Frameworks for diasporan study need to incorporate both.

Such a definition helps sift through the claims to diasporan status. Kathryn Kozaitis describes the Roma (Gypsies) as a diasporan group without a connection to a homeland (Kozaitis 165–99). The Roma unquestionably share many features of diasporas, including

issues of assimilation and discrimination in hostlands. Yet, lacking a relationship to a homeland, are they not more properly situated in the framework of nomadic peoples?

While it is a useful and necessary starting point, this "checklist" approach nevertheless presents certain problems. If the concept of diaspora is rooted in the group itself, it encourages reification of diasporan identity. Such an approach is unsustainable because identities are never fixed; different intrinsic characteristics become salient based on the contexts in which people and groups identify themselves. Even within single diasporas, simultaneous diasporan identities are possible.<sup>12</sup> This has been particularly evident within African diaspora studies, which provides an instructive working example for this discussion.

An African descendant born in Jamaica is part of the *African* diaspora. Upon moving to England, he or she then joins a *Caribbean* diaspora in England, while still retaining membership in the African diaspora. How, then, does this Jamaican immigrant relate to the continental Africans resident in England, themselves also part of an African diaspora? Is there not also a *Jamaican* diaspora in England, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere? How does this late-twentieth-century Jamaican diaspora connect with the earlier migrations of Jamaicans to Panama, Costa Rica, and Cuba? To fix this person's identity as part of an undifferentiated African diaspora does not allow for the complexity of multiple identities, the salience of any of which at any given time is conditioned by socio-political exigencies. Nor can such an individual be exclusively considered part of a Caribbean, or even Jamaican, diaspora. Conceptualizations of diaspora must be able to accommodate the reality of multiple identities and phases of diasporization over time.

This type of problem leads us to an additional and more fundamental problem with what I have described as the ethnographic approach to defining diasporas. It anchors the work of the diasporan scholar in the observation of groups, rather than in the dynamic social *processes* of diasporization from which those groups are created. There is also a risk of moving towards essentializing "diaspora" as an ethnic label rather than a framework of analysis.

In wrestling with this problem, I found that I could not offer a fixed definition of diaspora. While it is important to clearly distinguish diasporas from other groups, the ultimate purpose of such an exercise is to move toward an epistemology of diasporan studies. Without a framework with which to compare one diaspora to another, the patterns in the process of diasporization cannot be discerned. Toward that end, I propose shifting the defining element of diasporan studies from the group itself to a methodological and theoretical approach to the study of the phenomenon of diaspora in

human history. *In other words, rather than being viewed as an ethnicity, diaspora may be alternatively considered as a framework for the study of a specific process of community formation.*

It must be emphasized that what follows is a suggestion of a mechanism for *developing* diasporan theory; it is not a definitive theory in itself. The latter can only be derived from the comparative analysis of the specific processes and patterns that define diasporic experiences. Though several ideas about these phenomena are floated here, most deriving from my own area of concentration in the African diaspora, only comparative analysis will fully elucidate the hallmarks of diaspora. The emphasis of this article, therefore, is on identifying and isolating categories of analysis that are applicable to all diasporas in order to begin comprehensive comparative study.

## **2. Toward a Theory and Methodology of Comparative Diasporan Studies: Five Dimensions of Diasporan Analysis**

How can we organize what we know about diasporas in a way that best enables us to design a framework for analyzing the diasporan phenomenon by focusing on the features that make them distinct? By concentrating on shared and essential aspects of diasporas rather than on the idiosyncrasies of specific groups, such a framework would have the advantage of applicability to all diasporas. It would allow us to compare diasporan groups to each other more effectively across space and time by establishing basic categories of analysis. Finally, a comparative analytical framework provides a way of pinning down which social formation is a diaspora; if certain features of and questions about diasporas are not applicable to a given group, perhaps that community is not a diaspora.<sup>13</sup> Once able to define a group as a diaspora, as opposed to another type of ethnic group, scholars would elucidate specifics of history and culture not otherwise discernible when studied in the context of, say, national histories or migration studies. Because diasporas have unique characteristics distinguishing them from other types of communities (i.e., nomadic, migrant), it should be possible to create a research approach applicable to any diasporan group. It is this *approach* that constitutes diasporan study, not the group's diasporan status in itself.

The black population of Brazil, for example, may be validly studied in many contexts that do not necessarily focus on its diasporan features. It can legitimately be considered in the contexts of Portuguese colonial, Afro-Atlantic, Brazilian, or Latin American regional histories. Some Africanists have argued that the diaspora is part of the extended history of Africa.<sup>14</sup> While I disagree with this as an exclusive approach, Afro-Brazilian history *is* in many ways deeply intertwined with the history of Africa. However, all these

contexts are fundamentally different from diasporan analysis designed to illuminate the experiences of the diasporan group as a discrete unit.<sup>15</sup>

The type of diasporan study proposed here focuses on a given group's diaspora status by addressing five dimensions of diasporan research (Butler, *Freedom's* 225–6):

- 1) Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal
- 2) Relationship with the homeland
- 3) Relationship with hostlands
- 4) Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora
- 5) Comparative studies of different diasporas

The purpose of articulating these five dimensions is to direct attention to issues unique to diasporas. Such an approach seeks to identify categories of analysis relevant to all diasporas, regardless of size or type. If, as in the example above, Afro-Brazilians may appropriately be considered part of a diaspora, the approach offered here provides an explicit methodological template that will illuminate the processes of diaspora as experienced by this group. For example, the framework facilitates a close analysis of the three sites in which diasporas take form: the homeland, the hostland, and the diasporan group itself. It allows for the consideration of each of these sites, in addition to international forces, as formative agents contributing to the creation and maintenance of diasporas.<sup>16</sup> It also directs attention to the interrelationships within the various communities of a diaspora, a key distinguishing feature that often gets short shrift when using conceptual frameworks not designed expressly for diasporas.<sup>17</sup> Migration studies, though clearly applicable in the early phases of a diaspora's existence, are perhaps less relevant over the course of its history, and they do not prioritize such dimensions as the relationships among diasporan communities.

This type of framework suggests a way for diaspora studies to focus on the elucidation of specific and unique dimensions of the diasporan experience and helps distinguish it from traditional ethnic studies. The framework's specificity also provides an alternative means of determining whether a specific group is actually a diaspora. A comprehensive study of a single diaspora should be able to encompass the first four dimensions; if it cannot, perhaps the group is, in fact, another type of community. If information about single diasporas can be grouped into the first four categories of inquiry, it will then be possible to engage in comparative diasporan study.

It is important to interject here that diasporan study is inherently comparative on two levels. First, the study of any single segment helps illuminate the common experience of the entire diaspora. For example, examination of the aftermath of slavery in the Americas,

focused on the Afro-Atlantic diaspora's relationship with its various hostlands, has enabled scholars to discern fundamental patterns for the entire group through comparative analysis: patterns of legal, social, and economic barriers to capital acquisition, or forms of resistance and challenge, that transcended the standard geo-linguistic boundaries that traditionally disaggregate Afro-Atlantic history (Cooper, Holt, and Scott; Bolland; Butler, *Freedoms*). This focus on the comparative history of the group as a whole helps differentiate diasporan analysis from other frameworks. Second, the study of the phenomenon as a type of community formation in human history requires comparative analysis of different diasporas. The five dimensions outlined here offer a template for organizing scholarship on diasporas that will facilitate comparative analysis on both levels. The present discussion addresses the dispersal itself in some detail as a potential site for identifying and comparing different types of diasporas.

This template for diasporan study raises the question of the diaspora's relationship to the concepts of nation and borders. In order for a group to be declared a diaspora, we assume that it must exist across multiple nation-state boundaries. There must be a homeland, defined in national or regional terms, and destinations in at least two other nations. Yet, in his portrait of the relationships between migrant workers in the southwestern United States and their homeland in Aguililla, Mexico, Roger Rouse uses a diasporan construct to describe a transnational community, a kind of micro-diaspora, existing across only two countries, one sending and one receiving. Traditional constructs of diaspora have privileged scale, in part because of its relationship to the concept of nation. In other words, the presumption of the nation-state within the construct of diaspora tends to restrict consideration to those groups that span formal political borders. Because of this, smaller diasporas, like the Aguilillan, contained within larger ones, receive a different level of analysis. What I am proposing is that diasporas may be studied *as diasporas* wherever and whenever they occur, regardless of their size. This sets the stage for a conceptual problem. The difference between diasporas that encompass several nation-states and those like Aguililla's, composed of multiple destinations within a single nation, may prove to be significant. While the template may be equally useful for both types, it is important to maintain the distinction between the two. For the purposes of the present discussion, I will differentiate them as "macro-" and "micro-" diasporas, although other terminologies may be more explicit. The point is that a diasporan approach is a tool of analysis that may be utilized for diasporas as large as the Indian or as small as the Aguilillan.



*Reasons for and Conditions of the Dispersal*

The process of diasporization is the logical starting point for diasporan studies. Variations in the experience of the initial dispersal may, in fact, be the key to distinguishing between types of diasporas. Typing and labeling (i.e., naming) diasporas are very different things, but they both derive from the initial dispersal.<sup>18</sup> There are many possible ways to label diasporas, or to set typologies. These two distinct objectives are often conflated and obscured by the multiple bases of identity used in naming diasporas, which may be religious, as in the case of the Jewish diaspora; nation-based, as in the Indian; "ethnic" or culturally based, as in the Sikh; regional, as in the Caribbean; or continent-based, as in the African. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between diasporan labels and typologies of diasporas. Diasporas clearly take labels based on a variety of markers, but when those markers act as substitutes for a typology of diasporas themselves, it becomes difficult to establish a consistent basis for the typology. The challenge thus remains to look beyond the *labels* of diaspora currently in use to the fundamental differences between *types* of diaspora.

In distinguishing specific types of diasporas, Philip Curtin employed an approach that hinged on the *primary activity* of the dispersed group, as in the case of the "trade diasporas" he studied. His analysis employed the principles of comparative diasporan study in that it explored such factors as merchant–host relationships and relationships within specific trade networks in order to compare trade diasporas to each other. However, it is difficult to extend an activity-based identity as a standard for all diasporas. Trade was clearly a motor in the formation of early diasporas, but sometimes commerce emerged as a corollary of diasporization rather than its initial motive and impetus. Trade diasporas would then have to be compared to other diasporas defined by activity, such as, say, a "slave" diaspora. In addition, privileging one activity overshadows equally important activities undertaken by other members of the diasporan community. Within trade diasporas, farmers, artisans, and cooks, for example, may have complemented a commercial economy. The use of primary economic activities to categorize diasporas also directs attention to specific age and gender groups. Women, children, and elders all played roles in sustaining the daily life of a trade diaspora community in which commerce may have been dominated by working-age men.

Robin Cohen offers an alternative approach to setting a typology of diasporas. He outlines five different categories: victim, labor, trade, imperial, and cultural. This typology emphasizes the conditions and causes of the initial dispersal, but it involves other

rationales as well, such as the status of diasporan communities in their respective hostlands (*Global x-xi*).<sup>19</sup> Cohen cites the Caribbean as an example of a cultural diaspora because of the types of relationships established among the constituent communities of the diaspora and because they are not indigenous to the area from which they dispersed (*Global 127-53*).<sup>20</sup> Clearly, diasporas are too complex a form of community to conform easily to simple categorization, a fact that Cohen's typology seeks to accommodate. It is nonetheless important to grapple with the problem of typology. The case of cultural diasporas helps illuminate some of the theoretical difficulties involved.

Cultural diasporas may be defined in such a way as to raise fundamental questions about the nature of diaspora itself, questions that can be illustrated by the example of the Yoruba diaspora. Yoruba is the modern ethnic name for the descendants of the Oyo Empire and other cities with ancestral links to Ile-Ife, in what is now southwestern Nigeria.<sup>21</sup> The series of wars that decimated the Oyo Empire in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to the capture and enslavement of thousands of its inhabitants. While some found refuge in neighboring African states, thousands more were taken away on slave ships destined primarily for Cuba and Brazil. Some of those ships were intercepted on the high seas, and their captives resettled in British stations in Sierra Leone and St. Helena Island. Still later, Yorubas from those British stations were moved to Jamaica (Schuler).

Since that time, the Yoruba have had a profound impact on American and Caribbean cultures. Key aspects of their culture and worldviews, especially sacred concepts and forms, were adopted not only by other African descendants but by individuals of European, Asian, and indigenous American ancestry as well—the quintessential cultural “creolization” that marks American/Caribbean history.<sup>22</sup> Over the course of the twentieth century, numerous scholars have noted the parallels in Yoruba-based spiritual communities, cultural connections that were concretized in a series of international conferences of Yoruba initiates. Today, adherents to Oyo/Yoruba traditions have created an “imagined” spiritual community that has quite active interactions. Though they may consider themselves culturally Yoruba, perhaps only the tiniest fraction has ancestral ties to the cities of Oyo and Ile-Ife from which these traditions derive. Thus, there exists a Yoruba cultural diaspora alongside a Yoruba ancestral diaspora.<sup>23</sup>

Whether or not there is a fundamental difference between diasporas based on ideological complexes, broadly defined as culture, and others based on ancestry is a subtle but important aspect of our understanding of diasporas. Both are rooted in the dispersal of a people, with the qualification that the ability of individuals to “join”

ideological diasporas makes possible quite different historical trajectories than those possible for diasporas defined strictly by geographical movements. In this regard, I am distinguishing between the spread of ideas, which may involve persons unconnected to the physical diasporization, and the processes by which people carry and reshape ideologies in the specific historical and geographical contexts of diasporan movement. This raises the question of whether religions, as they spread to new parts of the globe, can be studied within a diasporan framework. Cohen argues that "religions can provide an additional cement to bind a diasporic consciousness, but they do not constitute diasporas in and of themselves" (*Global* 189). Perhaps not, although to some extent it is conceivably possible to apply a diasporan framework to the study of the dispersal of an ideological community and its subsequent development transnationally. I suggest that the template for studying this phenomenon is different from that appropriate to diasporas, although the relative weight of ideological versus physical diasporization is certainly open to debate. For the purposes of understanding the processes of diasporization in human history, it might be best to consider ideological diasporas separately from those rooted in physical migration.<sup>24</sup>

The dispersal itself stands out as a fundamental basis for understanding a given diaspora and, hence, as a basis for establishing a comparable typology of diasporas. Why did these people move? What segments of society left to constitute the diaspora? A people that is expelled will necessarily develop a different cultural ethos from those who flee, or who are taken as captives. A group that leaves *en masse* also differs from a group that gradually constitutes itself after a protracted period of individual emigrations. What international conditions helped determine the nature of the dispersal and the destination sites? These factors for consideration all focus on the conditions of the original diasporization rather than on the roles assumed by communities once they have settled in their new hostlands.

The removal of massive numbers of peoples from a given society and their transfer to another is necessarily traumatic and typically occurs under extraordinary circumstances. The reasons for the relocation may be categorized by degrees of volition, for each results in a different type of relationship between diasporas, their homelands, and their host societies. The most extreme types of dispersals are forced movements of mass groups, as in the case of Africans, Armenians, and Jews. However, diasporas also result from other types of movements, including voluntary exile, cumulative individual movements, trade networks, and empire-building; often multiple types of migration are combined within a single diaspora. Comparative diasporan study may help situate the importance of

the seminal diasporization relative to other, secondary migrations within a diaspora. Here I review several types of dispersal, suggesting that each creates its own ethos of diaspora—the shared memories and myths around which this unique type of imagined community is built. It remains to be seen whether these may serve to set a typology of diaspora and whether, by grounding such a typology in forms of physical dispersal, they offer a consistent and comparable way to study the impact of that dispersal on patterns in the subsequent evolution of a given diaspora.

*Captivity.* This category, which includes enslavement, refers to an involuntary dislocation in which the receiving societies play an active role in preventing return to the homeland. The term captivity is preferred over enslavement because it encompasses all practices and policies that prevent the emigration of the diasporan group. In addition, it may include such tactics as forced indenture not explicitly labeled as enslavement. Subsequent relationships between diaspora and homeland may be oriented toward, and may even privilege, the reestablishment of ties. Analysis of global economic, political, and military interrelationships is especially central for this form of diasporization, insofar as it involves collusion between homelands and various hostlands in mandating and enforcing the resettlement.

*State-eradication exile.* Colonialism and conquest have occasionally resulted in the obliteration of entire states or nations. Most commonly, the population becomes absorbed by the new state. In rare cases, however, the conquering state does not admit the vanquished peoples, forcing them into diaspora. An example of this was the destruction of the trading state of Owu, which began a new mode of warfare during the civil strife that devastated the Yoruba-speaking areas of modern Nigeria in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After losing a war over a market town, Owu was razed and prohibited from rebuilding (Ajayi 145–6). In this and other types of exile, the reasons for the dispersal should always be considered in conjunction with the specific attendant conditions. Certain actors may have had greater responsibility for the collective exile, which may result in segmentation within the diaspora based on political allegiances. In the case of Owu, the conditions of dispersal included the context of trans-Atlantic slavery. Thus, while political segmentation may have been pronounced for other diasporas, Owu's people shared equally in the trauma of enslavement and massive relocation to the Americas. Also important in studying this type of diasporization is the difference between those groups who never regain a formal homeland and those whose state is subsequently reestablished. State rebuilding initiatives may be undertaken by specific segments of the original population, which may affect their relationships with those remaining in diaspora. Alter-

natively, outside agents may create new states to substitute for the homeland, as was the case with the colonial partitioning of West Africa after the aforementioned period of warfare. In doing diasporan study, it is important to remember that these later conditions must be considered as part of the relationship with the homeland (dimension 2) and not as part of the initial diasporization.

*Forced and voluntary exile.* In many cases of forced exile, the diasporan group is expelled from and by the homeland. The types of relationships between the diaspora and the homeland will depend on changes in homeland conditions and the timing of those changes. This differs slightly from the case of state-eradication exile, in that the homeland continues to exist, thus allowing for the possibility of return. Voluntary exile, while also involving intolerable relationships between the diasporizing group and the homeland, is the choice of the exiting group. As with any exile, changes in conditions at home will affect subsequent relationships with the diasporan group. The distinction is made between forced and voluntary exile because the nature of the separation may affect the degree to which ethnic identity and culture are maintained or surrendered in favor of assimilation. This type of question is relevant to the first dimension of diasporan research in that it helps establish a typology of diasporas that can be related to subsequent patterns in their development.

*Emigration.* This form of definitive separation from the homeland is the cumulative result of individual initiatives, whereas the types of diasporization detailed above relate to decisions involving whole groups. Emigration, in its simplest individual form, is a permanent relocation to a single locale; diasporan studies focus specifically on emigrations to multiple destinations from a single homeland. Emigration is typically the result of intolerable economic conditions. Examples of this include the Chinese, Indian, and Jamaican diasporas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In each of these cases, the availability of work in the homeland was negatively affected by the interference of foreign interests, while shifting world economic conditions allowed imperial powers to redirect workers to sites where labor demands were greatest. To cite just a few destinations, Chinese workers thus moved to Cuba, Panama, and the United States; Indians went to Guyana and South Africa; and Jamaicans to Panama and Costa Rica, where permanent communities eventually emerged. Migration literature is extensive on many issues central to the study of these populations, such as the well-known work on Japanese American emigrants and their distinct generational patterns of assimilation. (Fugita and O'Brien; O'Brien and Fugita). Of specific concern in diasporan analysis is how this type of relocation affects the nature of the diaspora. It may take an extended period of time for the group to develop a diasporan identity

and intergroup relationships, if these develop at all. This may partially explain why it was not until recently that books appeared conceptualizing the Italian and Irish abroad as diasporas, though both had physically existed since the nineteenth century (Gabaccia; Bielenberg).

*Migration.* In contrast to emigration diasporas, in which people relocate definitively, some diasporas arise out of migratory patterns in which individuals may come and go but institutions and networks become established in the hostlands. A comparative analysis of empirical research is needed to determine whether or not this is a necessary distinction; the relevant difference here is in the ways the diasporan community is formed. With improved transportation and communication resources in the twentieth century, seasonal migrations have been made possible over increasing distances. Whereas in the past a worker traveling from China to Cuba, for example, would necessarily have had to make a long-term commitment, that same worker today might be able to shuttle between the two places several times a year. Institutions and networks that form as a result of this type of migration could easily yield a diasporan community with a unique level of continuity with the homeland, insofar as they represent an ethnonation transcending the political boundaries of a nation-state.

*Imperial diaspora.* These diasporas originated as a mode of conquest, in which a powerful homeland sent its nationals to impose upon subject peoples its political and economic control and, in the process, its culture. Examples of this type of diasporization include the Ottomans and Romans. This type of administrative technique was used on various scales, as exemplified by the Incas in precolonial Peru who brought regional elites to the central capital for education and training and then redistributed them around the empire. In the modern era, colonialism and imperialism redistributed homeland nationals around to diverse parts of the world, with the central state taking on the responsibility of maintaining key networks of interdependence between constituent units. Because imperial power is generally ensured through control of material resources, many empires may be considered a form of trade diaspora. The key point for purposes of this typology is that the relocation resulted from formal state policies, with the departing members acting as a type of deputized emissary responsible (in theory) to the sanctioning state.

Naturally, actual histories do not necessarily fall neatly into the categories outlined above. To cite one example, Soviet Jews prevented from emigrating to the new state of Israel during the mid-twentieth century had, simultaneously, a historical foundation in an exile diaspora alongside the reality of captivity. Also, individuals experience diasporization differently based on such factors as

gender, social status, occupation, and age. These other dimensions of experience and identity help historicize and contextualize a general typology when analyzing the diasporization of a given group. By this I do not mean gratuitous mentions of such identifiers as “race” and gender but, rather, meaningful consideration of all factors that are intrinsically part of the diasporization. Avtar Brah offers this type of inquiry in her treatment of young South Asian Muslim women workers (see esp. ch. 6, 128–51). In Brah’s analysis, the adjectives referring to age, geography, religion, and gender are not tossed out as mere labels; each identifies a factor that actually constitutes the labor markets in which these women circulate and which makes possible their physical relocations. Continuing with the example of gender, a comparison of various dispersions would reveal cases in which women were overrepresented in the diasporan group. It is possible that female-dominated diasporas differ significantly from male-dominated or gender-balanced groups.

The categories of diasporization outlined above are, therefore, rough-hewn and require further exploration and refinement for each case study. That said, they may nonetheless serve as useful guidelines both for examining the initial dispersal and for comparative inquiry into how diasporas take shape. These conditions are akin to the traumas of childhood; they mark the diasporan group and inform the direction of its development. The historical circumstances of the relocation determine the sector of society from which the diaspora originates, its demographic composition, and even the more amorphous realm of political orientation or attitude. Yet apparently similar conditions in the mature diaspora may be the result of quite different origins. For example, it is possible to find diasporan groups that are extremely ethnonationalist and closed to outsiders. This may be the adaptation of former captives to hostile conditions in the hostland; involuntary diasporas are generally placed in inferior conditions in their host societies and often develop oppositional relationships with them. Alternatively, migrant diasporas may well find themselves in comfortable conditions in their host societies and may choose to isolate themselves so as to contain the group’s resources.<sup>25</sup> What may appear at face value to be analogous situations of endogamy may, in fact, be parts of quite different patterns of diasporan development that can be elucidated only through consideration of the conditions of diasporization as an integral component of analysis.

Robin Cohen offers an important caveat to the utility of basing a typology of diaspora on the initial dislocation. No diaspora is a monolith, not even the Jewish diaspora from which so much of current diaspora theory derives. He writes, “not all Jewish communities outside the natal homeland resulted from forcible dispersal. Indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the Jews are

not a single people with a single origin and a single migration history.” Cohen also notes that their history was not all doom and gloom in Babylon; rather, it was “enriching and creative as well” (*Global* 21). Certainly, most diasporas experience multiple waves of out-migration of different demographic character and reasons for departing. Nonetheless, one traumatic part of that migration history stands out as a defining moment for the Jewish diaspora. I therefore emphasize the seminal dispersal because it tends to characterize the diaspora, and its collective attitudes towards both homelands and hostlands, despite its ultimate diversity.

### *Relationship with the Homeland*

The reasons for and conditions of the relocation necessarily affect subsequent relationships between diasporan peoples and their homeland. Because diasporization often arises from extremely traumatic conditions, it is common for the homeland to no longer exist, or for it to change dramatically. Yet the *construct* of the homeland is essential; it functions as the constituting basis of collective diasporan identity. Identity based in a shared connection to homeland thus distinguishes diasporas from such groups as nomads. Although diasporas may also share complementary sources of common identity (e.g., language, religion, phenotype) that are typical markers of ethnicity, it is the homeland that anchors diasporan identity.<sup>26</sup> This connection to place is a hallmark of diasporan identity that differs from constructions of *ethnic* identity, which can be constituted on virtually any basis.<sup>27</sup>

Relationships between diasporas and their homelands are an integral component of a diasporan framework of analysis. To what degree does the diaspora participate in the affairs of the homeland? What is the flow of political and policy influence in both directions between diasporas and homelands? How do changes in power and resources affect homeland/hostland relationships? These questions underscore the need to consider relationships between diasporas and homelands diachronically, as their dynamics are subject to change over time. In addition, the homeland relationship may differ from one segment of the diaspora to another.

There is a narrow passage leading to the sea from the Cape Coast slave depot in Ghana that stands as a physical metaphor for one of the central facets of the homeland relationship. This threshold leading to the gangplanks of the slave ships is called the “door of no return,” for it was here, and at many other such portals along the Atlantic coast, that Africans entered the diaspora. One may wonder to what degree a return is possible, since the process of diasporization irrevocably changes both the homeland and the diaspora. Yet the concept of return is a fundamental part of the



diasporan experience. It is often expressed through cultural re-entrenchments; in some cases, there have been attempts at physical return as well. Many of the Africans who left the Slave Coast in the nineteenth century landed in Brazil, one of the few countries from which substantial numbers of Africans "returned." Theirs is a poignant story of finding themselves regarded as "an alien group in what they had regarded while they were in Brazil as 'home'" (Boadi-Siaw 306; see also Turner; da Cunha). More recently, Japanese-Brazilian "returnees" (Brazil also has the largest community of the Japanese diaspora) have chronicled similar difficulties in adjusting to the homeland (Awanohara; Yamanaka; Tsuda). Larger-scale attempts to repatriate diasporas raise obvious conflicts in the homeland regarding the sharing of resources with the diasporan group and their incorporation into the socioeconomic structures of the homeland. Responding to Marcus Garvey's proposal of a massive return to Africa, many objected strongly to the idea of relinquishing their attachment to hostlands they had helped to build. Is it necessary that a diasporan population should attempt to, or wish to, return to its ancestral home? Here I differ with those diasporan scholars who argue that a desire to return is a defining characteristic of diaspora. The range of dynamic relationships between diasporas and homelands is very large and encompasses positions concerning a possible or actual return that pit idealization against pragmatic reality, including the reality of attachment to a hostland, sometimes dating back many generations. Thus, it is the existence of the *issue* of return, and the related sense of connection to the homeland, that is intrinsic to the diasporan experience, rather than a specific orientation toward physical return.

The case of the Roma, raised earlier, suggests that even a conceptual relationship to homeland may be a critical factor of diasporan identity in the absence of a homeland that continues to exist as a geopolitical entity. The world has taken shape through countless waves of wandering peoples; not all of these maintained an anchoring sense of homeland. Is there a fundamental difference between diasporas with homelands and those without? Are there typological patterns relative to the strength and dynamism of the homeland relationship? These are some of the questions relative to the homeland relationship that merit further discussion in order to develop diasporan theory.

The relationship with a homeland does not end with the departure of the initial group. Not only does it continue, it may also take diverse forms simultaneously, from physical return, to emotional attachment as expressed artistically, to the reinterpretation of homeland cultures in diaspora. *To some extent, diasporan representations of the homeland are part of the project of constructing diasporan identity, rather than homeland actuality.* This point has

been noted by Kathy Ogren in her reading of the uses of Africa in some of the more influential writings of the Harlem Renaissance. Homeland relationships may also vary from one segment of the diaspora to another, or for certain categories of people within a diaspora. The point here is to broaden the scope of inquiry into the many facets of homeland relationships and to consider them dynamically.

One aspect of the relationship with the homeland that should not be forgotten is the view from the other side—the homeland's attitudes about the diaspora. In her study of Cape Verdean relationships with descendants in the United States, Laura Pires-Hester shows how President Aristides Pereira went from not considering those abroad as nationals to including them for purposes of leveraging resources and influence. Her consideration of the "strategic use of the [bilateral diaspora] ethnicity resource" provides a useful concept in diasporan studies (497). The diaspora is a potential resource in the homeland; its utilization depends on the homeland's objectives as much as on those of the diaspora. Emigrant communities often attempt to advocate on behalf of their homelands in their new locales; how does this change as communities' composition shifts from the travelers themselves to their diasporan descendants? To what extent does homeland intervention mobilize the entire diaspora, or strategically consider its multiple locations? Comparative analysis of the deployment of diaspora as political capital may yield valuable insights into alternative strategies of power and the factors affecting them. Is diaspora ultimately a political construct invented or reinforced to resolve specific crises?<sup>28</sup> Do these crises help forge diasporan identity, and what is the role of the homeland in this process? These questions are intended as points of departure in the shaping of theory, which should consider all aspects of the homeland relationship and what it reveals about the phenomenon and functioning of diaspora.

### *Relationship with Hostlands*

Anthropology, migration studies, sociology, and political science, among other fields, have contributed greatly to the understanding of diasporan relations with their hostlands. Diaspora scholarship is rich in studies of the politics of identity, assimilation, cultural retention, and the avenues of political, social, and economic empowerment. Rather than discussing these types of issues here, I wish to suggest ways in which to apply an explicitly diasporan framework for their analysis.

Hostlands may be considered as one of the primary agents in the formation and development of diasporas (the others being the homeland and the diasporan group itself). As a result, an analysis of the

hostland's agency is an integral element of diasporan analysis that is distinct from the foci of the disciplines of study mentioned above. Diasporan analysis raises such questions as how the host society affects the diasporan community's ability to interact with the homeland, with other diaspora groups, and with the hostland majority. Another issue for diasporan analysis is the role of hostlands in shaping diasporan identity. For African descendants in the Americas, taken from many different nations in Africa and evolving a multiplicity of identities in the diaspora, their heterogeneity mitigated against solidarity. On the other hand, blanket discrimination based on membership in a "black" race was a vital factor in forging solidarity between diverse African diasporan communities. Again, there is a need to examine the hostland relationship comparatively, to determine any potential patterns, both within and between diasporas, as part of the effort toward developing diaspora theory.

*Interrelationships within the Diasporan Group*

Interrelationships between segments of a diaspora are a critical dimension of the diasporan experience and must exist to justify the study of a group within a diasporan framework. I suggest that the emergence of these relationships is the seminal moment in the transformation of migratory groups to diasporas. Contact between communities of the diaspora, *independent* of contacts with the homeland, is vital in forging diasporan consciousness, institutions, and networks. It is, therefore, an essential point of analysis.

The importance of a group's self-awareness as a diaspora tends to be undertheorized in the literature vis-à-vis the relationship between diasporas and their homelands. Yet it may be argued that if a dispersed population does not maintain ties among its members, it is difficult to cast it as an *operative* diaspora. This does not mean that the group might never develop diasporan identity. The African diaspora existed for nearly four centuries before that identity became operative. By this I mean that, until they came to know each other and group identity coalesced around "blackness" and shared ancestral histories of enslavement and New World oppression, the Afro-Atlantic communities could have followed other trajectories, even including those of assimilationist immigrant groups. To some extent, this has already happened in the case of many Afro-Hispanics who have opted for "Hispanic" rather than "black" identities. Identity is, therefore, a vital component of diasporas; it transforms them from the physical reality of dispersal into the psychosocial reality of diaspora.

This is a very specific use of the phrase "diasporan consciousness." While it implies recognition of the historical and cultural

connection to the homeland, it necessarily includes a simultaneous recognition of the unique community existing between members of the diasporan group. It is the awareness of a distinction between the experiences of those who have been dispersed and of those who remain in the ancestral home. To use a visual metaphor, the physical scattering can be represented by the hub of a wheel connected to its various spokes. Diaspora is the interconnecting ideology that completes the wheel, linking the spokes to each other as well as to the center, thus creating the whole of this transnational community. Further exploration will help pinpoint the exact factors in the transition to diasporan self-awareness.

It is possible to represent relationships between the constituent communities of a diaspora through mapping techniques that consider more than geography. In his study of the Sudanese trade diaspora, Philip Curtin uses a map that indicates lines of dependency and rivalry between its members (239). He also notes this diaspora's varying relationships to its center in Cairo. This is but one of the many ways in which geography can be used creatively to map the internal structure of diasporas beyond the construct of a particular group's experience in each of the discrete nations in which it has settled. There is no single rule for mapping the internal structure of diasporas, except, perhaps, that each must be mapped on its own terms. In the contemporary Cuban diaspora, for example, to simply use destination cities such as Miami and New York to denote its subunits obscures the very real divide between anti-Castro émigrés, the "*Marielitos*," and others. For this diaspora, political ideology and socioeconomic class are real boundaries within the group that must be taken into account. Chronology also factors into concerns about the specificity of internal units, especially when diasporas form over long periods of time, to avoid formulations that homogenize the experiences of diverse peoples.<sup>29</sup> This presents a challenge because what is being mapped is an imagined community. Yet it is possible because diasporas are rooted in the broad concept of nation (not specifically the modern nation-state). All nations have a geography, and geographies can be mapped. First, diasporas are "ethno"-national. In using this term, I am referring to ethnicity in its broadest sense—a group of people bound together because of a perceived shared characteristic (e.g., phenotype, historical experience, religion, geography) without fixing the nature of that characteristic. These factors, stemming largely from the historical formation of the diaspora, inform its internal structure and explain the rationale of its constituent units. Diasporas are also "trans"-national, that is, they are a nation with its own internal structure but without—and existing across—traditional geographical borders.

To map a diaspora, therefore, requires consideration of its internal dynamics in conjunction with spatiality in order to more

accurately represent a transnational reality. Specific techniques of doing this remain to be teased out; my intention here is to direct attention to the need to retool geography for use in diasporan study in ways that allow us to simultaneously incorporate the historical realities from which that geography arose. The larger point is that before one can study interrelationships within diasporas, the units of analysis must be clearly defined based on the diasporan group's understanding of itself.

Any study of the ties that bind diasporas has the potential to yield insight into why formal transnational organizations may exist in some cases, or whether particular cultural practices serve to cement diasporan identification (see, e.g., Tölölyan, "Elites"). There are many players facilitating or obstructing diasporan interconnections, from individuals to nation-states to transnational forces, with multilayered results. For example, xenophobia could lead to reprisals against expressions of diasporan (as opposed to patriotic) nationalism in the same countries that facilitate diasporan networking through accessible telecommunications technology. There may be some segments for which interconnections are stronger than others, or of a different nature. These are but some suggestions for ways in which to explore this specific dimension of the diasporan experience.

### **3. The Comparative Study of Diasporas**

The ultimate objective of the framework outlined above is to provide a stronger basis for the comparative approach to the study of diasporas. The first step of this process would be to examine the four dimensions of study of single diasporas: (1) the reasons for and conditions of the relocation; (2) relationships with the homeland; (3) relationships with hostlands; and (4) interrelationships within the diasporan group. These both allow us to identify any single social formation as a diaspora and make it comparable to others. A general typology of diasporas must and would provide a fundamental basis for their comparison. A captivity diaspora may be very different in nature from a trade diaspora. Similarly, the relative political or economic strength of the homeland may correlate to specific patterns of interrelationships within its diaspora. While this article has concentrated on the conditions of dispersal, any of the other dimensions of single-diaspora study are potentially alternative or simultaneous points of comparison that would enable us to establish typologies of diasporas for more effective analysis. The extraordinary amount of research on the diasporan experiences of multiple populations now makes it possible to move into a new generation of comparative diasporan study.

The element of time may be considered in a non-linear fashion. Each of the above dimensions of diasporan experience is dynamic,

and each changes over the course of a diaspora's life history. This raises the question of whether it is possible to establish some form of chronology for stages of a diaspora's history. The initial dispersal is, at first glance, a clear marker for the beginning of a diaspora when it is a massive relocation caused by a discrete crisis. Yet this does not preclude the possibility of both previous and subsequent migrations. This point was raised earlier in the case of subsequent diasporization within the Jewish and African diasporas, but it applies to any diaspora in existence over long periods of time. In some cases there are centuries between the initial diasporization and subsequent ones. Take, for example, a descendant of the Arabian peoples who moved to Egypt around the seventh century CE, who now lives in London. It could well be argued that this individual could only be considered part of the African diaspora, based on place of birth. Yet he or she is, simultaneously, part of a new, or young (postcolonial African), diaspora; a middle-aged (modern African) diaspora; and an old (Arabian) diaspora. These terms are used intentionally to evoke a reference to the life history of diasporas. It is possible that newer diasporas (up to two or three generations removed from the original dispersal) are substantially different in character, with such issues as migration, adaptation, or political strategies dominating both discourse and experience. At this early stage, it is likely that a common bond to the homeland would be the foundation of diasporan identity. By the fourth generation, however, the situation is likely to be quite different. At that point, diasporan populations may need to actively reinforce identity in order to counteract assimilation. I would suggest that another phase is entered when relationships develop between diverse communities of the diaspora to forge a diasporan common identity distinct from an identification exclusively as members of a homeland. There is a subtle but critical difference between notions of community centered on the homeland and those centered on the diaspora itself. Does yet another phase begin when secondary diasporas emerge? Is there a point at which a diaspora ceases to exist as a meaningful category of analysis, or do the echoes of older diasporas linger on even as newer diasporas disperse and intermingle? These are basic questions about the maturation of diasporas that can be explored through comparative analysis.

In *New Diasporas*, Nicholas Van Hear discusses some of the issues faced by newer diasporas and highlights the utility of situating diasporas historically in the age in which they occur (a linear consideration of time). Although they are posited in the present as transnational communities, diasporas have existed prior to modern constructions of the nation-state. The rise of modern state formation has undoubtedly affected the history of diasporas

and the increasing rise of diaspora identities in the present. It is possible that, in antiquity, diasporas were more likely to consist of conquering armies than of the refugees and wage workers so common in diasporas of the late twentieth century. Comparative study stands to shed light on the changing nature of diasporas in different historical eras.

One such line of inquiry by Khachig Tölölyan suggests that globalization and transnational institutions are becoming an increasingly important agent in the formation of diasporas in the modern era.<sup>30</sup> International conditions have always played some role in determining the nature and destination of particular diasporas, to varying degrees. For example, the global trade network established by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century led to the involvement of selected African nations and American destinations in what would evolve into the full trans-Atlantic slave trade (Russell-Wood). Tölölyan's analysis of the Armenian diaspora, like Van Hear's profiles of contemporary diasporas, suggests that the agency of such transnational factors as debt creation in developing nations, multinational corporations, or genocidal warfare is perhaps playing more of a role in forcing people into diasporas than the core triad of the homeland, hostlands, and the departing group. This raises a number of questions. First, should global forces be considered independently as agents of diaspora? The agency of the global context is considered in this essay specifically as related to the seminal diasporization and the establishment of the transnational diasporan community, but other approaches are possible. Has the relative weight of the international context changed over time? If we broaden the idea of "global context" to include technologies of communication, transportation, or even warfare, new advances on these fronts may affect the manner in which diasporas are formed and their trajectories of development. Do different types of diasporas result depending on the extent to which global powers are involved? Perhaps diaspora creation is a corollary of the rise of new empires or superpowers. The role of the global is but one of the comparative issues whose closer analysis would serve not only to refine our understanding of the diasporan phenomenon but also to help situate diasporas in world history.

Place is another important topic for consideration. Diasporas intersect and overlap, especially in cosmopolitan areas; the impact of diasporas on each other, and the effect of that interaction on individual identities and collective political strategies, is one avenue of further research. Analysis of "diasporan capitals," sites around which communities from many diasporas coalesce, potentially holds keys to a more nuanced understanding of the processes and specific factors affecting the creation of diasporan identity.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The many questions raised in this article can best be answered through comparative empirical analysis, from which can be derived some conclusions about the nature of diasporas over time and throughout the course of human history. The framework of diaspora provides an alternative perspective on world history viewed as a series of overlapping diasporizations.<sup>32</sup> In seeking to develop new tools with which to understand diasporas, it may be necessary to consider adapting specific methodologies designed for diasporan studies.

There are themes essential to diasporan study whose exploration has been weighted in certain disciplines. Cultural and literary studies have developed considerable literature on the sociocultural and personal implications of transnationalism. Anthropologists were pioneers in ethnography early in the twentieth century and more recently have articulated theories, such as that of cultural re- genesis, that are integral to diasporan study (see, e.g., Mintz and Price). Much of diaspora experience is unwritten: it is inscribed in the creative arts, material culture, and oral traditions. This presents methodological challenges on multiple levels. Diasporan study requires the full range of the scholar's craft; the diasporan scholar must venture beyond the boundaries of disciplinary literature, as well as transcending the traditional geographic organization of most disciplines.<sup>33</sup> This need has implications for the training of diaspora scholars. A program of study geared to diaspora research would necessarily include training in multiple languages and disciplines, as well as immersion in "folk" and expressive culture and experience abroad in some of the communities of focus. New programs, institutions, and models of learning may be required for future generations of diaspora specialists.<sup>34</sup>

There are ongoing discourses within diasporan studies that fall outside this article's narrow focus on epistemology. Across such disciplines as literature, cultural studies, political science, and history, a growing number of scholars are thinking beyond borders to explore the agency of transnational communities as they reinvent themselves, considering the emergence of transnational individual identities as well (see, e.g., Lavie and Swedenberg; McClintock, Mufti, and Shohat; Hall, "Cultural Identity"). Social constructs such as race, gender, and sexuality interact with the forces of state and international authority in these new narratives of postcolonialism, reconfiguring identities in an ongoing quest for self-determination and power.

In addressing power relationships, the diaspora/host binary is not the only consideration (Brah 185). Power comprises all manipulations of resources and identities, a reality the diasporan construct



must accommodate. A diasporan identity is not necessarily empowering if it maintains gender and class discrimination.

Traditionally, diasporas have been viewed as disempowered because they typically lack the resources (particularly economic and military) of formal states. It has therefore been easy to establish their disempowerment as normative. Nonetheless, transnational formulations are clearly capable of overpowering the national insofar as they are able to mobilize necessary resources, a factor that may become increasingly important as old colonial boundaries continue to be challenged by guerilla and ethnonational movements.

This point about power is sometimes unsettling. Articulations of diasporan identity by disempowered peoples suggest a quest for new alliances that might potentially confer more autonomy. The move of the "minority" person toward alignment with an international diasporan community and ancestral homeland gives him or her an alternative basis of power that may otherwise not be available because of traditional modes of hegemony. Diasporan nationalism can become a transcendent, "stateless" form of patriotism superseding allegiance to the various countries in which the diaspora has settled.<sup>35</sup> This possibility has caused concern, most notably in countries with high rates of immigration, that efforts to advance their own interests would lead diasporas "to hold [national] policy hostage" (Freeman 485).

The mere expression of diasporan ethnonationalism, therefore, causes uneasiness in some quarters. For some, it evokes memories of the unchecked xenophobia that characterized the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan/Aryan Nations, or even economic and political struggles such as those between Tutsis and Hutus that became intertwined with ethnicity in Rwanda and Burundi. When communities coalesce around ethnicity (however constructed), they establish boundaries that are sometimes impermeable and, therefore, undemocratic when considered in the context of the society at large. Yet it would be disingenuous to highlight these dangers of ethnonationalism only for disempowered peoples. All constructions of identity are based on power, explicitly or implicitly. People gravitate toward identities that hold some benefit and away from those that do not. That benefit depends on the system of valorization of the individual, and it may include spiritual, social, and economic considerations. Further, articulations of identity express an individual's choice of self-determination within a given society, as opposed to being solely a function of socioeconomic or ethnic factors. Avtar Brah offers the example of two young black British women of Jamaican parentage, one of whom prefers to identify as Jamaican or Caribbean while another, of similar background, opts to assert her Britishness in defiance of cultural marginalization (Brah 193). My own work has focused on the strategic use of identity at the

community level. The diasporan construct is an alternative collective identity that revolves around negotiations of social power, as do all others. The fact that its use is increasing dramatically in recent years signals a corresponding challenge to traditional constructs of borders, nationalities, and imposed identities of disempowerment.

Diaspora studies will necessarily engage ongoing academic discourses concerning transnationalism, identity and culture, migration, imagined communities, and so on. To the extent that diasporan scholarship is clearly defined, it can avoid becoming subsumed within these other debates and, instead, be refined and enhanced by them. The reality of transnationalism in this historical moment has meant that this is also the time for diaspora studies to come into its own. Those of us committed to understanding the process and impact of diaspora have moved beyond the insular world of single diaspora study, but we are still grappling with refining our own language and frameworks of analysis. Though we borrow from, and add to, such discourses as postcolonialism, modernity, world history, and ethnic studies, we have yet to establish an epistemology focused on the uniqueness of the diasporan experience.

This article is, admittedly, only an outline toward that end, but it will, I hope, help us to progress in our attempt to interpret and share what for many of us has been such a profound part of our own lives. For in this present stage of human history, it is increasingly rare to live and die on the land of our ancient forebears; this is, as Khachig Tölölyan says, the transnational moment—the era of diaspora.

#### Notes

1. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, the Rutgers University Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture, the Rutgers University Black Atlantic/African Diaspora Seminar Series, Yale University, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. I am greatly indebted to all those who commented and helped me think through these issues, with special thanks to Colin Palmer and Khachig Tölölyan. This article was completed with the support of the Scholars-in-Residence Program at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

2. Diasporan theorists have noted that this definition, as offered by Walker Connor (among others), is too broad to be useful. (For a critique of Connor, see Safran 83; Tololyan, "Rethinking" 15, 29–30).

3. Egg creams (which, incidentally, contain neither eggs nor cream) were once a popular fountain drink in New York City.

4. Tölölyan discusses a host of factors contributing towards the increase in usage of the construct of diaspora in "Rethinking Diaspora(s)."

## *Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse*

5. A survey of the Dissertation Abstracts International database identified 487 dissertations published between 1990 and 2000 with the word “diaspora” in either the title or the abstract.

6. “Without such a realization,” he wrote, “the expression *African diaspora* may be doomed to the study of enforced dispersal only—to slavery” (Shepperson 51). Jon Stratton revisits the Jewish paradigm in light of its recent representations by diasporan scholars.

7. Safran’s final two categories differentiate between (5) commitment to the maintenance and safety of the homeland and (6) a more generalized connection to the homeland that defines the diaspora’s “ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity.”

8. For example, Tölölyan points out that the traditional understanding of coercion into diaspora now extends to economic coercion. He also highlights the fact that diasporas need not exist as a distinct ethnic group in the homeland but may, instead, form as a *result* of diasporization.

9. Robin Cohen also makes this modification to Safran’s list ( “Diasporas” 514–5).

10. This provocative phrase, coined by Benedict Anderson, has been especially useful in developing theories of diaspora.

11. Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau included the criterion of time in their definition of diaspora (xiv–xvii).

12. This problem is addressed by Robin Cohen in “The Diaspora of a Diaspora.”

13. This approach differs from that of James Clifford, who has suggested defining what is or is not a diaspora through relational positioning. He writes, “Rather than locating essential features, we might focus on diaspora’s borders, on what it defines itself against ... Diasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by ‘tribal’ peoples” (307). While I am proposing an alternative way of *defining* diaspora studies, Clifford (and others) nonetheless raise issues of vital concern that must be addressed as points of analysis within the field, some of which are addressed in the body of this article.

14. The First African Diaspora Studies Institute (FADSI), held in 1979, came to “the strong consensus among delegates at FADSI that African descendants abroad should be conceptualized as an extension of African history” (Harris 5).

15. For a more detailed discussion of the alternative perspectives afforded by a diasporan approach to Afro-Brazilian history, see Butler, “From Black” 125–35.

16. Within the framework presented here, I consider international forces and institutions as part of the context and conditions of the seminal, or defining, diasporization, and again as a factor in the creation of diasporan interrelationships. Factors such as imperialist conquest, slave trading, global commerce, and transnational institutions may be considered as agents creating, sustaining, and also discouraging diasporas. See the section on the comparative study of diasporas for additional comments on this issue.

17. Avtar Brah underscores the importance of the economic, political, and cultural relationships between segments of diasporas as the linchpin on which the concept of diaspora is predicated (183).

18. Robin Cohen’s typology of diasporas, discussed below, is also based on the conditions of the initial dispersal (Cohen, *Global*).

19. Cohen acknowledges the multiplicity of experiences within single diasporas that complicates attempts to use a single identifying label for the group as a whole. My objective here is to derive a typology by basing it on a consistent foundation in the seminal dispersal itself.

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20. Stuart Hall emphasizes non-indigenous ancestry in defining diaspora identity in the Caribbean, going so far as to state that “the Caribbean is the first, the original and the purest diaspora” (“Negotiating” 28).

21. The Yoruba are themselves a “formalized” diaspora of Ile-Ife, which created sixteen kingships that maintained traditional links to their common homeland and each other. (For general background on Yoruba history, see Johnson; Falola).

22. I detail the transition from a Yoruba community based on common ancestry to one predicated on affiliation in Butler, *Freedoms* 190–209.

23. Martin Baumann raises this issue in the context of Euro-American converts to Tibetan Buddhism, asking whether or not they may be considered part of the Tibetan diaspora (383–4).

24. George Brandon offers an approach that combines a consideration of both physical and ideological diasporization.

25. This may also occur as a result of their outsider socioeconomic status, as with the Chinese immigrants of northwestern Mexico in the era of the civil wars. Evelyn Hu-DeHart differentiates between groups invited to fill a special need in the host economy and those who have found their own niche. The latter case is usually more lucrative (Hu-DeHart 98).

26. Such a construction makes membership in a diaspora a birthright, although, as noted above, scholars of the Armenian diaspora have argued that “diasporan” identity implies an active level of participation.

27. Alamin M. Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Shariff offer a useful discussion about the clash of multiple and differing constructions of what some would call diasporan identity among the Swahili.

28. Historian Winston James of Columbia University publicly issued the challenge to consider whether the construct of diaspora truly holds intellectual coherence outside the realm of politics in his oral comments at “The African Diaspora: A Symposium” in May 2001.

29. In this regard, we may consider the issues raised by Colin Palmer regarding the African diaspora and the need to desegregate its theoretical unwieldiness for purposes of meaningful analysis (22, 24).

30. Tölölyan highlights the agency of international forces by situating his analysis of the Armenian diaspora as “framed by and within globalization” (“Elites” 108).

31. See Darshan Singh Tatla’s analysis of the many factors that contributed to Sikh ethnonational identity (11–39).

32. This phrase is borrowed from Earl Lewis’s concept of a “history of overlapping diasporas” (765).

33. My own training in African diaspora history is reflected in the extent to which I draw on that literature in this article. I do not suggest that specialization in specific topics, regions, or disciplines precludes diasporan analysis. Rather, it is the combined contributions of specialists along with those equipped to do multidisciplinary syncretic analysis that will advance our understanding of diasporas.

34. It should be noted, however, that it is not necessary (or feasible!) for a scholar of diaspora to “do it all”; insofar as a more focused study is used to illuminate the larger experience of the group, or a particular aspect of the diasporan phenomenon, there are countless opportunities for specialization within the field.

35. It can also work in reverse, where diasporan communities act as agents of their respective hostlands in their dealings with the homeland (Shain; Tölölyan, “Rethinking” 26).

## *Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse*

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