

## **DIASPORA: A DEFINITION**

In their introduction to *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities* (2010), Kim Knott and Seán McLoughlin refer to some scholars' doubts about the usefulness of the term 'diaspora', as it seems to have become 'an exhausted concept emptied of meaning by overuse

and lack of precise and agreed definition' (2). Lack of precision and indiscriminate use can indeed render any term 'useless' for critical purposes, as it seems to have happened in the case of 'diaspora'. It has often been applied, for instance, to short-term stays outside the nation-state, or to violent dislocations (such as inter-ethnic strife or communal riots) inside the nation-state, besides being applied to those who had moved to and settled down in host nations long ago. We should, therefore, come to an agreement as to where to apply the term and where not to, since the contexts and dimensions of all movements/dislocations are not the same. For this we also need to outline the contours of the changes that the word has gone through. An attempt has been made below to define 'diaspora'.

(Diaspora is a social formation outside the nation of origin.) It is a phenomenon involving uprooting, forced or voluntary, of a mass of people from the 'homeland' and their 're-rooting' in the hostland(s). Diasporic subjects usually have a strong nostalgia for the land they have left behind and for its culture(s), but at the same time may, consciously and/or unconsciously, tend to acculturate or assimilate to the dominant culture of the new space. More often than not, diasporic locations spawn hybrid cultures. Diasporic situations should be explored by paying proper attention to the specific contexts and histories of the ethno-communities, because each diaspora has its own sociocultural, economic and political dimensions.

The word, as has been mentioned earlier, needs to be used with critical precision. Imprecise use of the term would render it useless for critical purposes. One, for instance, often comes across the expression 'internal diaspora' purportedly referring to 'movements within a country'. Any group of people, who leave their native place either of their own volition or because of violence, may travel to another part of the country, but it would not be appropriate to use the terms 'diaspora' or 'diasporic' to describe them. Such a group can return to their place of origin, if they wish to or if situations permit, without any passport or visa. In order to be in the diaspora they would need to acquire legal documents, and fulfil certain criteria and then cross national borders. At the heart of the concept of diaspora, old or new, lies the condition of 'scattering' outside the homeland.



After the birth of the ideas of nation and nationhood, the concept of the 'homeland' becomes intricately associated with these. In this framework, 'homeland' is not used parochially to mean a smaller subnational identity and territorial space like a state within a country or any small locality one lives in for generations. Howsoever different its cultural practices may be, the small locality is still a part of the nation/homeland. Indiscriminate use of 'diaspora' in the subnational contexts may split the 'homeland' into smaller, largely homogenous entities and would pose a challenge to the very foundations of the nation-state. Diaspora theorists lay stress on the belongingness to a nation or a country, even though it may host many ethnic and religious groups. Citing reasons for using the word 'ethno-national diaspora', Sheffer, for instance, maintains that he is interested in 'the politics of dispersed groups whose members regard themselves as being *participants in nations* that have common ethnic and national traits, identities, and affinities' (*Diaspora Politics* 11, emphasis added). He specifically mentions that 'they owe a degree of loyalty to *their nation*, and especially to *that segment of the nation that resides in the homeland*' (11, emphasis added). He, therefore, does not isolate 'that segment' from 'the nation' simply because he conceives 'diaspora' in terms of nation/national identity. The nation/nation-state, rather than a segment therein, is at the core of the concept of diaspora. If a movement from one place to another in a nation-state like India is regarded as diaspora, every movement outside the smaller localities would also demand the nomenclature. These are 'internal migrations' and cannot be referred to as 'internal diaspora'.

In the definition of the term there may be some grey areas such as the issue of the time period required for the diasporic subject/community to become natives or indigenous people. It is an intriguing question, considering the fact that the diasporic members of a white community in a white-dominated country may shake off the 'diasporic' or 'immigrant' tag more easily than the non-whites. The issue does not depend wholly on the conditions of acquiring 'green cards' or citizenships, or that of staying a specified period of time in the host country. It depends more on the public and administrative perception of the subject or the community from a different nation-state. This perception may be created partly due



to the fact that members of these communities still feel strongly attached to a homeland elsewhere and harbour a longing to return there. Clifford believes that it 'is always a political question' (254). It is for this reason that Sheffer observes that 'second-, third-, and even fourth-generation citizens of many host countries (for example, the United States, Australia, Germany, and Britain) are still formally and informally considered and widely referred to as "immigrants" or "migrants"' (*Diaspora Politics* 16). It also largely depends on the political relationship between the host country and the country of origin. One may recall instances of how the Japanese Americans were incarcerated in the United States in several camps after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor during World War II, or how the Chinese living in India for generations were sent to a camp in Deoli, Rajasthan, during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Many of the Japanese Americans were US citizens. The Chinese people in India were denied citizenship although most of them had resided in the country for a long time.

In this section, we may refer to Sheffer's clarification of three terms – 'diaspora', 'diasporic' and 'diasporism'. He observes that

an ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. . . . Among their various activities, members of such diasporas establish trans-state networks that reflect complex relationships among the diasporas, their host countries, their homelands, and international actors. (*Diaspora Politics* 9–10)

The second word – 'diasporic' – according to Sheffer, 'denotes the constitutive features and factors of those social and political formations' (11). These 'features and factors' include 'common structural, organizational, behavioral patterns', and (cultural, psychological, and social virtual) boundary creation and maintenance. 'Basically, however, those borders are drawn in accordance



with the scope of acceptance and maintenance of the common ethno-national identity by diasporans and in accordance with their wish to identify as such' (12). The third term – 'diasporism' – denotes that 'such a discernible overarching phenomenon really can be observed' in the real space (12). Different groups in the diaspora, despite their geo-cultural differences, share characteristic features which 'create distinctive structural, organizational, and behavioral similarities among them' (12). He further says, 'In other words, such groups – whose historical origins are in different territories, nations, and historical periods, who reside in various host countries controlled by different nations and regimes, and who command a range of varying resources – are in fact parts of the same general social and political phenomenon' (12).

## DIASPORA: SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF THE TERM

Etymologically, the term 'diaspora' is of Greek origin. The noun form *diasporá* derives from the Greek composite verb *diaspeírein* – *dia* ('through' or 'across') and *speírein* (to sow/scatter). It thus comes to mean 'to scatter through/across' – an act of dispersion or scattering. As a botanical metaphor, it calls up images of soil (both 'accustomed' and 'unaccustomed'), seeds, transplantation, growth of seeds into saplings, and a new climate where the saplings must grow (and thus suggesting, metaphorically, cultural displacement and acclimatisation in the new space). The entire process of transplantation involves challenges of adaptation to the new environment. The history of the term corresponds to this botanical process of dislocation and relocation.<sup>1</sup> It was originally used in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Torah, and was applied to the Jewish experience of exile which was taken in earlier studies 'as the paradigm for both exile and diaspora' (Baumann 19).<sup>2</sup> In its earliest usage, the term carried the negative connotations of dispersal and decomposition. 'The Alexandrian Jewish-Greek translators of the Hebrew scriptures adopted precisely the disastrous connotations of current philosophical discourse' (Baumann 21). It was a curse word and indicated banishment by God. As Sudesh Mishra points out, '[i]n the context of its appearance



in Deuteronomy, this diasporic removal is associated with curse, with a perpetual otherness amid others, with blindness, madness, and defeat (Deut. 28:28), with a spreading that weakens. (In fact, the Hebrew word *Za'avah*, rendered *diaspora* in Greek, denotes not so much a "removal" as a "fleeing in terror.")' (22n15). Mishra further observes, that over the centuries the word has 'accrued positive resonance as well, bespeaking a sense of tenacity, resistance, and preservation of faith during the worst of circumstances' (22n15). It has also shifted its emphasis from 'scatterings' (departure and deportation from the homeland) to arrival and gatherings in the hostland. The central focus has thus moved from the homeland to the hostland, which gradually becomes the new homeland.

Baumann points out that in the 'evolved Septuagint . . . the noun *diasporá* and the verb *diaspetrein* were coined as technical terms to interpret Jewish existence far from the "Promised Land" in light of an encompassing soteriological [that is, theological; relating to the doctrine of salvation] pattern' (21). The translators, Baumann observes, in fact avoided the concepts of 'exile', 'banishment', and 'deportation' signified by the Hebrew words *gôla* and *galût* (the two words refer to the specific instance of 'Babylonian captivity and exile') while forming the word 'diaspora'; instead they referred to 'movement under force' (*metoikesta*) and 'captivity as a result of war' (*laichmalosta*). 'Jewish-Greek translators of the third and second century BCE intentionally distinguished between *galût* and *diasporá*, adopting a new word to express neologically their situation of living outside Israel-Palestine' (Baumann 21).

The Jewish diaspora, rooted in the story of Exodus, remained the dominant paradigm of diaspora for a long time. Pain and suffering associated with violent dislocations and dispossessions were supposed to be an inalienable part of the concept. Words, however, travel through time, and during the course of their travel, they acquire new semantic connotations. While discussing the term in the article mentioned earlier, William Safran refers to the process by which words widen their semantic fields. He mentions two words – 'ghetto' and 'holocaust' – to exemplify his point. Moving away from their etymological roots, the words now have wider implications. As he points out, "ghetto" has come to designate all kinds of



crowded, constricted, and disprivileged urban environments' while 'holocaust' now refers to 'all kinds of mass murder' (83). He explains how 'diaspora' too has assimilated other connotations and become an inclusive umbrella term to refer to varieties of people such as immigrants, expatriates, people in exile, refugees, and so on. This fact of multiple groups experiencing the exilic consciousness was recognised by several other critics of the time. However, as Robin Cohen notes, Safran gave 'some social scientific contour to the new claims rather than allow a journalistic free-for-all to develop' (4). He points out that the Jewish experience and the concept of homeland remained the pivotal points in Safran's formulations. For Safran, 'members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of "their original homeland"; they idealized their "ancestral home", were committed to the restoration of "the original homeland" and continued in various ways to "relate to that homeland"' (Cohen 4). Cohen rightly underlines the need '*both* to draw generalized inferences from the Jewish tradition *and* to be sensitive to the inevitable dilutions, changes and expansions of the meaning of the term diaspora as it comes to be more widely applied' (5, italics in original).

As a result of new developments, the term now comes to include both categories of people: those who move out of the nation-state voluntarily and those who move beyond their homeland because of coercive developments – ethnic, religious or political. It is for this reason that Sudesh Mishra observes that 'genre designations [for example, 'diaspora criticism'] bear little relation to the question of etymology. Statements on the etymological origins of a term may indeed participate in the genre, but no genre is really ever regulated by the strictures of etymologists or by the definitions found in dictionaries' (vi). Arguing in the same vein, Mishra reiterates, '[r]oot meanings do not give birth to a genre; rather, a genre is made up of the dynamic procession of statements (some entering, some exiting) participating at the relational scene of the nomination' (vi). Different critical positions, or what Mishra calls 'procession of statements', help the evolution of the term. He observes that although diaspora is 'related to the question of dispersion' the 'genre' exceeds the etymological question, including 'counter-statements



or statements that concern matters not strictly connected to the subject of dispersion' (vi).

Given the popular views as well as the critical perception of diaspora in contemporary critical studies, Safran argues in his essay that Diaspora Studies needs to change its critical stand in favour of a more dynamic perception. He extends Walker Connor's broad working definition of 'diaspora' as 'that segment of a people living outside the homeland' (qtd. in Safran 83) by offering six basic characteristic features widely shared by the diasporic communities.

1. 'Diaspora' refers to the movement of people from 'a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions' (83).
2. The displaced people 'retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history and achievements' (83).
3. They apprehend that they are not perhaps welcome in the host country and, therefore, feel alienated from it.
4. They cherish the desire to return to their ancestral homeland ('their true, ideal home') one day at the appropriate time (83).
5. They have a firm conviction that they should be committed to the 'maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity' (84).
6. '[T]hey continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship' (84).

In terms of the above features, Safran refers to 'the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them fully conforms to the "ideal type" of Jewish Diaspora' (84). This is not an inclusive list but considering the time when Safran published the article (1991), it should be considered the beginning of the process of identifying the diasporic groups.

Robin Cohen duly acknowledges the importance of Safran's formulation and builds up his own theoretical position on it. He offers modifications of two of the above mentioned features posited by Safran (points 1 and 5) and adds four more, 'mainly concerning





the evolution and character of the diasporic groups in their countries of exile' (Cohen 6). The two modifications are concerned with the diasporic group's relationship with the homeland. He states that the movement from the centre to the periphery/peripheries 'is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together' (6). He amends the fifth feature by shifting the focus from the 'maintenance or restoration' of the homeland to its 'very creation' which 'covers the cases of an "imagined homeland" that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora's natality in the remotest way' (6). Besides the modifications of these two characteristic features, Cohen also provides some additional features.

1. The groups may 'disperse for colonial or voluntarist reasons' (6). This is a 'most controversial departure' from the 'prototypical Jewish diasporic tradition' (6) and, in fact, broadens the scope of the term by including those who migrated voluntarily throughout history to seek 'work abroad' and can be applied 'to imperial and colonial settlers' (7). It also brings to the fore trading and commercial networks.
2. Cohen draws our attention to the positive aspects of diaspora. This amounts to a paradigmatic shift in Diaspora Studies. He asserts that '[t]he tension between an ethnic, a national and a transnational identity is often a creative, enriching one' (7) and offers the example of the diasporic Jews who contributed to the fields of 'medicine, theology, art, music, philosophy, literature, science, industry and commerce' (7). This they did despite the fact that they suffered 'a degree of subterranean anxiety in the diaspora' throughout the ages (early Babylon, the Islamic world and in early modern Spain) and in multiple spaces ('such diverse areas of settlement as Bombay, Baghdad or Vienna').
3. Cohen speaks of the mobilisation of a collective identity in the context of 'solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries' (7). 'Bonds of language, religion, culture and a sense of a common fate impregnate such a transnational relationship and give to it an affective, intimate quality that



formal citizenship or long settlement frequently lack. A useful description of this sentiment is “co-responsibility” (7).

4. Cohen’s final addition is related to a more complex aspect of diaspora. Going beyond the homeland/hostland binary, he posits the cases of those who experience multiple displacements where the concept of homeland loses its effectiveness for all practical purposes. He therefore suggests that ‘in some limited circumstances the term “diaspora” can be used to describe transnational bonds of co-responsibility even where historically exclusive territorial claims are not strongly articulated’ (7–8, italics in original).<sup>3</sup> He also observes that ‘in a global age where space itself has become reinscribed by cyberspace a diaspora can, to some degree, be cemented or recreated through the mind, through artefacts and popular culture, and through a shared imagination. To cover such examples, I use the expression *deterritorialized diaspora*’ (8, italics in original).

Sheffer, Safran and Cohen, along with their contemporary theorists, have more or less prioritised the ‘triadic relationship’ between: (a) the homeland which is the originary space and site of nostalgia, (b) the hostland and its social, cultural and political contexts, and (c) the ethnic community which tries to retain its own cultural identity in the face of adverse and challenging situations. Although the discussions revolve around retaining community identity, identity cannot be preserved in the purist, uncontaminated sense of the term. In a multicultural society in particular, diasporic subjects are exposed to the influences of the dominant cultures. Many of them, especially the descendants of the first generation, may not like to be confined to ghettoised situations. Bharati Mukherjee’s female protagonist in her novel *Jasmine* (1989), for instance, wishes not to stay put in the Indian ghetto in the United States and ultimately breaks out of it. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) also shows how Gogol and Sonia, like other second-generation Indian Americans, are the products of a new hybrid culture. This is shown effectively through the food metaphors used in the novel. Ashima, their mother, carefully prepares both Indian and Western food items alternately in her kitchen. This shows how the second-generation



members of the community have been adapting to mainstream cultural habits.

Cohen's mention of the lateral dimension of the ethnic relationship gestures towards a transnational turn in Diaspora Studies to be discussed shortly. Roger Rouse, in his article 'Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism', offers an interesting case study of the development of a lateral relationship of a Mexican ethnic community from the rural *municipio* of Aguililla since the early 1940s. This *municipio* became part of a vibrant network of economic and sociocultural activities as a result of the transcultural movement of its residents, most of whom settled in the urban neighbourhood of Redwood City on the edge of the Silicon Valley of California. Rouse's study shows that they kept in touch with their native space through familial, sociocultural, and economic networks. Thus, they 'maintain these spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them to their neighbours' (29). They contribute to the decision-making processes in the family and the community back home. Rouse remarks, '[i]ndeed, through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information, the various settlements have become so closely woven together that, in an important sense, they have come to constitute a single community spread across a variety of sites, something I refer to as a "transnational migrant circuit"' (30). In some cases, thus, diasporic movement of a particular ethnic community to a different, particularly a neighbouring, country may result in the development of a vigorous network of economic, cultural and social activities. Such activities flourish in the absence of strict regulatory steps taken by the state authorities. Initiation of surveillance by the state naturally curbs such ethnic movements and networking.

The additional features mentioned by Cohen testify to the lateral dimension spoken of by Rouse and thereby update the concept of diaspora. These features specifically destabilise what Clifford calls 'localizing strategies' by which he means 'bounded community', 'organic culture', 'region', 'center and periphery' (245, italics in original). Clifford, in fact, believes that 'it is not possible



to define "diaspora" sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to private oppositions' (254). Instead, he suggests the perception of 'a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement' (254). The concept of 'home' naturally comes under considerable pressure as the new spaces become increasingly familiar and the idea of community expands spatially across national borders. This creates an interesting horizontal relationship between those living in multiple places, spread across nation and beyond. This exactly is what Rouse means by 'transnational migrant circuits' which are responsible for the 'spatially extended relationships' established 'through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information'. Clifford comments,

... dispersed peoples, once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labor migration. Airplanes, telephones, tape cassettes, camcorders, and mobile job markets reduce distances and facilitate two-way traffic, legal and illegal, between the world's places. (247)

Clifford would have included computers, e-mails and video calls/conferences, had he been writing the article 'Diasporas' (1997) today. All these technological innovations have the effect of dissolving the physical sense of the border. The modern border is characterised not only by barbed wire that divides countries and nations but also by the most unsuspecting of spaces such as airports at the heart of a country where security formalities like passport checking take place during check-ins and check-outs.

## **TRANSNATIONALISM: A COGNATE TERM**

This takes us closer to what is known as 'transnationalism' which is a recent coinage. The term was used for the first time by Randolph Bourne in his article 'Trans-National America' (1916) to refer to the juxtaposition of groups of multiple backgrounds. It is now used in a radically different context. Today, it refers to the linkages between the national and the transnational spaces through



interests (by way of criteria such as religious beliefs, common cultural and geographic origins)' as agents sustaining the linkages. These are, according to him, transnational groups performing transnational functions. 'The collective attributes of such connections, their processes of formation and maintenance, and their wider implications are referred to broadly as "transnationalism"' (3). He further observes, '[t]ransnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity' (3).

Transnationalism is thus heavily dependent on the functions of the networks across the world. 'The network's component parts – connected by nodes and hubs – are both autonomous from, and dependent upon, its complex system of relationships' (5). Sustenance of the network is aided largely by globalisation, Information Technology and facilities of fast travel. Vertovec quotes Akhail Gupta and James Ferguson to suggest the kind of changes transnationalism has brought in: 'Something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete. At the same time, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount' (quod. in Vertovec 7). Diminishing of the importance of space and contiguity necessarily pushes back the role of the nation-state and foregrounds the role of non-state actors. The emphasis on multilocality and multiple modes of communication has further contributed to the new imaginary.<sup>4</sup>

Alejandro Portes looks at the scenario from the perspective of economic networks embracing the nation and beyond:

Once migrant colonies become well established abroad, a flow of *transnational* economic and informational resources starts, ranging from occasional remittances to the emergence of a class of full-time transnational entrepreneurs. The cumulative effects of these dynamics come to the attention of national governments who reorient their *international* activities through

embassies, consulates, and missions to recapture the loyalty of their expatriates and guide their investments and political mobilizations. The increased volume of demand created by migrant remittances and investments in their home countries support, in turn, the further expansion of the market for multinationals and encourage local firms to go abroad themselves, establishing branches in areas of immigrant concentration. (qtd. in Vertovec 160, italics in original)

Vertovec classifies transnationalisms into six types.

1. Transnationalism as social morphology (social/ethnic formations, 'triadic relationship' between ancestral nation, host nation and globally dispersed, but ethnically identifiable, community, active networks of contacts)
2. Type of consciousness (multilocality, 'decentered attachments', 'imaginary coherence', fractured collective memory, multiplicity of histories, a 'new transnational imaginary')
3. Mode of cultural reproduction (syncretism, creolisation, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity, 'microelectronic transnationalism', cable network and global reception of media coverage)
4. Avenue of capital (transnational corporations, growth of transnational capitalist class – a 'new power elite', transnational subjects transferring small amount of remittances, lateral spread of assets)
5. Site of political engagement (a global public space or forum for dissemination of politic, mobilization of support through technology, 'lobbying of intergovernmental organizations', NGOs, establishment of offices of political parties abroad)
6. Reconstruction of 'place' or locality (creation of new translocalities through actual and virtual spaces)

The multiple connotations of transnationalism are captured by Aihwa Ong in the following comment: '*Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the



*transversal*, the *transactional*, the *transnational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism' (4, italics in original).

## TYPES OF DIASPORA

The phenomenon of diaspora has now embraced transnational dimensions as a result of faster modes of transport, greater scope for interactive contacts due to technological advancements, more flexible government policies and easier investment routes, and effective growth of cultural, political and economic networks. Thus, social and cultural fields have been seamlessly absorbed into economic activities. Although there are ethnic ghettos still in diasporic spaces, the ghetto mentality is increasingly on the wane. In view of these developments, diaspora and transnationalism may be considered co-extensive terms. In the context of the above, it would be wise not to use the terms in a mutually exclusive way but to bring them together within the ambit of Diaspora Studies.

Looking back at history as a vantage point and taking up the archetypal examples of Jewish and African migrations as the starting points, diaspora may be divided into several categories.

Sheffer thinks of two 'meaningful criteria for distinguishing between the various existing ethno-national diasporas' (*Diaspora Politics* 73). These are: (a) status of the migrants' homeland; and (b) the 'age' factor. The latter refers to the time the diaspora takes place. On this criterion he divides diaspora into historical (Classical), modern (recent) and incipient ('diasporas in the making, groups of migrants who are in the initial stages of forming organized diasporas') diasporas (75). Historical diasporas are 'state-linked' and they include the Jewish, Greek, Chinese and Armenian diasporas. These 'diasporas emerged in antiquity or during the Middle Ages, and now they have become linked to nation-states that were created in much later periods'. The second category refers to the 'fully fledged "modern state-linked diasporas," namely, those that were established after the seventeenth century, such as the black, African-American, Italian, Polish, and Irish diasporas' (75). The



last category, according to him, includes Palestinians in Europe and North America and Russians in the Baltic republics.

On the criterion of homeland status, Sheffer divides diaspora into two categories: (a) stateless diasporas; and (b) state-linked diasporas. 'The stateless diasporas are those dispersed segments of nations that have been unable to establish their own independent states' (73). This is a smaller category that includes communities such as the Gypsies, Palestinians, Kurds, Tibetans and Sikhs. 'Those diasporas strive to establish or reestablish independent national states' (74). The problem with this category created by Sheffer is that communities like the Sikhs are not really 'stateless', as they are very much parts of nation-states where they may have been dissident elements and may have fled from. There are still a considerable number of such community members living in nation-states, occupying important positions including those in the highly sensitive defence departments. On the other hand, state-linked diasporas 'are those groups that are in host countries but are connected to societies of their own ethnic origin that constitute a majority in established states' (73). This is a larger category and includes 'all other existing ethno-national diasporas, regardless of their age, their organization, or the nature of their relationships with homeland and host country' (74).

From another point of view, that of experience and profession, Cohen lists five 'ideal types' of diaspora: (a) victim diaspora; (b) labour diaspora; (c) imperial diaspora; (d) trade diaspora; (e) deterritorialized diaspora. These categories are not necessarily diachronically arranged; some of them may be coeval as well. Among the first category Cohen includes Jews, Africans, Armenians, the Irish and Palestinians. Tibetan diaspora may also be added to the list. He in fact mentions that '[m]any contemporary refugee groups are incipient victim diasporas but time has to pass to see whether they return to their homelands, assimilate in their hostlands, creolize or mobilize as a diaspora' (18). In the second group, Cohen includes indentured Indians as well as the Chinese, the Japanese, Turks, Italians and North Africans. He offers 'proletarian diaspora' as a synonymous expression. We shall discuss indentured Indian diaspora ('coolie diaspora') in some detail in the next chapter.



Imperial diaspora, the synonymous expressions of which are 'settler' or 'colonial' diaspora, includes the British, Russian and other imperialist forces. The Lebanese, Chinese and Venetians, Indian business and corporate professionals, and Japanese traders fall within the category of the trade diaspora. The last category – deterritorialised diaspora – includes Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis, Roma and some religious diasporas. Cohen comments that '[t]he expressions "hybrid", "cultural" and "post-colonial" are also linked to the idea of deterritorialization without being synonymous' (18). Missing in the list are highly skilled transnational scientists, technologists and human resource personnel, usually from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds, many of whom are dubbed 'cyber coolies', echoing the term 'coolie diaspora' which was coined during the nineteenth century. People within this new class are truly transnational, conversant as they are with languages and modes of world trade and education. They also demand a place in the typology of diaspora.

### **STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIASPORA CRITICISM**

Diaspora theory has witnessed some paradigm shifts in its history. These shifts have occurred as a result of changes in real conditions on the ground. Global sociopolitical, economic and technological developments, particularly from the 1990s onwards, have inevitably changed the patterns of global movements and consequently have transformed our worldview. These changes are also reflected in the theoretical formulations about diaspora.

According to Sudesh Mishra, diaspora criticism has 'witnessed three scenes of exemplification or two epistemic tremors or riffs . . .' (15). By the word 'scene' he refers to the specific space and time of dispersion. He observes that these 'scenes do not constitute neat temporal blocks. Rather, they intersect across the same temporal axis and some participants (such as Vijay Mishra and Stanley Tambiah) end up contributing to more than one' (15–16). The first scene, according to him, is the scene of 'dual territoriality'. The presence of two distinct territories figures prominently in

the minds of diasporic subjects. This 'subjective split between the geo-psychical entities of here and there, of hostland and homeland' has influenced the critical genre (16). In this reading of the homeland and the hostland forming 'cohesive tensional entities', the homeland is assumed to be 'classically auto-centred, racially self-evident and ideologically homogenised' (16). For the 'diasporists' who are part of the scene, 'there is a straightforward correlation between territorial-nationalistic and psychological-ideological (dis)locations' (16). Diasporic subjects are '[s]uspended between two such terrains (living without belonging in one, belonging without living in the other)' (16). Mishra makes the following comment on this specific social formation:

[M]apping of the geopolitical onto the psycho-subjective . . . spawns a series of classificatory statements about diasporas in general. Roughly, there are three sets of statements. . . . The first set seeks to identify the new *being* (psychic identity) of an uprooted ethnic cluster as it vacillates between homeland (the absent topos) and hostland (the present topos), the second set undertakes to tabulate the peculiar *characteristics* of this cluster while the third, targeting the constitutive role played by memory in identity formations, attributes to the diaspora a departure (from an implied or designated norm) on the *plane of consciousness*. (16, italics in original)

According to Mishra, the first scene represents the root-generated (that is, arborescent) concept of diaspora where split and duality play a significant role. Gabrielle Sheffer, Walker Connor, William Safran and Robin Cohen are the main participants in this scene.

The second scene is one of situational laterality. It is the result of an 'epistemic riff'. 'In this picture, homogenised, circumscribed and nationalised territories no longer function as privileged referents for identity constitution' (Mishra 17). Diaspora, in this position, is 'lateral, peripatetic and multipolar (as distinct from linear, fixed and bipolar)'. This is a 'situation-specific *becoming*' – lateral axes having 'rhizomorphic routes in preference to arboreal roots' (italics in original). It is clearly a departure from 'the dualistic concept of origin and return' (17). The concept of the diasporic subject experiencing, simultaneously, a separation from, and



affiliation to, the 'psycho-territories' gains importance in this scene. According to Sudesh Mishra, '[d]eriving their argument from such versions of poststructuralist thought [for example, Deleuze and Guattari], the participants at the scene of situational laterality assume a dogmatically decentred view of diasporic movements and subjectivity. Indeterminacy supplants stable points of geo-psychical recognition' (18). Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Deleuze and Guattari are some important participants in this scene.

The third scene is the 'scene of archival specificity'. Instead of generalising all diasporic movements by placing them under one category, it pays attention to the 'interrogative specificity' (Mishra 18). The old diaspora, for instance, cannot be equated with the new diaspora. The old version was triggered by the plantation economy, while the latter is a 'feature of migratory flows in the era of advanced capital' (18). This search for the archaeology of specific diaspora constitutes the second 'epistemic rift' in diasporic studies. This 'particularist approach' provides 'an overdue corrective to the generalist paradigm' (101). Vijay Mishra is the 'first diasporist to insist on tracking historical differences within the single dispersed ethno-national formation and has to be given credit for inaugurating the third scene of exemplification' (Mishra 116). Other participants are Martin Manalansan, Donna Gabaccia, Brent Hayes Edwards and Martin Baumann.

In the third scene, Mishra acknowledges the importance of the role of 'the era of advanced capital' in creating a distinctly different type of diaspora (18). This era generates globe-spanning transnational networks of capitalist projects in which human resources form an indispensable part. New diasporic formations are therefore much more complex than ever before. What emerges in the new global reality is a kind of revival of new binaries suggesting the clash of civilisations. The source country/homeland of migration of the diasporic subjects has received overt and undue attention in recent years, re-inventing in new forms the homeland/hostland division along with respective political/economic power differentials. Ethnicity and religion play a crucial role in widening the rift.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, this conflict takes place in the environment of a larger migratory flow of people and greater investment of capital. The rise

of the global terrorist (and terrorist networks transcending national space) shows the accent put on both the national space of origin and the global space where the play of ideology takes place. This is a challenge that theorists of diaspora and transnationalism face today.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Both scattering and gathering are part of an inevitable process of diasporic movements. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni captures this process very effectively in her 'Yuba City' poems included in the volume *Leaving Yuba City: New and Selected Poems* (1997). She imagines, in the section titled 'Yuba City Poems', the emotional ruptures in the diasporic subjects produced by the Sikh diaspora in the early twentieth century. In one of the five poems in the section – 'The Brides Come to Yuba City' – she describes the journey of the brides who were left behind in India for immigration restrictions. They – many of them 'picture brides' – were literally carrying different kinds of seeds:

Labeled in our mothers'  
hesitant hands, . . .  
packets of seeds – *methi, karela, saag* –  
to burst from this new soil  
like green stars. (103, italics in original)

This, interestingly, as I have pointed out elsewhere, corresponds to the etymological meaning of the word 'diaspora'. 'The metaphorical implication obviously is that the cultural seeds planted in the American soil will flourish, adapting themselves to the new environment, drawing sustenance from the new soil and surviving inclement weather, and ultimately taking roots' (H. Lahiri 115n17). The poem, therefore, metaphorically describes the process and condition of 'diaspora', from the etymological point of view as well.

<sup>2</sup> The history of the Jewish experience of exile which is accepted to be the core content for the genesis of the term 'diaspora' is a long one. It goes back to the first millennium BCE. Several Jewish groups were driven out of their homeland to upper Mesopotamia by the Assyrian invaders in the eighth century BCE. In 597 BCE and 587/586 BCE, a large number of Jews, many of them from upper