Diaspora

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abstract   Contemporary diasporas are studied from many different perspectives. An aspect widely acknowledged is their illustrating a dual homeness and their challenge to national cultures' aspiration to sociocultural unity. Insertion into new societies tends to erode the singularity of diasporic communities, but the symbols they retain or create may still warrant cultural reproduction as transnational entities. A factor of multiculturalization of their present-day societies, these diasporas themselves become multicultural entities under the influence of the host cultures on their dispersed communities. The incoherent –even chaotic – realities these contradictory tendencies generate in the eyes of analysts are not necessarily perceived in these terms by the actors.

keywords   chaos ◆ diaspora ◆ dual homeness ◆ globalization ◆ identity ◆ multiculturalism ◆ transnationalism

Delineating the field

'Diaspora' (Dufoix, 2008), a word of Greek origin, refers to the dispersal throughout the world of people with the same territorial origin. A descriptive notion, dispersion is often given religious or ideological connotations such as in the Hebrew concept of *galut* (exile), which is imbued with messianic aspirations of 'Return'. Understandings of the diasporic condition may vary both within and between diasporas. Diasporans may wish to be absorbed into their new environment, but when they attach to their dispersion a particular significance that merits enduring loyalty, they attempt to remain distinct from the 'others' – as a diasporic community. The institutions and networks which they establish then lead them to adopt the usual pattern of an ethnic group grounded in an awareness of primordial particularism (religion, origin, or language). All other aspects being equal, however, because its allegiances cross national boundaries and link it to a transglobal entity, a diasporic community is seemingly less permeable to assimilatory tendencies than non-diasporic ethnic groups. This means that its (unavoidable) adjustment and acculturation to its environment do not inevitably lead to loss of all concern for its original identity.

Establishing a diasporic community, however, is not a uniform process and it may vary from one community to another – in the same society – and in different countries. Robin Cohen (2006) distinguishes here between the 'solid' diaspora, marked by powerful myths of a common origin territorialized in a 'old country', and the 'liquid' diaspora, which is constructed through new cultural links and a substitution of sacred icons (see also Vertovec, 1997, 2004). Adding the in-between model of 'ductile' diaspora, he discusses three models running from historical reality to postmodern 'virtuality'. One novelty of our era, however, resides in the frequent sense of attachment to a 'territorialized origin' that relates collectives of the same origin to each other transnationally – including the original homeland. 'Transnationality' implies that dispersed groups perceive themselves as forming 'one diaspora' that, under an appropriate name, also encompasses the country of origin: the 'Jewish diaspora' refers to Jews' dispersed communities; the 'Jewish world' to the same, but including Israel.

This notion can be expanded to include cases presenting peculiarities but still responding to the principle of dispersed communities bound by transnational

allegiances. It still holds, for instance, for cases referring to more than one original homeland. Chinese diasporans may refer to mainland China, Taiwan, or Singapore, and sub-Saharan Africans whose ancestors were deported as slaves to the New World from different places in Africa refer their origin to the Dark Continent as a whole – unlike Africans who emigrated after their nations won independence. In other cases, sociocultural processes in the receiving setting bring about 'pan-diasporic' tendencies among an amalgamation of groups originating from distinct countries but culturally and socially close to each other relative to their new common environment. Latin Americans become 'Hispanics' in the USA while still conserving features marking their diverse specific origins. Muslims from Arab countries who have settled in the western world tend to see themselves – and to be seen – as a 'Muslim diaspora' at the same time as they continue to display 'Moroccanness' or 'Algerianness'. Not too different is the case of the Kurds, who originate from places that are not united under the same national roof, but who share a common legacy facilitating their coalescence.

Still another growing category in this era of multiple diasporas consists of 'returnees'. Germany, Japan and Israel witness the immigration of people who in the past saw themselves as diasporans from these countries but decided for ideological or instrumental reasons to 'return home'. These returnees have absorbed the culture of their diasporic environments and may eventually rebuild a new community where the previous national token becomes a diasporan identity and vice versa, continuing the 'diasporic code' in inverse mode.

Also qualifying under the notion of transnational diaspora are groups who exhibit a transnational commitment despite the absence of a homeland, and concretize their sense of forming a global entity only through transnational organizations, networks, cultural values, or religious convictions. Jews saw themselves as 'one people' for centuries before the creation of Israel and, in a similar vein, Romanies see themselves as a people encompassing the globe, without specific territorial attachment. This kind of diaspora is quite exceptional and requires conceptualizations of its own, unlike the very different case of the communities crystallizing in post-Soviet Europe, which Rogers Brubaker (1996) named 'accidental diasporas'. These cases, like the ethnic Russians stranded within the borders of newly independent Baltic states, were engendered not by voluntary migration but by changes in national borders. This kind of diaspora retains ongoing relations with its original homelands and displays resistance to the disappearance of its original languages and cultural reference.

The common denominator among all the individual cases pertaining to these categories consists of their each considering themselves part of a transnational whole that eventually includes the original homeland(s), which may be sovereign or territorialized minorities in one or more countries.

Major hypotheses

A growing body of research focuses on transnational diasporas against a background of the increasing importance of the phenomenon. Some researchers still stick to the assimilationist paradigm and emphasize the role of central policies in the social, cultural and political insertion of new groups. Updating their approach, researchers in this group (Heckmann and Schnapper, 2003) have elaborated on different possible strategies – the Republican French aspiration to sociocultural homogeneity, or the British and Dutch permissiveness towards a moderate form of multiculturalism. While they recognize that integration is influenced by personal inclinations, policies, they ascertain, create incentives for given choices.

Other scholars insist more on diasporans' velleities, and point out that immigrants and their offspring tend today to be unwilling to abandon their identities while acquiring their new national tokens (Basch et al., 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2003; Levitt, 2001; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Morawska, 2003). The nation-state container view of society, it is contended, has definitely become outdated. This assumption is the object of diverse hypotheses.

Some scholars associated with the postmodernist trend attack ideologically the very assumption that diasporas, ethnicity, or race are topics of study in their own right. For Paul Gilroy (2000), these notions distort democracy and reduce people to symbols. He calls for the renunciation of race as a category, championing a cosmopolitan humanist outlook on society. Homi Bhabha (1996), echoing Fanon (1961), sets as an ideal 'to be a man among other men'. Identity is but a means of exploitation and Taylor's (1994) praise of multiculturalism a lure. From a different perspective but still in a critical tone, James Clifford (1994) asserts that present-day diasporic discourses by diasporans are to be understood as a search for non-western models opposing the nation-state concept. Arjun Appadurai (1996) analyses the diasporic phenomenon in the context of what he sees as a present-day neoimperialist relationship between 'the West and the Rest'.

Among the more positivist scholars of diasporas, a distinction should be drawn between those emphasizing the impact of contingencies on diasporans' aspirations, and those focusing on cultural and iden-

tity aspects. In the first group, Covers and Vermeulen (1997) and their colleagues describe cases where diasporic identities are assumed to be moulded by economic interests and power relations. Tsing (2000), Sökefeld (2006) and Anthias (1998) deny, from this perspective, that our world has entered a new era. The striking recent developments, they contend, have failed to produce one single new logic of transformation. Diaspora communities, like many other groups, are but instances – among many others – of social mobilization. These approaches concur with Anderson's (1991) assessment that diasporas are imagined collectives, which are only real when imagined as such and impact on behaviours.

Stuart Hall's (1990) approach is not far from this view. While he acknowledges the singular dynamism of ethnic and diasporic phenomena, his understanding of identity is not essentialist but strategic and positional. Identity, in his view, does not signal the core of the self but only a fragmented, fractured and politicized token referring to a given collective.

Other conceptualizations of diaspora go further and underline shared identities as significant elements in themselves (Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991; Tölölyan, 1996). Whatever the importance of circumstances, they believe, there can be no diasporic community without a consciousness of diaspora – even though it does not presuppose consensual formulations among its individual members. This approach does not reject the mobilization dimension, or the assumption of fluidity of collective boundaries, but it does reject the necessarily a priori primacy of the contingency-first hypothesis. It complies with Weber's (1978) old assessment that the sense of belonging forged by religion, history, or a language may be a major component of community formation.

William Safran (2004) goes as far as reversing the contingency–identity relation. He acknowledges that a diaspora often illustrates deracination, oppression and painful adjustment, but it is also via incentives of their own that diasporans develop institutions and symbols. Tölölyan (1996) adds the consideration of global processes of deterritorialization and migration. These processes are bound to a decline of locality as a point of reference for the collective identities at the core of the diaspora experience (Sheffer, 2003).

Defining a collective identity is by no means easy, as its formulation often varies among members of the same community, and at different places and times. This difficulty, I have suggested (Ben-Rafael, 2002), leads me beyond the circumstantialist/essentialist argument to a structuralist approach (Lévi-Strauss, 1961; Lévi-Strauss et al., 1977). Accordingly, diverse identity formulations may be

generated within the same collective as the outcome of different circumstances interacting with different aspects of the same original legacy. What may still keep such formulations connected to each other within the same identity space – and prevent their splitting the collective into different groups that become reciprocally alienated over time – is then conditioned by their declaring commitment to more or less the same people, and drawing symbols from the same reservoir to highlight the collective's singularity.

The historical chain

Transnational diasporas, however, do not appear in a vacuum, and the arguments that divide scholars began long before diasporas themselves emerged and multiplied. As noted here, in several ways diasporas are forms of ethnicity. This latter notion, widely accepted by social scientists, refers to entities that are smaller than society (Eriksen, 1993) and whose members share real or putative common ancestry and are engaged, in Giddens' (1991) words, in a reflexive project of identity-building.

In a broader historical perspective, this concept of ethnicity turns attention to the state and the national political scene. Like nationalism, ethnicity indeed conveys a principle of primordialism that does not often warrant coherence and harmony between the two. A nation-state generally emerges from the broadening of ethnic boundaries to include the societal population under a concept of 'nation', and as such entitled to a state. As negations, however, of *anciens régimes*, states came to generate universalistic rules of citizenship and compliance with duties of civility (Nikolas, 1999). The 'modernist-versus-ethnicist' argument developed from this binarism – the nation's stemming from primordial allegiances and its representing universalistic codes. 'Modernists' equate the nation-state with a 'community of citizens' (Schnapper, 1994); 'ethnicists' (Hutchinson, 1994; Smith, 1986) underline that the nation-state remains the expression of long-standing primordial commitments. For the latter, in contrast to the former, nations and ethnic communities are units of human history and nation-building is never a total break from past cultures. Religion, among other legacies, is most often a founding element of nationalism. Between these schools of thought, Brubaker (1996) argues that universal and primordial aspects are variously involved in different nationalisms, while Nikolas (1999) points out that political-national and cultural-primordial aspects are always complementary in nationalist ideologies.

It is also a fact, though, that many nationalisms

have been unable to prevent the emergence of new, particularistic allegiances, or the re-emergence of old ones, from within the national collective. Scholars explain that for some groups it is a reaction to discrimination (Smith, 1986). Yet it has also been maintained that socially successful groups often retain ethnic allegiances, illustrating that ethnicity is a kind of ground-rule of the human experience. This approach – which we call 'ethnicist' when it concerns the sources of nationalism – is attacked by circumstantialists, who see here developments bound to the social benefits of 'invented' traditions.

Different explanations may apply to various groups according to specific contingencies or historical paths and legacies. In this context, transnational diasporas simply pursue and deepen the multi-phase dialectical transformation of the relation of ethnicity to nationalism. Ethnicity which was present at the origin of nationalism merged into it when the latter crystallized into a nation-state. Ethnicity, however, later re-emerged with the self-assertion of some old or new groups that caused – in some cases more, and in others less – the remoulding of the social order now compelled to make room for 'sub-families' within the 'national family'. Transnational diasporas that multiplied later on with the contemporary expansion of globalization, its communication revolution and unprecedented migration movements, constitute ethnic groups of a new kind with unprecedented impacts by the very fact of their transnational connections and obligations. They challenge thereby the national collective to position itself anew vis-a-vis the world, and to redefine its area of jurisdiction.

Diasporas, states and multiculturalism

As a general case, the founding narrative of diasporas, which constructs their past experience and is conveyed in many manners (by books, forms of cults or folktales), accounts for the condition of dispersal, assesses its challenges and justifies aspirations to retain distinctiveness from locals and allegiance to legacies originating 'elsewhere'. 'Elsewhere' means a transnational orientation rather than an international horizon, as it does not imply any buffering by official institutions. It indicates a commitment that cuts across boundaries and concretizes 'here and now' a principle of 'dual homeness'.

Dual homeness implies the anchoring of a collective in its local environment, intensified by an external reference of belongingness. Such a development is particularly relevant to the case of newcomers in the more affluent western societies that are the major pole of attraction for immigrants from the rest of the

world, and where welfare rights are generously offered to newcomers (Soysal, 2000). Such rights ease the exigencies for these migrants to conform to the prevailing cultural models by reducing the costs of non-compliance. Diasporans are thus inclined to settle in neighbourhoods inhabited by fellow-diasporans, where the new is mitigated by the familiar. Contemporary ease of transport and communication with the original homeland and with fellow-diasporans settled in other countries permit then to anchor the community in a diasporic allegiance. On the other hand, getting jobs and guaranteeing children's future still pressurize diasporans to acculturate to their environments and invest their best efforts at successful insertion into their new environment. When they effectively become inserted into society, they also learn a new language and grow accustomed to new symbols. Ultimately, they acquire a new national identity that becomes their primary one and diminishes the original one to secondary status.

Such processes are bound to set off internal dilemmas and create tensions. In the Jewish–Israeli case, for instance, the quest for leadership over world Jewry regularly brings into conflict the Israeli state, which emphasizes its embodying Jewish sovereignty, and the large American diaspora, which insists on its own valuable experience as a Jewish community. French-speaking Quebec and France perceive themselves as their own centres of world *francophonie* – beyond their reciprocal allegiance. The scattered structures of diasporas and the disparate influences exerted on their various communities may indeed generate divergent perceptions of the common identity, and blur lines of authority. Diasporans become 'different' from what they were originally, and become factors of the sociocultural heterogenization of their diaspora. It is also often the case that English becomes the lingua franca among members of the same diaspora – even if each one speaks it with a different accent – because the original common language has lost much of its grip on diasporans. Nevertheless, some retentionism in diasporic communities is still fuelled by transnational exchanges and makes them a major factor of multiculturalization of their present-day setting – despite the mitigation of the sociocultural gaps. This dual contrast that transnational diasporas illustrate in two different dimensions concretizes the principle of a twofold sociocultural heterogenization of our global sociocultural reality and shows, in other words, a bidirectional force of multiculturalization.

This reality brings with it hardships as well as consolations. Diasporans often feel so at ease in their new setting that they willingly and openly assert their distinction – in spite of all prejudices that may be directed at them – and present this setting as a

genuine – possibly their first – homeland. In this case, they make it quite awkward to denominate this setting as 'hostland' – as do several commentators who reserve the token of 'homeland' for the diasporans' original homeland.

Considering original homelands as 'homelands' may also sometimes be misguiding, since some countries see emigrants more as 'deserters' and refuse to be acknowledged as the migrants' homeland anymore. This is by no means the general rule, though: in most cases, the original homelands show commitment to their expatriate nationals (Verdery, 1996). Some continue to see them as full-fledged citizens, while others grant them special privileges when they decide to return for reinsertion. In several instances, original homelands and diasporic organizations sustain common world frameworks where representatives of all regions discuss common interests.

Governments of original homelands may seek to retain a protective role over their émigrés in their current homelands. In return, diasporic constituencies are also prompted to lobby not only on behalf of their local interests but also of their original homeland vis-a-vis the state, making diasporic transnational interests topics of domestic politics – thereby widening the space and nature of inter-state relations (Laguerre, 2006). Such developments further strengthen the recognition of transnational diasporas and thereby the forces that foster society's multicultural character – eventually through the reconfiguration of the social order and overall identity in ways able to encompass, culturally and socially, those diasporic communities. It is a challenge, however, that can be fraught with hardship for both societies and diasporas. Both sides ask – what are the limits of multiculturalism? What should be left to the domain of communities' singularities, and what are the general symbols and values that should be endorsed by all? The issue becomes more arduous nowadays because collective boundaries tend to be more flexible, permeable and relatively open.

These processes have led some scholars to speak of 'hybridization' (Thelen, 1999) as a feature of contemporary social dynamics. 'Cultural hybridization' means the borrowing by a given culture of patterns of behaviour and values upheld by another. The result, according to Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2000), consists not only of changes occasioned by intercultural contacts but also in the emergence of new in-between categories. This notion is attacked by analysts who reject 'objectivist' approaches towards collective entities. In the present context, hybridization finds its utility by indicating a major source of new cultural developments. It also sensitizes the analyst to the general impact – in terms of innovations and mixings of sources of symbols – characteristic of

societies' development towards multiculturalism. The outcome is a tendency towards fluidity of social boundaries that invites actors to question and redefine their identities in the endless debates that typify contemporary intellectual endeavours.

In turn, this fluidity of boundaries together with the dual-homeness condition of diasporans cannot be without significance for individuals' attitudes towards society and state. Indeed, they signify that social belonging somehow becomes blurred for many people, and that for diasporans, more specifically, commitment to the national society and the state is coupled with transnational allegiances. Hence, none of these lines of loyalty are now one-sided and total. This aspect cannot exist without leaving a mark on individuals' involvement in their actual homeland. Moreover, the fact that many diasporans encounter this problematic cannot be without influence on both the feelings and behaviours of many non-diasporans. In this respect, one may speak of transnationalism – in terms of attitudes towards society and state that are in alignment with transnational allegiances – as a phenomenon that tends to permeate society as a whole. For non-diasporans, this phenomenon signifies that individual citizens may display a shared attitude vis-a-vis society and the state, challenging the rigour of the total commitment exigent upon them and long considered as 'normal'. In this light, transnationalism is nothing less than a general societal condition.

The development of transnationalism and multiculturalism is also largely favoured by endemic traits of present-day societies, above all by their democratic regimes. Democracy, it goes without saying, is grounded in the competition of parties and leaders for support throughout society. This allows groups of many types to become political actors by trading their sympathy in return for responsiveness to their claims, which they are able to promote through media or campaigning. As such, a democratic regime is a fertile ground for any political group capable of building up a constituency and articulating identity politics (Calhoun, 1994). Such a course of action grants public acknowledgement to this political power, and even legitimacy as an actor in the public arena. When this process involves ethnic groups or diasporic communities, it fuels the multiculturalization of society by imposing their recognition as permanent participants in the social order.

On the other hand, all other factors being equal, insertion into the political process by such communities should actually foster their members' identification with the given society and weaken alienation by virtue of their participation in the societal game of power. This, however, ignores the fact that wherever politics is a source of profits for an ethnic or

diasporic constituency, it might also incite leaders to increase the political mobilization of followers. Hence, while receiving more from society could anchor a community more solidly within the national citizenry, political effectiveness may drive it to more politicization and conflict. Empowered diasporic actors may even be tempted to strive for responsiveness not only to their specific demands but also to their aspirations regarding what constitutes a 'desirable' society (Huntington, 2005). Moreover, when considering that the various diasporic communities pertaining to the same setting possibly draw from their legacies a diversity of perspectives on modernity (Eisenstadt, 2003), one may also expect that they might be carriers of a diversity of notions of what that 'desirable society' should be. These notions are not necessarily convergent with each other, nor with the one conveyed by the prevailing culture. In this respect, diasporic communities may represent in their current homeland a, so to speak, face-to-face encounter of different, even divergent, understandings of modernity. Furthermore, claims to impose on the social order perspectives originating from different cultures may also awaken outraged reactions from non-diasporans. What is commonly referred to as 'the right to difference' might thus be the starting point of bitter conflicts over the validity of long-standing societal codes. In this, multiculturalism comes to exemplify a 'risk society' (Beck, 1992).

Empirical diversity and directions for future research

In any event, transnationalism and multiculturalism are now part of our daily life. They are visible to the public eye in every metropolitan linguistic landscape – London, New York, Paris, or Berlin – where from one block of houses to another we encounter different temples, cultural centres, ethnic restaurants, charities, or businesses, all marked by different linguistic signs – in addition to their carrying official languages. By their markers, 'Little Italy', 'Chinatown', or 'Jerusalem' show both their 'belonging here' and their transnational allegiances. They demonstrate how far these diasporic communities are challenging the aspiration to sociocultural unity that was for long the horizon of western cultures. Only half a century ago, these western powers were diffusing their languages and social models throughout the world. In the meantime, decolonization and the upsurge of globalization have implanted countless languages and cultures originating from the 'Rest' into the territory of the 'West', carried by diasporans from all over the world. The communities

they set up impose their public presence through their social dynamics and political ability. Democracy constrains societies to compromise with this anchoring of cultures within their borders and the settling of groups who stand in sharp contrast to the images conveyed by the descendants of old, indigenous families of their own ethnocultural and historical roots – as epitomized by the old French saying, for instance: 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois étaient grands et blonds' [our ancestors, the Gauls, were tall and blond].

A brief look at a handful of salient empirical cases is enough to assess how far the issues overviewed in the earlier sections find concrete expression – in the greatest variety of forms – in our global reality. We can think here of the Muslims – mostly from Arabic countries – who have settled in European countries in recent decades (Roy, 2004); the Latin Americans (Hispanics), most of whom migrated to the US (De La Torre and Espinos, 2006 Wortham et al., 2002); the Chinese who spread throughout Asia before reaching Europe and the Americas (Gomez and Hsin-Huang. 2004; Lo and Wang, 1997; Tan, 2003); and sub-Saharan Africans, most of whose ancestors arrived in the New World as slaves (Koser, 2003). This look reveals both tendencies of convergence and divergence relating, each in its own way, to some of the major hypotheses noted earlier. Discrimination and the weakness of human capital account for the concentration of many Muslims, Africans and Hispanics in lower strata, while human capital assets explain how Chinese tend rather to climb the social ladder. In tandem, not every diaspora shares equally conflicting images of its plight (Münch, 2001): the more successful avoid speaking of discrimination and emphasize the existence of opportunities for individual achievement. On the other hand, while many Africans and more than a few Chinese would be happy with possibilities of assimilation into their new environment, Muslims and Hispanics are more often reluctant to concede distinctiveness, in the context of their respective Islamic and Catholic background. Each group, moreover, adopts different types of community structures and political patterns that reflect both practical circumstances and cultural-religious orientations. Convergence, however, is the rule when it comes to the very endeavour of community-building, the development of networks, the creation of media, the production of symbols fed by both legacies and actual reality and, no less important, tendencies for political crystallization.

Globalization as such and inclusion in target societies tend to erode cultural idiosyncrasies of diasporic communities, but the singularities they retain warrant connectedness and cultural reproduction

within their transnational entities that themselves become multicultural through the influences of their various communities conveying values and symbols acquired in their actual – diverse – societies. These contradictory tendencies contribute to making multiculturalization – of both societies and transnational diasporas – a chaotic and cacophonic process (Wieviorka, 1996). From a more abstract perspective, they in fact concur with some types of reflections aspiring to capture our societal and global realities through new prisms. More precisely, we are thinking here about the notion of chaos that has recently gained popularity in social science. Chaos (again from the Greek) typically refers to situations dominated by unpredictability (Gleick, 1987). The antithesis of law and order, it designates unrestrictiveness – both creative and destructive. Chaotic realities, to be sure, can hardly be objects of analysis where the chaotic principle implies permanent, overall and uncontrolled changes of configurations (Urry, 2002, 2005). Where, however, chaos designates situations that still share some degree of stability, and where the chaotic principle refers only to the inconsistencies of the amalgam that these situations consist of, this notion of chaos, I contend, does not necessarily mean orderlessness – at least as far its perception is concerned. Once certain chaotic aspects of reality become recurrent, and thus familiar to actors, the perception of the disorder may leave room for a notion of configuration in participants' minds as they get used to the respective locations of objects or modes displayed regularly. Then, the diverse and intrinsically incoherent 'contributions' to the totality may be perceived by actors as 'one whole', that is, as a gestalt ('configuration' in German) – even when individual elements of this gestalt find themselves there independently from each other. Actors accustomed to such chaotic situations and to their incoherence thus come to view them as given realities named by notions like 'the centre' or 'downtown'. Moreover, as gestalt theory contends (Scholl, 2001), the set of constituents of those configurations come to be viewed as illustrating, as such, structural properties that pertain to none of these constituents individually. In this sense, gestalt and chaos are not mutually exclusive, and may be viewed as two sides of the same reality.

In this vein, and with respect both to actual homelands and transnational allegiances, the multiplicity of diasporic communities may be analysed as chaotic and incoherent for the intrinsic discontinuity of symbols and principles of action that they represent vis-a-vis their environments, as much as vis-a-vis their diaspora. At the same time, and again in both aspects, they can be analysed as gestalt by the very fact that they are reproduced recurrently and pertain, each in its own way, to the overall image that actors crystallize of the societal reality, on the one hand, and of the transnational entity, on the other. The more so in view of the fact that diasporic communities do not actually remain genuine strangers over time, regarding their environments or their transnational diasporas, alike. Communities in the same environment adjust to each other and are influenced in many ways by the prevailing culture.

This coexistence unavoidably creates a family resemblance of some kind among them, and between them and the prevailing culture. They now select symbols not only from their singular legacies, but also from the cultural 'material' found in their current setting. Above all, diasporans of the same society come to share a national identity and a societal commitment, reducing transnational allegiance to secondary status. Hence, diasporans of all communities and non-diasporans come to share what Wittgenstein (Schatzki, 1996) called 'family resemblance', i.e. a principle of unequal participation in a number of common features among people of a given entity. This is illustrated, for instance, by Afro-Americans, Jewish Americans and Hispanic Americans who, despite their different roots, religions and social positioning still share markers in common and are aware of their belonging to the same nation. A quite similar development takes place – though in different terms – in transnational diasporas consisting of dispersed communities that have become culturally very different from what they were when their founders left their original homeland. While these communities retain some varying commitment to their diaspora and draw some of their symbols from the same store, their resemblance now becomes more and more a type of 'family resemblance'. Hence, American Jews, French Jews, Russian Jews and Israeli Jews – whether non-religious, religious, or ultra-orthodox – are also aware of belonging to some common transnational entity and of their sharing some common interests. These lines of family resemblance tend to attenuate the chaotic character of contemporary societies and diasporas but, on the other hand, they also tend to increase the fluidity of gestalts and undermine their structuration processes, thereby multiplying the opportunities for conflict.

This outlook on contemporary diasporas indicates approaches that would transcend the discussion of the status of diasporas as a field of study, or the description of empirical endeavours of specific cases. It contends that the study of transnational diasporas is, in the final analysis, primarily concerned with the transformations of global social reality.

Annotated further reading

Ben-Rafael E, Sternberg Y (eds) (2009) *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (Dis)order*: Leyden and Boston: Brill.
This book presents in Part I a set of major perspectives on contemporary diasporas. Part II and III discuss empirical case studies – Part II discusses the paradigmatic case of the Jews, Part III a range of cases in different countries and stemming from different backgrounds. Part IV compares major global diasporic entities and draws out a few theoretical conclusions and assessments.

Cohen R (1997) *Global Diasporas: An Introduction.* London: UCL Press.
Robin Cohen points out the changing meanings of diaspora and elaborates on the typical features of contemporary cases. He outlines the diversity of notions of diaspora and, more particularly, what he calls victim diasporas, trading, labour and business diasporas. He also focuses on the eventual relations that bind identity and belonging to diasporic politics. Most interestingly, Cohen elaborates on diasporas as characteristic of a late modern condition.

Dufoix S (2008) *Diasporas*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
This book discusses successively the nature of diasporas, the condition of dispersion which is endemic to it, the ways communities are able to maintain connections with lands of origin and fellow-diasporans settled elsewhere and how the distance might be managed. Of particular interest is the first chapter, which starts with the discussion of the history of the concept and proposes a synthetic analytical framework that is proposed for given aspects of cases such as Jews, Armenians, Africans, or Chinese.

Glick Schiller N (ed) (1998) *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered.* New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.
This book elaborates on present-day immigrants' relation to original homelands, and their experience of social life across borders through continuous contact with theirs left far away. These contacts – in the areas of family, business, or social – result in the retention of genuine involvement in those societies. This, however, does not preclude diasporans also fully involving themselves in their new environments. The contributors to this volume delve into the diverse implications of this phenomenon and discuss the construction of migrants' transnational identity and their relation to the nation-state and nationalism.

Huntington SP (2005) *Who Are We?* New York: Free Press.
Huntington analyses America's multiculturalization stemming from the massive immigration of Mexicans. He considers that demographic explosion as causing a Clash of Civilizations within the US borders that alters the identity of the society. It jeopardizes the US identity, which, in his view, is given shape by the Anglo-Protestant culture, the English language, the rule of law, work ethic, education and upward mobility. Up to recently, immigrants adopted this culture as a means to thrive within American society. However, says Huntington, Mexicans are different – due to the proximity of the original homeland, regional concentration, historical presence, a religious faith that is not Protestantism and a language that is itself a world language.

Laguerre MS (2006) *Diaspora, Politics and Globalization.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Laguerre takes an innovative approach to the analysis of migration studies by focusing on the understanding of the relationships among migrants, their specific localities in their home countries and their everyday practices in the receiving societies. This approach transcends current views in migration studies. He speaks of a radial relationship with the home country where migrants communicate among themselves and with the home country simultaneously. In viewing the diaspora from a global perspective, the author reveals a new theory of interconnectedness in migration, which questions the relevance of the notion of transnationalism.

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This new edition of *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* brings together a range of prominent philosophers and social scientists to debate the essentials of contemporary multiculturalism. Charles Taylor's original question – to which he answered positively – asked about the capacity of liberal democratic regimes to endorse the recognition of different legacies. This debate is joined, in this volume, by Habermas, Appiah and others who question the tensions implied by multiculturalism for institutions and collective identities as well as for religious, gender, ethnic and other social categories.

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résumé   Les diasporas contemporaines ont été étudiées à partir d'approches nombreuses et variées. On les reconnaît généralement comme une illustration de l'appartenance duale et une remise en cause de l'aspiration à une unité socio-culturelle des cultures nationales. A l'inverse, l'insertion dans de nouvelles sociétés tend également à éroder la singularité des communautés diasporiques. Les symboles qu'elles conservent ou créent parviennent cependant encore généralement à garantir leur reproduction culturelle en tant qu'entités transnationales. Les diasporas représentent non seulement un facteur de multiculturalisation de leurs sociétés actuelles mais elles deviennent elles-mêmes des entités multiculturelles sous l'influence des cultures de leurs sociétés actuelles sur les communautés diasporiques dispersées. Les réalités incohérentes, voire même chaotiques, générées par ces tendances contradictoires aux yeux des analystes ne sont pas nécessairement perçues dans ces termes par les acteurs.

mots-clés   chaos ◆ diaspora ◆ double nationalité ◆ globalisation ◆ identité ◆ multiculturalisme ◆ transnationalisme

resumen   Las diásporas contemporáneas han sido estudiadas desde enfoques muy diversos. Uno de los aspectos que se les reconoce es que representan una ilustración de la doble pertenencia y que constituyen un reto a la aspiración de la unidad sociocultural de las culturas nacionales. La inserción en nuevas sociedades erosionan la singularidad de las comunidades de la diáspora, pero los símbolos que mantienen o crean pueden asegurar su reproducción cultural como entidades transnacionales. Las diásporas representan un factor de multiculturalización de sus sociedades actuales y se convierten en entidades multiculturales en si mismas como consecuencia de la influencia de las variadas culturas que coexisten en las sociedades en las que viven. No obstante, las realidades incoherentes – e incluso caóticas – generadas por estas tendencias contradictorias a los ojos de los analistas, no son necesariamente consideradas en estos términos por los actores.

palabras clave   caos ◆ diáspora ◆ doble nacionalidad ◆ globalización ◆ identidad ◆ multiculturalismo ◆ transnacionalismo