

International  
Migration  
Institute

IMI



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

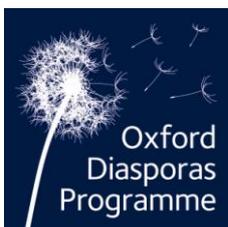
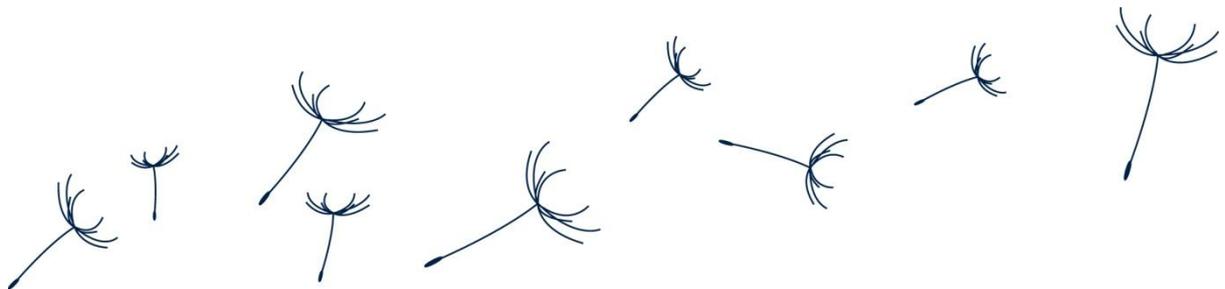
# Working Papers

Paper 55, April 2012

## Diaspora studies

Past, present and promise

Khachig Tölölyan



This paper is published as part of the Oxford Diasporas Programme ([www.migration.ox.ac.uk/odp](http://www.migration.ox.ac.uk/odp)) by the International Migration Institute (IMI), Oxford Department of International Development (QEH), University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK ([www.imi.ox.ac.uk](http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk)). IMI does not have an institutional view and does not aim to present one. The views expressed in this document are those of its independent author.

## **The IMI Working Papers Series**

IMI has been publishing working papers since its foundation in 2006. The series presents current research in the field of international migration. The papers in this series:

- analyse migration as part of broader global change
- contribute to new theoretical approaches
- advance understanding of the multi-level forces driving migration

### **Abstract**

This paper formed the inaugural lecture at the launch of the Oxford Diasporas Programme in June 2011. It explores the contradictions and complexities of three ‘formative binaries’ – between dispersion and diaspora, the subjective and objective aspects of the diasporic experience, and the differences between home and homeland.

**Keywords:** diaspora, dispersion, homeland

**Author:** Professor Khachig Tölölyan, College of Letters, Wesleyan University; Email: ktololyan@wesleyan.edu

## Contents

1 Introduction .....	4
2 Mapping diaspora studies .....	5
2.1 Dispersion and diaspora .....	5
2.2 Objective and subjective .....	8
2.3 Home and homeland .....	9
2.4 Other binaries .....	11
3 Conclusion: the politicization of diasporas .....	12
References .....	14

## 1 Introduction

Every scholar tries to achieve an objective perspective, but every frank scholar knows that he or she also has a subjective perspective shaped by his or her formation as a professional and a person. You are entitled to know mine. Any scholar in the field of diaspora studies must develop some expertise in three fields. First, the scholar must know the people of the diaspora he or she is studying, somewhat in the way that a good anthropologist knows them: must understand how people gain their economic livelihood, organize their social life, participate in public and political life, produce a culture that represents them to themselves and others and in the process attributes value and meaning to their lives. Second, the responsible scholar must have some historical knowledge of how the social formation under study came into being, and sometimes will even acquire more of such knowledge than individual members of that society or people possess. And third, a scholar must have what we now call theoretical competence – a familiarity with the ways in which ideas about similar social formations have been produced and can be critically and self-reflectively examined. In my case, the one social formation I know as a scholar in all of these ways is the Armenian diaspora, which however is not the primary topic of today's talk. My second area of expertise is the product of my work in the past two decades as editor of the journal *Diaspora*, which has given me the opportunity to observe closely the emergence of the multidisciplinary field of diaspora studies.

In 2005, the UCLA sociologist Rogers Brubaker titled his critique of the rapid growth of diaspora studies 'The "diaspora" diaspora'. He pointed out that during the 1970s, the word 'diaspora' and its cognates appeared as keywords only once or twice a year in dissertation abstracts; in the late 1980s, they appeared on average 13 times a year; and by the year 2001 alone, nearly 130 times. Brubaker warned that this rapid dispersion of the term into many disciplinary discourses was stretching and diluting its meaning. He identified the journal *Diaspora* as 'a key vehicle for the proliferation of academic diaspora talk' but added that even its editor (that would be me) worried that diaspora 'is in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category.' The first issue of *Diaspora* appeared at the end of May 1991. In my introductory essay for that issue, I wrote that the 'semantic domain' of the term 'diaspora' was being 'share[d]' with such terms as 'migrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile, overseas community and ethnic community' and that diasporas had become 'the exemplary communities of the transnational moment.' I meant that old diasporas, like nations, were being reshaped and new ones formed by the accelerating mobility across state-borders of people, money, and cultural products such as information, ideas, images, music. I also meant that at the same time, scholars working on a wide range of primary materials in many disciplinary fields were finding the category of diaspora an appealing and potentially useful one for organizing their inquiry. Ever since, as scholars ranging from Dominique Schnapper (2006) to Oliver Bakewell (2008) have noted, we have been observing the further crowding of diaspora's semantic domain. Such crowding is not merely additive, but transformative. As Ferdinand de Saussure pointed out in 1916, no term has its meaning independently, but rather acquires it in its relationship to, and nuanced difference from, related others. Consequently, since the late 1960s, 'diaspora' has come to mean what it does in its imbrication with the terms transnationalism, globalization, migrancy, ethnicity, exile, the post-colonial and the nation. Since the 1980s, the changing meanings of 'belonging' and 'citizenship' have further complicated the conceptual situation. So have digital media, in which networks emerge and self-nominate themselves as diasporas, not

without some grounds, except perhaps in the case of those programmers who, objecting to Facebook's practices in February 2010, fled that social network and established a new digital network named 'Diaspora\*'.

As several contributors whose work I have edited for the journal have suggested, I have on occasion acted like a member of the language-police, but it is not my intention today to insist further on the need to patrol the boundaries of our categories. Nor do I have enough time to offer an annotated narrative account of the sequence of important articles and books that played major roles in the emergence of the field of diaspora studies while, on occasion, also contributing to the attendant terminological confusion. Yet another kind of analytical narrative might ask how and why 'diaspora' became a term '*bon pour penser avec*', to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss on animals in totemism. Today, I will focus primarily on a few terms and concepts that have mattered and persisted and that seem to me likely to remain significant as diaspora studies moves forward; in some cases, pairs of these terms have functioned as formative binaries that will help us map the contemporary field of diaspora studies.

## 2 Mapping diaspora studies

### 2.1 Dispersion and diaspora

The first and simplest of these pairs of binaries is dispersion and diaspora. If I were establishing the journal now, its subtitle might be 'a journal of dispersion studies.' 'Dispersion' is the more general and inclusive term, whereas 'diaspora' is merely one of several kinds of dispersion so that, in a curious reversal, it has become a synecdoche, the part – diaspora – standing for the whole. Other forms of mobility and dispersion include migration intended to acquire education, jobs, land, settlement, new citizenship, or a combination thereof; there are also mobile traders and itinerant laborers who circulate between homeland and extraterritorial opportunities; there are victims of mass deportations, refugees and asylum seekers – some choose mobility, others have it thrust upon them; some are uprooted, others uproot themselves. Some eventually return home, many are assimilated, and the remainder may become consolidated into diaspora communities.

Until the 1930s, the social formations known as 'diasporas' consisted of a network of communities, at some times sedentary and at others quite mobile, that lived in often involuntary dispersion from their homelands and that resisted full assimilation or were denied the option of assimilating, or both at the same time. Many of them existed in lamentable and precarious conditions, glorified by no one in an era when the nation-state was the supreme form of polity, and diasporicity could mean second-class citizenship. In this earlier period, scholars confined the term 'diaspora' to just three groups: Jews – the paradigmatic case; Armenians (since the eleventh century); and Greeks. (Parenthetically, I should add that the ancient Greek port settlements of the Mediterranean, from Marseilles to Syracuse and Neapolis to Tarentum and Sybaris, were not called a 'diaspora' by the Hellenes, even though Robin Cohen's work in *Global Diasporas* (Cohen 2008) might provide an argument for renaming them settler-diasporas now. The earliest application of the term 'diaspora' to Greeks seems to date to the period after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and is firmly established only in the 1650s).

The ascendance of the term 'diaspora' as a cognate for all dispersions is a complex process, the product of the convergence of several autonomous events. Elsewhere, in two articles titled 'Rethinking Diaspora' (Tölölyan 1996) and 'The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies' (Tölölyan 2007), I have offered my own analysis of this process, which I will not recapitulate here except to say that in my view, the preconditions that enabled this convergence in the USA took place between 1964 and 1968. I will note the most important set of contributory events without much elaboration. The most encyclopedic account of all uses of the term appears in Stéphane Dufoix's 650-page dissertation, 'Les Diasporas', published as *La Dispersion* (Dufoix 2012), a marvelous synthesis but one whose richness of detail sometimes obscures the relative suddenness of the term's leap into scholarly popularity.

The first event enabling that popularity was the empowerment of Black Americans as voters by the civil rights acts of 1964–5 and the subsequent emergence in the USA of the Black Power movement; the renaming of coloured people and negroes first as Black, then as African-Americans, a terminological ethnicization that took place during the rise of Jesse Jackson as a temporarily plausible presidential candidate around 1984; and the parallel emergence of the term African Diaspora, first noted in a lecture by the historian George Shepperson at a pan-Africanist conference in Dar es Salaam, in Tanganyika in 1964. While not widely accepted by all African-American laymen, the term African Diaspora is now firmly lodged in universities and in the discourse of serious intellectuals and journalists in the USA. The dispersion of the descendants of former African slaves from the USA and Jamaica, to Brazil and the Indian Ocean, to Britain and Colombia is now a 'diaspora' to scholars in history and sociology, in ethnomusicology as well as in literary and cultural studies; in the latter, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 1993) had a catalytic, cascade-effect rarely witnessed in scholarship.

The second autonomous event that contributed to the renaming of various dispersions as diasporas was the June War of 1967 in which Israel, a state founded by people born in diaspora, spectacularly defeated its Arab opponents and galvanized the already considerable support it had in the Jewish-American community into not just a political lobby but a movement in intellectual life. An attendant product of the boom in post-1967 Jewish-American discourse was what I call the re-diasporization of ethnicity. Greek, Armenian, Black, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Irish, Indian and Chinese leaders of old and new ethnic groups became animated by new and specifically diasporic commitments. It became possible and even fashionable to develop and advocate translocal commitments to the ancestral homeland and to kin communities in other countries. Community leaders added to the older task of staffing and funding intra-communal ethnic institutions the work of cross-border 'outreach'. Often explicitly working with the Jewish-Israeli model, even when this was inappropriate, notables of ethnic communities engaged in diasporic activities even before accepting the term, striving for the acknowledgment of new self-identifications in universities, public media and lobbies, culture and the arts; indeed, at all sites and events where representations of diasporic groups are formulated and disseminated, or its rights and obligations discussed.

The third event to converge with these above-named factors was the passage by the United States Congress of the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 by a vote of 76 to 18. This Act, with amendments added in following years, rescinded the restrictive immigration quotas established in 1923–4, enlarged the number of immigrants and enabled

non-European immigration to the USA on a global scale. Though this event took place in the time-frame I am discussing, that is, 1964–8, I should add that its full effects were only felt after 1970; it took five years for the momentum of immigration to develop. Still, after the Immigration Act passed, Americans began to take renewed note of the fact that theirs was a country of immigrants who became citizens with full rights long before their cultural assimilation was complete. The two texts that played a key role in this process were President John F. Kennedy's *A Nation of Immigrants*, first written in 1958 but published posthumously in 1964 (Kennedy 1964), and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's 1963 tome, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Glazer and Moynihan 1963). Though they differ greatly, both texts reluctantly acknowledged that the task to be completed was to acculturate and integrate all immigrants as Americans without necessarily insisting on their complete assimilation; the melting pot had not homogenized all; ethnicity was acceptable, integration – one of the war cries of the civil rights movement – essential. In my view, diasporas are a special category of ethnicized dispersion. In the decades of discussion that have followed the two texts, there is a recurrent pattern. Both ordinary people and some scholars were so hypnotized by the standard notion of the great immigration of 1871–1923 that they expected a repeat pattern in assimilation and were surprised when it did not happen in quite the same way. At the moment, there is still considerable difference of opinion, with scholars such as Alba, Knee, Massey, Glick-Schiller and Waldinger unable to agree on the extent to which transnational mobility promotes a resistance to full assimilation that may result in diasporas. The proliferating discussion of immigration and the varieties of integration in the USA is subtly but thoroughly hampered by scholars' anxiety about being perceived as racist.

It was in this environment that the American media and then university curricula began to note and ascribe importance to the fact that the major industrial countries of Western Europe had also been taking in new immigrants, starting with Caribbeans in 1948, then labour migrants from Italy and Yugoslavia, Turkey and Portugal since the late 1950s, to whose number Commonwealth and French citizens from the former colonies were added as their homelands were decolonized, starting with Vietnam in 1954, Ghana in 1957, Algeria in 1962, and ending with the disintegration of the Portuguese empire in 1974. The recognition of these immigrations into Europe, accelerated by Enoch Powell's speech of 1968, was coupled with a dim awareness that Canada and Australia were also easing immigration and slowly developing laws and cultural policies advocating tolerance and acceptance that were recast as 'multiculturalism' in the 1970s. Increasing reflection on the new immigration, ethnicity and multiculturalism cleared the ground for the acceptance of the diaspora concept, which made it possible to think of fellow-citizens with multilocal commitments, dual citizenship, and participation in transnational networks as something other than dangerous people with divided loyalties whose discontent might someday cause 'rivers of blood' to flow.

Finally, the fourth major development that in my view prepared the ground for the acceptance by scholars of the diaspora concept was the emergence and eventual valorization within university curricula of the notions of identity, difference and diversity as subjects of inquiry. Again taking the USA as my example, after the costly but remarkable success of the movement for the civil rights of Black Americans, a series of struggles emerged during the later Vietnam War for the rights of women, homosexuals and others. Within university curricula, the indispensability of difference as a function that establishes

boundaries and identities and yet also creates heterogeneities within them first emerged in 1966, as texts by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, by French theorists like Barthes and Benveniste, and by philosophers like Derrida all began to appear. The privileging and celebration of difference led to identitarian claims and turf-wars in academe that had and still have problematic consequences; but they also led to an acceptance within much of the educated American elite of the right to difference that would eventually facilitate the acceptance and high valuation of diaspora as concept and identity. This movement, which excoriated exclusion and advocated inclusion without homogenization, was widespread in both theoretical and empirical work. Like intolerant racist, masculinist and heterosexist norms that silenced and excluded others, homogenizing norms of national identity were rejected. Historians formulated research agendas in order to fill gaps and lacunae, to enable silenced voices be heard, to let the subaltern speak, in the belief that she could, and should, and would be heard. Diaspora studies was a beneficiary of this wider movement. That said, let me add that among the early causes of the success of the diaspora concept that I have enumerated, this last claim is the one most open to debate because there is not sufficient quantified evidence for it; it is based on experience and interpretation.

Together, these steps led to the broad social and scholarly acceptance of dispersion as consequential; it was no longer viewed as merely a preliminary stage of the disappearance of distinct social formations and collective identities, but rather as a first step to their acceptable persistence in the form of consolidated diasporas. In my own practice as a scholar, I call 'diasporas' those communities of the dispersed who develop varieties of association that endure at least into their third generation. But as an editor, I am open to the practices of colleagues who take other positions concerning transnational networks and social fields, positions shared by many of the referees for the journal.

## ***2.2 Objective and subjective***

If dispersion and diaspora are one set of formative binaries that bookend conceptual tensions and terminological variations in diaspora studies, 'objective' and 'subjective' mark another persistent contestation. To breathe life into these banal terms, let me cite at length an essay by the Chinese-Canadian literary scholar Lily Cho (Cho 2007), who writes that 'Diaspora must be understood as a condition of subjectivity and not as an object of analysis. I propose an understanding of diaspora as first and foremost a subjective condition marked by the contingencies of long histories of displacements and genealogies of dispossession.' She adds that 'some diasporic subjects are transnational, but not all...Diaspora emerges as a subjectivity alive to the effects of globalization and migration, but also attuned to the histories of colonialism and imperialism. Diaspora is not a function of socio-historical and disciplinary phenomena, but emerges from deeply subjective processes of racial memory, of grieving for losses which cannot always be articulated and longings which hang at the edge of possibility. It is constituted in the spectrality of sorrow and "the pleasures of obscure miracles of connection".'

Since I have just been arguing that the popularity of 'diaspora' is due to the convergence of socio-historical and disciplinary phenomena, I can hardly endorse Cho's views in their totality; indeed, no scholar can afford to agree with the notion that diaspora may not be 'an object of analysis', as she puts it. We know too much about diasporas as neighbourhoods and networks, chains of connection and exchange, as weak victims of persecution but also as wealthy practitioners of what I call 'stateless power' in my own

work, to agree wholeheartedly with her characterization. And yet her claim is crucial. There is indeed no place called diaspora, though there are sites of habitation and memory. There is no legal, juridical, bureaucratic category named diaspora, though there are passports and visas and residency permits, legal and illegal aliens, *les dépayés* and *les sans-papiers*, documented and undocumented aliens, permanent residents, refugees, stateless people but also holders of dual citizenships and the like. Cho's insistence that diasporas are mourners of loss links her to scholars who see individuals gathering into communities of traumatic memory, consisting of victims whose identity and claims to rights are bound to their wounds. Robin Cohen introduced the notion of victim diaspora a decade before Cho wrote, and he acknowledged that while no enduring diaspora endures merely through such memory, still much of its life can be organized around commemorative functions and discourses and practices that take the wound as their starting point. Of course genocide and ethnocide, rape and dispossession, are nothing if not real. But they are not part of the lived, objective experience of subsequent diasporic generations, who can have no direct and unmediated memories of the horror. Rather, as Marianne Hirsch argues (Hirsch 2008), later generations inherit or construct what she names 'postmemory' through photographs and narratives, artefacts and exhibits, at conventions and conferences and now online. The subjective is real, though in a different register than the materiality of the objective, and it helps to constitute the diasporic individual subject who is drawn to others sharing the same mediated subjectivity. This is one reason why the study of literature and mass culture, and of the new digital media, must be brought closer to the work of social scientists.

### **2.3 Home and homeland**

A third formative binary for diaspora studies is that of home and homeland. The dominant theories claim an orientation towards the homeland as an essential feature of diasporic identity; this position is deeply influenced by a certain view of Jewish history that eventually became Zionism's and is now that of the Jewish state. Many have argued that the Jewish diaspora always lived with the hope of 'next year in Jerusalem', a ritual statement that is taken to figure an unwavering orientation towards the project of return, of *aliyah*. Even today, when not all Jews choose to return to Israel and when 400,000 Israeli Jews live in a new diaspora, and even when the Jewish diaspora no longer holds quite so dominant a place in the field of diaspora studies as it once did because space has been made for other forms of postcolonial, transnational dispersions, it is still the case that a homeland orientation is usually taken for granted. Only the Roma, or Gypsies, it has been noted, are diaspora as stark dispersion, with no gaze turned towards a homeland, no memory of it, no aspiration to return to that area of what is now the Indian-Pakistani border which they seem to have left around the eighth century. The Roma exist as a diaspora across borders because their leaders recognize themselves as dispersed and oppressed fragments of a people, fragments that they increasingly work to reconnect.

With this exception, all other dispersions are seen as having a homeland and being oriented towards it. This is so much the prevailing wisdom that one encounters it in the functionaries of homeland governments, which have been persuaded of the importance of reclaiming their diasporas and are busily creating ministries and bureaus of diaspora in Armenia and Italy, in Greece, the Dominican Republic and even the Basque autonomous region of Spain. Serving as a consultant to two of these, I have found it necessary to argue

for a slightly different and more productive position, whose foundation I can best illustrate with three linked anecdotes.

In 2002, I attended an international conference in Poitiers, France, at which well-known Israeli scholars routinely spoke of the role of Israel as the homeland of the world's Jews. Eventually, an American associate professor asked to respond. She said: 'I am a Jew and an American. My home and my parents' home is the United States. My grandparents' home was Hungary. Israel is the homeland of my ancestors, not my homeland. After the USA, it is the world's second most important country for me, and its prosperity and security matter a lot to me.' Two months earlier, at an Armenian American event in Watertown, Massachusetts, a college student who identified himself as belonging to the fourth generation of his family born in the USA said much the same thing to a speaker passionate about what he regarded as the audience's 'Armenian homeland'. 'I'm an American', the student said. 'This country has been my family's home for several generations. I understand that Armenia is the homeland of my ancestors and that I have distant kin there, and I'd like to do something to help it be secure from Turkey and less economically miserable than it is.' Part of what he said was virtually identical to the words of the Poitiers speaker.

These sentiments are widespread among the young students I have been teaching for several decades. My next anecdote, which I also narrate in an article titled 'Beyond the homeland: From exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism' (Tölölyan 2010), occurred on the first day of my course on 'Diasporas, Transnationalism, and Globalization' four years ago. I asked the 16 students in the seminar to say something about their ethnodiasporic interests, if any. There was a long silence. I turned to a student I had already taught twice and knew well from long conversations and said: 'I know you, I know you're Jewish, you've talked about it, why the silence?' She took her time answering. 'Professor,' she said eventually, 'I know I'm Jewish. You know I am Jewish. The trouble is, the second I admit that, my mother and grandmother also know just what kind of Jew I should be, whom I should date, what I should do. I can't *afford* to be that Jewish.' The remark initiated conversation. A Korean-American student whose parents are, as is often the case with recent Korean immigrants to the USA, committed evangelical Protestants, expressed similar reservations about claiming a diasporic identity. In universities and online, a great many of the young who will form the next generation of America's diasporas express the same views. They acknowledge an ancestral homeland and an ethnodiasporic identity, and both matter. But they won't acknowledge fully any diasporic identity that is conceived in relation and subordination to the national and moral authority attributed to the homeland because such consent will confine them and prescribe their behaviour. Immediately after admitting to any form of homeland-bound diasporic identity, they seek distance from its possible claims, pointing out that they have many identities – the usual gender, race, class, sexual orientation, along with ethnodiasporic identity. They desire and aspire to what I would call, in analogy to Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), multiple and flexible identities that they can configure as needed – they want to select from each and all those elements of which they can be proud and whose claims and obligations they are prepared to honour. They are at home in America, while retaining their feeling for the homeland of their ancestors and the more tightly defined and homeland-oriented diaspora of their elders. They have already abandoned exilic nationalism for diasporic transnationalism.

It comes as no surprise that diaspora scholars have begun to use terms like 'contingent community' for long-lived diasporas that are rapidly being altered by the attitudes of their educated young, or that Aram Sinnreich has published a book about the youthful practice of mash-ups in music (2010). He argues that the young demand and celebrate what he calls 'musical "configurability" rooted in a global, networked communications infrastructure.' Sinnreich uses interviews with prominent DJs, music industry executives and attorneys to argue that today's battles over sampling, file sharing, and the marketability of new styles such as 'mash-ups' and 'techno' anticipate even broader social change. 'Music, which has a unique power to evoke collective emotions, signal identity, and bond or divide entire societies' is now also raw material, a resource for reconfiguring identifications as multilocal as diasporas themselves. In my view, Gayatri Gopinath's article on the Punjabi, Caribbean and Anglo-American synthesis that produced global bhangra music, published in *Diaspora* in 1995 (Gayatri 1995), remains a model of work that needs to be done more frequently.

My argument has been that we must be careful not to locate the diasporic's home in the ancestral homeland too easily. This is a habit partly shaped by studies of diasporic politics. Michel Laguerre's (1999: 641) remark that 'the nation has outgrown the state because of its diasporic tentacles' is exemplary of the problem: it confuses first-generation Haitian migrants with an established diaspora and attributes to that diaspora the status of a fragment or an extension of the nation. In my view, a collection of transnational migrants becomes a diaspora when its members develop some familial, cultural and social distance from their nation yet continue to care deeply about it not just on grounds of kinship and filiation, but by commitment to certain chosen affiliations. Contemporary transnational studies knows that the homeland is reached easily by telephone and video and airplane, and that the transnational social space is the space in which the new immigrants still feel most at home, and they project this characteristic of recent forms of dispersion onto diasporas. By contrast, after several generations, the diasporic is no longer committed because of kinship links and personal memories (though both will matter to the extent that they can be revived and invigorated through travel and participation); nor is he or she committed simply because of not being integrated into the host society, as the first and second generations of dispersion often are not. The diasporic not committed through these links is now a citizen in his or her 'new' home country, possesses a hybrid culture and identity or at the very least has developed a comfortable bicultural competence. He or she is a diasporic because of a set of cumulative decisions to continue to remain bi- or multi-local, to care about others in diaspora with whom she shares an ethnodiasporic origin, and also to care in some manner about the well-being of the homeland of the ancestors.

## **2.4 Other binaries**

Time constraints will not allow me to discuss at similar length other features and formative binaries of diaspora studies. In particular, I regret not having time to explore the debate on the political roles of diasporas and homelands. I will gesture at the issue by paraphrasing the British Sikh scholar Gurharpal Singh, who warns that we must be careful of presuming that new political winds originate predominantly from one and blow to the other. It is never clear *a priori*, he points out, whether diasporas are the new wind or merely the weathervane responding to storms generated in the homeland. Other binaries we might consider are the tension between the term identity, which risks reification and essentialism,

and identification, which points to a much more flexible and reversible process. Another binary harks back to a distinction between the emic and the etic, first made by linguistic anthropology in the 1950s. For linguists, the emic, modeled on the phonemic, designates the perspective of the native speaker, the knowledge and fluency of the insider, who neither needs nor knows the etic discourse by which scholars describe the phonetic, grammatical and syntactical features of a language. The analog of the etic is the scholarly discourse of diaspora studies, which in my view too often fails to understand the emic vocabulary, concepts, representations, dispositions and behaviours by which the members of a diaspora talk about themselves to themselves and perform their identifications for each other, as they study, debate and nurture their own social formation. I insist on the opposition between diaspora studies as we practise it and the study of diasporas conducted by members of the diaspora, and would be happy to discuss it further.

The gap between the emic and etic understandings of diaspora has become more apparent in recent years, as homeland governments and international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF have quite clumsily sought to develop means to attract more investment and remittances, sell bonds to the diaspora, and generally direct the political and economic capital of diasporas, ranging from the Indian to the Rwandan and the Armenian, Haitian and African.

### **3 Conclusion: the politicization of diasporas**

This paper began with a consideration of the enabling social and political conditions leading to the explosive growth of diaspora studies that worried Rogers Brubaker. It then proceeded to a partial typology of conceptual binaries that persistently structure the proliferation Brubaker finds so troubling. While the need to remain vigilant about terminological and conceptual clarity remains, I would like to end by directing our attention to the current, problematic politicization of diasporas and to the role that the relatively autonomous field that is a maturing diaspora studies can play in ameliorating that trend.

Diaspora studies is in danger of becoming a servant to global political forces, as anthropology was once in danger of serving imperialism. The multi-sided politicization of diasporas is due to many factors. As diasporic social formations are consolidated, their own new elites and political entrepreneurs aspire to become leaders, brokers of influence and intermediaries of the diasporas' relations with the governments of their new countries of settlement, as with the governments of former homelands. Inspired by the successes of Israel, India and China in variously attracting diasporic investment and lobbying support, homeland governments are crafting enticements ranging from dual or special citizenship status, to elections for positions in homeland legislatures, as a way of keeping their diasporas productively engaged as subordinates. NGOs, the World Bank and the IMF are now involved in parallel attempts that aim to secure for homelands and their governments more investment, more remittances, more philanthropy, and purchase of diaspora bonds and the like. Finally, the governments and security apparatus of the countries in which new diasporas are emerging, anxious about everything from terrorism to unemployment, are also inclined to reduce the lived complexity of diasporas to a few political platitudes about loyalty and involvement.

Diaspora studies can try to be an antidote to the reductive instrumentalization of the social, cultural and affective complexity of diasporas. As scholars of diaspora studies, we

need to foreground, to remind ourselves and others of that amazing complexity, which is the product of diasporic efforts to construct, represent and discuss the quotidian life of local diaspora communities while also attending to the demands of engagement with other diaspora communities and the homeland. The paradoxical combination of localism and transnationalism, the fierce aspiration to achieve economic and social success and the willingness to sacrifice for the community and the homeland, indeed the oscillation between loyalty and skeptical detachment that characterizes the performance of diasporic lives, is in my view an example of the way everyone, including nationals, will have to live in an increasingly heterogeneous and plural world. It is a world in which diasporas have been living for a while. I hope for a diaspora studies that lives up to the complexity of the diasporas which are both the objects and co-subjects of its analysis.

## References

- Bakewell, O. (2008) 'In search of the diasporas within Africa', *African Diaspora* 1(1–2): 5–27.
- Cho, L. (2007) 'The turn to diaspora', *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 17: 4. Available at <https://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/topia/article/viewFile/13229/22406>
- Cohen, R. (2008) *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, London: Routledge (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).
- Dufoix, S. (2012) *La Dispersion. Une histoire des usages du mot diaspora*, Paris: Editions Amsterdam.
- Gilroy, P. (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London: Verso.
- Glazer, N. and D. Moynihan (1963) *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, Boston: MIT Press.
- Gopinath, G. (1995) 'Bombay, U.K., Yuba City: Bhangra music and the engendering of diaspora', *Diaspora* 4(3): 303–21.
- Hirsch, M. (2008) 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today* 29(1): 103–28.
- Kennedy, J. F. (1964) *A Nation of Immigrants*, New York: Popular Library.
- Laguerre, M. (1999) 'State, diasporas and transnational politics: Haiti reconceptualised', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28(3): 633–51.
- Ong, A. (1999) *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schnapper, D. and C. Bordes-Benayoun (2006) *Diasporas et nations*, Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Sinnreich, A. (2010) *Mashed Up: Music, Technology and the Rise of Configurable Culture*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Tölölyan, K. (2010) 'Beyond the homeland: from exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism', in A. S. Leoussi, A. Gal and A. D. Smith (eds.) *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, Amsterdam: Brill.
- Tölölyan, K. (1996) 'Rethinking diaspora (s): stateless power in the transnational moment', *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, 5(1): 3–36.
- Tölölyan, K. (2007) 'The contemporary discourse of diaspora studies', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27(3): 647–55.