
Rethinking the concept of diaspora: mobility, connectivity and communication in a globalised world

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Introduction

This article attempts a brief overview of the recent debate on diasporas. It selectively focuses on aspects of the exchanges among theorists from the early 1990s onwards and seeks to identify ways in which our understanding of the concept has evolved and attempts to offer a critical evaluation of these.

Of particular interest in this examination is the debate on the ‘nature’ of diasporic communities. Some key questions related to this and central in the discussion contained in this article are: are ‘ethnicity’ and ‘mobility’ or ‘displacement’ sufficient parameters to allow us to make sense of diasporic phenomena and to retain the critical edge of the concept? Or should we attempt to rethink some of our basic assumptions? The line of argument taken suggests that diasporas should better be seen as depending not so much on displacement but on connectivity, or on the complex nexus of linkages that contemporary transnational dynamics make possible and sustain. What is more, I suggest that diasporas should be seen not as given communities, a logical, albeit deterritorialized, extension of an ethnic or national group, but as imagined communities, continuously reconstructed and reinvented. I argue that it is in the context of this intersection of connectivity and cultural reinvention and reconstruction that media technologies and diasporic media become crucial factors in the reproduction and transformation of diasporic identities.

The debate

There has been a relatively longstanding interest within the social sciences in the study of forms of human mobility, particularly migration. Predominantly premised upon and informed by cultures where territory and land are meticulously demarcated and highly valued, and where notions of 'home' are linked with a fixed place, social sciences have reflected the fascination and, at the same time, the apprehension with which sedentary societies have approached nomads, refugees and migrants. In this context a substantial literature has developed comprising highly diverse studies ranging from anthropological research of nomadic life and the cultures of transhumant populations, to the study of migrant and refugee settlement in 'host' societies, to securitised approaches to migration. Within this rapidly expanding literature, the terminology has varied considerably, depending on (a) the different types of migratory experience of different populations, (b) the particular focus of different investigations and (c) the changing concerns informing social research at different times: thus migrants have been studied as immigrants, guest workers, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, displaced populations, 'folk devils' or threats to the security and prosperity of 'host' societies, to name but a few attributions.

In the context of this terminological diversity, it is only relatively recently, that a new term - diaspora - has been systematically introduced and used in academic and policy discourses. To be sure, this 'new' term is hardly a neologism. Its origins can be traced back over centuries (for a history of the concept see Cohen 1997) though its usage and importance has varied over the years. In its long history, the term has been consistently associated with experiences of displacement, dispersal and migrancy; however the concept has remained peripheral in the debates on human migration and mobility until fairly recently.

Over the past decade or so, the number of articles and monographs focusing on the concept of 'diaspora', or premised on the study of the 'diasporic condition' has increased dramatically, indicating not only a widespread and growing interest in phenomena associated with it, but also the realization of the potential of the concept to serve as a theoretical tool for the advancement of qualitatively different perspectives and outlooks in the study of human migration. As Clifford points out 'diasporic language seems to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse. Transnational connections break the binary relation of "minority" communities with "majority" societies (1997, 255)'.

Although a consensus over definitions of 'diaspora' is hardly evident and, despite the fact that it would certainly be premature to argue that a widely accepted theoretical framework for the study of diasporas is likely to be in place any time soon, it is clear that the debate unfolding over the past decade has contributed to

some convergence among different problematiques on the study of human migration. Indeed, a closer look on the semantics associated with the rediscovered term indicates a shift in the nuances it carries with it, a reconfiguration of its meaning, of the experiences and potentialities associated with it, and therefore, of the overall character and focus of the current debate.

As I will try to argue in the course of this article, in this new context, the usage of the term often carries with it connotations relating to the transnational character of diasporas and the phenomena surrounding them. What is more, it intimates the existence of a closer relationship of contemporary diasporic conditions with the highly diverse and complex processes which we identify as globalization. Finally, the ways the concept has been used indicate that a decisive shift from 'mobility' to 'connectivity' (for a discussion of the term see Tomlinson 1999, 10-13) has been taking in the course of the recent debate. Or in other words, that is, an acknowledgement of the importance, even centrality, of processes of communication and exchange (be those material or cultural). While narratives of uprooting, displacement and migrancy continue to be central in contemporary notions of diaspora, there is little doubt that the current use of the term conveys much more.

Revisiting the concept: typologies

Within the renewed debate on the meaning of 'diaspora' and on the significance of diasporic studies, one can identify a few systematic attempts to define the field and suggest ways of approaching and studying diasporic phenomena. In one of the earliest and most systematic efforts to delineate the concept, back in 1991, William Safran argued that the concept of 'diaspora' is linked to those communities that share some or all of the following characteristics:

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

This attempt to construct a quite specific ideal-type stressed the transnational character of diasporas, the symbolic and material importance - for Safran and other proponents of similar notions of diaspora - of a homeland and a vision of eventual return to it, and introduced an array of other factors such as the

perceived marginalization in the country of settlement experienced by members of a diasporic community.

As I have argued elsewhere, the above list, although a useful one, is quite limited and limiting as it clearly revolves around the relationship of the diasporic group with its homeland and therefore plays down other important relationships and linkages that inform the diasporic condition (Fazal & Tsagarousianou 2002, 6-7). In essence, it could be argued that, in this context, diasporas are primarily seen as not a lot more than a sub-category of an ethnic group, or a nation. Other theorists such as Cohen (1997) have used the same prescriptive formula of constructing an ideal type of a 'diaspora' as a vehicle of expanding the definition to include a broader range of phenomena. Cohen thus proposes that perhaps these features need to be adjusted and that four other elements should be added to the list proposed by Safran. According to him, therefore, a definition of 'diaspora' needs to:

- be able to include those groups that scatter voluntarily or as a result of fleeing aggression, persecution or extreme hardship;
- take into account the necessity for a sufficient time period before any community can be described as a diaspora. According to Cohen, there should be indications of a transnational community's strong links to the past that thwart assimilation in the present as well as the future;
- recognise more positive aspects of diasporic communities. For instance, the tensions between ethnic, national and transnational identities can lead to creative formulations;
- acknowledge that diasporic communities not only form a collective identity in the place of settlement or with their homeland, but also share a common identity with members of the same ethnic communities in other countries.

Cohen has clearly attempted to move the debate forward by not only re-emphasising the transnational character of diasporas but also by pointing out the significance of their 'transnationality' in the production of creative tensions and syntheses. However, his renewed emphasis on 'strong links to the past', albeit moderated by his emphasis on the creativity and forward vision of diasporas, does not push the debate decisively forward.

Such attempts to define diasporas undoubtedly offer useful insights and correctly reflect the formative influence of a sense of loss and displacement (and, by implication, the primacy of the relationship of diasporas with a 'homeland') that is common among many –though not all– diasporas. However, they have also been marked by some fundamental weaknesses.

One key weakness relates to their attempt to identify an essential checklist, a closed set of characteristics that, according to some researchers, would contribute to the establishment of a fairly demarcated field of investigation (e.g. Cohen 1997). Such an endeavour is quite restrictive and attempts to artificially and somewhat arbitrarily reify what in essence constitutes a snapshot of complex and ongoing processes. As James Clifford has characteristically pointed out, 'we should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like diaspora by recourse to an *ideal type*' (1994, 306). The notion of diaspora is a very elusive one and although attempts have been made to provide a typology (Cohen 1997) such typologies and definitions do not recognise the dynamic and fluid character of both diasporas and the volatile transnational contexts in which they emerge and acquire substance.

For example, whereas Cohen's distinction between the categories of 'victim' (e.g. Jews, African and Armenians), labour (e.g. the Indian indentured labourers), trade (e.g. the Chinese and the Lebanese), imperial (e.g. the British) and cultural (e.g. the Caribbeans abroad) diasporas take into account the diversity of diasporic experience, they do not really take on board late modern transnational mobility that takes significantly novel forms (such as transnational commuting or mental migration) that cannot be readily discarded as having no relevance to the study of diasporic phenomena (cf. Tölölian 1991; Cunningham and Sinclair 2000). In addition, insightful attempts to make sense of the intensively transnational phenomenon of the Muslim Umma in diasporic terms by Mandaville (2001), although the latter does not fit the strict and primarily ethnocentric criteria advanced by the definitions in question, have the potential of expanding the horizons of our understanding diasporic phenomena.

Questions of home

Another aspect shared by the majority of attempts to build ideal-type definitions of diasporas, perhaps linked to their emphasis on empirically observable 'facts' and the recurrence of these over time, relates to an overrated emphasis on the perceived nostalgic links and memories diasporas have of an original home or homeland. However the notion of home that many researchers stress are questionable as the issue of home within contemporary diasporas becomes somewhat irrelevant.

In contrast to the emphasis that commentators like Safran put on the importance for diasporic communities of maintaining strong links and identifications with the traditions of the 'homeland', Hall points out that the link between these communities and their 'homeland' or the possibility of a return to the past are much more precarious than usually thought (1993, 355). For the place called homeland will have transformed beyond recognition. But it is not only 'back home' that has been caught up in the process of modernization – diasporas

themselves are deeply affected by their position at the centre of contemporary globalisation flows. In that sense, there is no going 'home' again.

There is detour and no return. Diasporas and diasporic experiences, even their apparently more traditionalist variants, should not be dismissed simplistically as backward-looking, as they are almost invariably constituting new transnational spaces of experience (Morley 2000) that are complexly interfacing with the experiential frameworks that both countries of settlement and purported countries of origin represent.

As Avtar Brah writes:

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

The notion of home therefore is much more complex than approaches to diasporas premised on the power of nostalgia would want us believe. It 'is intrinsically linked with the way in which the processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It relates to the complex political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging' '(Brah, 1996, p.194). As Fazal and Tsagarousianou (2002: 11) argue, what is important in diasporic notions of home is their relationship to a multiplicity of locations through geographical and cultural boundaries.

Within the frame of contemporary diasporas, the notions of 'home' and when a location becomes home are therefore linked with the issues related to inclusion or exclusion which tend to be subjectively experienced depending upon the circumstances. When does a location become a home? How can one distinguish between 'feeling at home and staking a claim to a place as one's own?' (Fazal and Tsagarousianou 2002, 11-12)

As recent research into diasporic cultural politics indicates (Tsagarousianou 2001, 29-30), the link between diasporas and countries of origin is often fraught with tensions and ambivalence, as diasporic communities precisely juxtapose themselves (and 'home') to definitions of themselves emanating from the country of origin. Diasporic identity can often draw much more on the experience of migrancy and settlement, of 'making' one's home than on a fixation to a 'homeland'.

This ambivalence in processes of diasporic identification is often due to the contrasting exigencies of a usually 'monophonic' official discourse and politics on the one hand, and a diasporic vernacular or plebeian culture – often more polyphonic and complex - on the other. These contradictory resources in diasporic identification are summarised by Werbner in her assessment of the situation in Britain:

The argument about ethnic naming highlights the fact that it is not only Western representations of the Other which essentialise. In their performative rhetoric the people we study essentialise their imagined communities in order to mobilise for action. Within the spaces of civil society, the politics of ethnicity in Britain are not so much imposed as grounded in essentialist self-imaginings of community. Hence, ethnic leaders essentialise communal identities in their competition for state grants and formal leadership positions. But – equally importantly – such leaders narrate and argue over these identities in the social spaces which they themselves have created, far from the public eye. (Werbner 1997, 230)

In a way, the often uncritical insistence on the primacy of the relationship with an original homeland, can support the essentialization of origins and the reification of what is supposed to be found at the origin (e.g., tradition, religion, language, race). What is more, emphasis on the constitutive role of an 'originary place' can often contribute to lack of attention to the 'potentialities' of diasporas. By 'potentialities' I refer to the various creative possibilities opened by the activities of diasporas in both local and transnational contexts. In addition to the centrality attributed to the formative character of the experiences of loss and displacement that, say, Safran emphasises, it is important not to lose sight of the, at least equal, significance of the ability of diasporas to construct and negotiate their identities, everyday life and transnational activities in ways that often overcome the *ethnic identity v assimilation* dilemma that they are uncritically condemned to by some theorists. Cohen (1997) has certainly attempted to move his typology-premised examination of diasporas towards this direction by pointing out the 'more positive' [as opposed to nostalgic] aspects of diasporic communities and acknowledging that diasporic communities not only form a collective identity in their place of settlement or with their homeland, but also share a common identity

with members of the same ethnic communities in other countries. But, perhaps of equal significance is the fact that diasporic identities are ‘the product of active engagement in “politics” or, in other words, cultural and political action that articulates elements from different cultures and different frames of action and experience in one, more or less coherent whole (Clifford 1997; Fazal and Tsagarousianou 2002, 12). Indeed, it could be argued that it is this particular element that can allow us to distinguish between ‘ethnic’ and ‘diasporic’ identity: not all dispersed populations can automatically and uncritically be identified as diasporas because they share a common ethnic ancestry and identity. It is their readiness and willingness to engage themselves with the building of a transnational imagination and connections that constitutes the ‘threshold’ from ethnic to diasporic identification.

Community and cultural politics

Thus, instead of more uncritical ethnocentric or ethnic definitions of diasporas, we should be focussing more on the complex processes of negotiation that often transcend the limitations of ‘ethnicity’. As Mandaville points out

The estrangement of a community in diaspora – its separation from the ‘natural’ setting of the homeland – often leads to a particularly intense search for and negotiation of identity: gone are many traditional anchor points of culture; conventional hierarchies of authority can fragment. In short, the condition of diaspora is one in which the multiplicity of identity and community is a key dynamic. Debates about the meanings and boundaries of affiliation are hence a defining characteristic of the diaspora community (2001, 172).

This, essentially novel opportunity for self-invention inherent in diasporic cultural politics, is clearly reflected in Brah’s claim that ‘diasporas are the sites of hope and new beginnings’ (1996, 193). In this context it is important to recognise the ‘opportunity structures’ that the combination of migrancy and connectivity that the diasporic condition entails give rise to. This is largely, though not entirely, uncharted territory; empirical, mainly anthropological research has started to shed some light in this area but more needs to be done to reduce the influence of what I would call ‘nostalgia-premised’ definitions of diasporas. Through his study of the politics of identity among migrants from the Balkan region of Macedonia in Australia Loring Danforth (1996) has demonstrated the potential for cultural creativity that can be unleashed by the opportunity structures that processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of diasporas entail. Danforth very convincingly argues that diasporas do not look back in a nostalgic effort of recovering or maintaining their identity but effectively discover (or construct) notions of ‘who they are’ and ‘what home is, or has been’ by essentially looking forward.

In contrast to some of the definitions of diasporas briefly discussed earlier in this paper, diasporas should not be seen uncritically as ‘given communities’ (Mandaville 2001, 169); but rather as ‘imagined communities’ continuously reinvented and reconstructed. Although Benedict Anderson’s original usage of the term (1983) was intended to apply to the study of nations, there is no reason why diasporas could not qualify as imagined communities too. They, too, can be seen as such as they are constructed through the lengthy process of forging links among their members in both local and transnational contexts, ‘of suppressing or neutralising internal differences, of establishing the context in which common experiences can be developed and past experiences can be interpreted in similar ways. This process of imagination ‘involves creating economies of truth, making sense of the raw material of social experience, in fact, creating this very social experience through discursive practices’ (Sofos 1996, 74).

What must be stressed above all is the sense in which the construction of diasporic identity, as is all identity, is inherently a *sociopolitical* process, involving dialogue, negotiation and debate as to ‘who we are’ and, moreover, what it *means* to be ‘who we are’.

Finally and, possibly, more importantly as E. P. Thompson argued in *The Making of the English Working Class*, it is not enough for a social formation objectively to fulfill the material conditions prescribed by a category, such as working class. A collective, subjective understanding of oneself as working class is necessary before the designation acquires any meaning (1968). What makes certain contemporary diasporas really ‘diasporas’ is their self-mobilization around their awareness of themselves as a diaspora, their ability to imagine themselves as such and to construct the appropriate discourses.

Connectivity

Although one cannot but recognise that late modern migration movements are framed by ‘solitude, itinerancy and illegality’ (Papastergiadis 2000, 46) it is equally undisputable that late modern migrants are not lonely and isolated in the sense that their predecessors during earlier forms of socio-cultural distancing were. Whereas displacement has been a constant in the history of migration, in late modernity, global migration trends have produced transnational diasporic groups related by culture, ethnicity, language, and religion, not only in the sense of ‘transnational dispersal’ but also in terms of intense and constant interaction at a transnational level. Such developments have led to a shift of emphasis from globalization as rapid mobility over long distances’ (Lash and Urry 1994, 253) to globalization as proximity and connectivity (Tomlinson 1999). They have also had an impact in our understanding of diasporas as depending on this very connectivity. In this context, diasporas can be seen as situated at the centre of sets

of intersecting transnational flows and linkages that bring together geographically remote locations. In turn, they contribute to the generation of transnational flows in the areas of population movement, finance, politics, cultural production and, as a result, are considered to be in the vanguard of the forces that deepen and intensify globalization (Clifford 1997).

New technologies and faster communications in the new century, contrasted to the long and precarious journeys of emigration and the slow and fragile communications among earlier migrants are therefore just one of the factors that have clearly shaped what we understand as diasporic experience in late modernity. The movement of people characteristic of late modern migration, is complemented by and involves the circulation of money, technology, goods, information, ideas, lifestyles, etc., what Appadurai describes with the rather shorthand terms mediascapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes and ethnocapes (1993). Situating diasporas in this context, instead of seeing diasporas descriptively as groups or populations, we are able to develop a concept that refers to a complex social phenomenon that refers to the array of relationships that these multiple transnational landscapes entails. In this new conceptual setting, diaspora can refer to constellations of economic, technological, cultural and ideological and communication flows and networks. This way of thinking about diasporas allows us to think of a multitude of phenomena and processes in a much more holistic and inclusive way, bringing together diverse transnational flows and the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of these. In this context, thinking in terms of diasporas includes the process of migration but is not exhausted in it. It carries with it connotations of transnational networks and therefore of complex processes of exchanges, material, cultural and mental. It focuses on the dynamics of interaction between migrant groups and societies of settlement as well as erstwhile homelands. Therefore, contemporary diasporas can be seen as 'exemplary communities' of the forms of migrancy that occurred in the mid- to late 20th century *and* the dynamics this sets in motion.

Diasporic communications

As I argued in the introduction of this article, the intersection of this complex connectivity and of the processes of cultural reinvention and reconstruction that the diasporic condition sets in motion effectively renders media technologies and diasporic media crucial factors in the reproduction and transformation of diasporic identities, and of diasporas in general.

There should be no doubt that 'diasporic media' is a term that refers to a considerable and highly diverse array of organizations, practices and settings where diasporic narratives are constructed. It is also beyond question that these differ considerably in terms of their degree of institutionalization, durability and

accessibility as well as their popularity, and as to the degree of their involvement in the reproduction of official or plebeian/demotic discourses. There is also considerable disagreement as to the nature of the diasporic media space. In contrast to more traditionalist perspectives which see a homeland to diaspora pattern of flow, Cunningham and Sinclair (2000) for example suggest that the flow of media not only occurs from the centre to the periphery, but also from the periphery to the centre through centres such as Hong Kong, Mumbai, Mexico City, Cairo which are defining new world regions. They state that 'the media space of a diaspora tends to be of this kind, to the extent that it is spread throughout several of the national markets which have been the territorial unit for international media distribution in the past' (2000, 3; see also Fazal and Tsagarousianou 2002, 16). More recently, the emergence of several studies on diasporic media seems to indicate a more complex landscape characterised by multidirectionality and multiplicity of flows.

But regardless this diversity and heterogeneity, it can be argued that the various media, information and communication technologies that are utilised by diasporas and the media they support and sustain play an important role, not only in the articulation of diasporic identities in the strict sense, but also in the process of providing the narratives 'holding together' or reconfiguring the constellations of flows, networks and relationships referred to above. Diasporic media operating at the transnational level can provide a sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity to the dispersed populations that make up a diaspora and to their everyday lives. This temporal convergence brings a qualitative change in the experience of migrancy and the dynamics set in motion by it: whereas earlier forms of socio-cultural distancing were inextricably linked with temporal distance, making it very difficult for dispersed migrants to share experiences and form common frames of making sense of these, the sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity made possible by diasporic media in late modernity enables new ways of 'coexistence' and 'experiencing together'.

Drawing on Scannell's interesting discussion of the significance of electronic media, it could be argued that, apart from facilitating the compressing of time and space, they bring about new possibilities of being; in particular, 'new possibilities of being in two places at once' (Scannell 1996, 91) - referring to the place where they receive the broadcast and the place where an event 'actually' takes place. Taking this argument further, I would argue that diasporic media do not merely enable their audiences to 'be in two places at once' but effectively give them the opportunity of producing *new spaces* where remote localities and their experiences come together and become 'synchronised'. This is not merely a rhetorical distinction but, I would think, an important dimension in the processes of making sense of the encounters that take place during the consumption of diasporic media content.

In this sense, diasporic media can effectively provide the raw material for, and facilitate the construction of common experiential frames among their audiences thus being in a position to play a crucial role in processes of social group integration and identification as well as of legitimation/delegitimation of relations of power and social hierarchies.

As Mandaville points out,

diasporic media can and should be understood as much more than simply a means by which information of interest to a given community can be exchanged, or a means for communicating images of that community to the wider society. [Indeed].... we need to understand these media as spaces of communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of diasporic community are continually constructed, debated and reimagined (2001, 169).

As it has already been pointed out, a displaced and dispersed population cannot automatically be identified as a diaspora as it is not sufficient for it, as for any social formation for that matter, objectively to fulfill the material conditions prescribed by a category, such as diaspora in our case. The crucial element that makes the concept meaningful and legitimate to use is their self-mobilization around their awareness of themselves as a diaspora. In other words, it is their ability to imagine themselves as such, to imagine and construct the relevant transnational linkages and to construct the appropriate discourses. It follows that this self-awareness and the processes of self-imagination as a diaspora, if they are to be sustained over time, require diasporic institutions, which construct and sustain a diasporic space of communication and exchange where definitions of the diaspora are elaborated and reproduced.

It is this, little studied, capacity of diasporic media that, together with a host of other diasporic cultural, political and economic processes, can transform diasporas from little more than aggregates of migrants into active and vibrant diasporic networks. Clearly, the research agenda on diasporic media and cultural practices needs to focus more on processes of diasporic identity formation and the institutions and practices supporting these.

Conclusion

It is clear that debate on the 'nature' of diasporic communities is only just starting. The process of defining, or better understanding diasporic phenomena is marked by experimentation and continuously informed from debates on identity, ethnicity, globalization to name but a few as well as an expanding body of

empirical research on its subject matter. This paper has stressed the importance of maintaining a sufficiently critical, flexible and open definition of diaspora and diasporic culture in order to avoid reifying the concept and overlooking the multitude of experiences relating to diverse patterns of migration and settlement, modes of that mark and intersect with diasporic experience.

This paper has attempted to decouple definitions of diaspora from and the concepts of 'ethnicity', 'mobility' or 'displacement' as, it was argued these are not sufficient parameters to allow us to make sense of diasporic phenomena and to retain the critical edge of the concept. 'Ethnicity' is an established concept that does not have the capacity to convey the complexity that is inherent in notions of diasporas, including their transnational dimensions, or the linkage with globalization inherent in most attempts to define the term. 'Mobility' and 'displacement' on the other hand, may place undue emphasis on physical movement and, possibly, shift our focus primarily to a population that has moved or been displaced instead of enabling us to study the broader social formation that diasporas connote, that is, the ensemble of relationships, networks, discourses that constitute diasporic phenomena.

In contrast, as I suggested that the concept of diaspora inhabits the 'transnational' and refers to complex multidirectional flows of human beings, ideas, products - cultural and physical and to forms of interaction, negotiation and exchange, processes of acculturation and cultural creativity, webs of exclusion and struggles to overcome it, appropriate frames of reference need to be established. In this context, our understanding of diasporic phenomena might be further enhanced by linking our conceptual quest with the concepts of 'connectivity' and by focusing on the cultural politics that make the imagination and activation of the complex nexus of transnational/diasporic linkages and dynamics possible. This is so as diasporas are not 'given' or objectively definable communities but belong to what Benedict Anderson has called 'imagined communities'. Diasporic cultures are therefore premised on the institution of diasporic imaginaries and communication infrastructures (diasporic media and cultural spaces) upon which multiple and diverse processes of identity and community are constructed, and depend on the production of narratives and discourses that reproduce and sustain relevant frames of self-identification, and collective action.

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