

Defining Diaspora and Their Online Engagements: Problematic Constructions, Deconstructions

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1.1: ABSTRACT

The meanings of some key concepts are experiencing stimulating and “even polemical debates” (Özkirimli, 2000). Key amongst these concepts is diaspora. A few definitions of the concepts challenge essentialist and normative approaches. Some examples are those of Cohen (1997) on diaspora; Giddens (1991), Gilroy (1993), Hall (1996), and Ang (2000) on identity; Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), Smith (1994) on nationalism; Glick Schiller, et al (1992), Portes (1996, 1997), Robins and Aksoy (2003, 2005) on transnationalism; and Brah (1996), Naficy (1999), Connor (2001), and Hammer (2007) on home and the *homeland*. Some other works situate definitions within an otherwise restrictive analytical framework. Examples of these are Safran (1991), Marienstras (1999) on diasporas; Kedourie, (1960), Deutsch (1969), Nairn, (1997), on nationalism; and Rapport and Dawson, (1998) on home and the *homeland*. This paper discusses the concepts based on “how they should be theorised”, rather than “what they are”. This is because of emerging new meanings in a world of constant global changes, such that the productions and reproductions of meanings require regular reviews.

1.2: INTRODUCTION

Beginning with the problematic concept of diaspora, I shall discuss its past and present framework as has been done by seminal theorists. The paper shall then examine the definitions of the concept in ideal types by Safran (1991), Cohen (1997) and Marienstras (1999). I will explain along with them the theories of those who are partly anti-essentialists, partly anti-normative through their opposition to the development of ideal types. For a better structuring of arguments on nationalism, the focus will be on the post-1980 theorists (Zuelow, 2006).

1.3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative analysis was used for this research. It was founded on a critical evaluation of secondary data that included literature on how diaspora is to be theorized, literature on the history of notable diaporas and literature on their online engagements, besides literatures that sought to gauge the disparate viewpoints on the subject matters of displacements, and the related elements of existence in dislocation. The reviewed literature were spread over time, deep into the history of diasporas, and up until the coming of new communication facilities that sought the pains of communication.

2.1: THEORIES OF DIASPORA

The concept of diaspora has a long history. Its interdisciplinary as related to sociology, political science, cultural studies, geography, anthropology, history, philosophy, literature, communication, religion, cinema, music, theatre, (Vertovec, 2000:2; Karim, 2003:1; Brubaker, 2005:4), qualifies it as one of the few terms helpful to theorising human mobility in present times. Originally Greek, diaspora in its recent definition compares with other socio-cultural and economic terms like globalisation, transnationalism, identity, nationalism, nations and nations-state, amongst other expressions that define global changes.

The concept became more popular since the 1980s (Cunningham and Sinclair, 2001:9), into the 1990s, when global economies began witnessing a boom, with increase in human mobility. Issues around movement and settlement often lead to discourses on diaspora. It also involves notions on “travelling and dwelling” (Morley, 2000). Besides, displacements across borders, dislocations and relocations, integrations and disintegrations, “outsiders” and “insiders”, *sameness* and difference (Gilroy, 1993, 2000; Hall, 1996), frequently relate to the concept.

Diaspora is also used to address issues like cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (Georgiou, 2006c); nation and nationalism (Anderson, 1998); transnationalism and migration (Cohen, 1997; Vertovec and Cohen, 1999; Vertovec, 2004, 2005). Other than these are ideas on “strangeness”, and identity (Gilroy, 1997; Georgiou, 2006a), while “notions of ethnicity, immigration, settlement and race are all found to intersect and dissect conceptualisation of diaspora” (Kalra, et al, 2005: 9), just as it “shares an overlapping semantic field (Tololyan, 1991, 1996)”, with these subject matters (Brubaker, 2005:10). Diaspora is additionally a culturalist approach to the contextualisation of resettlement amongst a people, as it emphasises boundedness, (amongst themselves) and possible integration (in hostland), as against individualism (Robins and Aksoy, 2003).

The concept refers to the sowing or the scattering of seeds in Greek. It implies forceful dispersal of people from an original location, or the *homeland*, to different other places, or nations, when it is about humans. A people who voluntarily live in a place outside an original home, with strong collective identity can be a diaspora (Cohen,

1997: ix). This sense of the word is increasingly becoming common. However, the term “sometimes defined as *galut*-exile or bondage-and as *golah*-a relatively stable community in exile¹” (Skinner, 1993:11), is yet a subject of intense and inconclusive theoretical debate. This is because of the ever-shifting variables and contexts that it covers. For instance, while some writers (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Marienstras, 1999) define it in ideal terms, others (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1997; Georgiou, 2000) argue against it.

To start with, Safran’s (1991:83-84) ideal types were particularly pioneering in the development of criteria for defining diasporas. Additions, modifications, or sometimes, absolute disagreements with thoughts of finding a model, follow his suggestions, because of the interweaving character of diasporic experience and consciousness. Safran’s conditions for identifying diasporas are that:

People or their ancestors have been dispersed from an original centre; They retain a collective memory, vision or myth of their *homeland*; They believe they are not fully accepted in the host society; The ancestral home is idealised and there is a myth of return; They believe that all members of the diaspora should be committed to the maintenance, safety and prosperity of the original *homeland* (and they); continue in different ways to keep links with *homeland* – ethno communal consciousness and solidarity (Safran, 1991: 83-84).

Representative as it appears, modern realities of diasporas expose the ideals to criticisms. For instance, the first criterion does not consider the nature of dispersal, whether voluntary or involuntary. The case of the former seems now more common with modern economic migrants (Brah, 1996; Sheffer, 2003; Kalra, et al, 2005; Portes, 1997, 1999). The remainder is largely presuming.

It undermines the fact of continuous attachment to the *homeland*, forgetting that these sometimes normalise over time (Clifford, 1997:255). The attachment it assumes could evolve to nothingness, through “assimilation and distancing” (Clifford, *ibid.*). The exilic (Bhabha, 1994:xii; Naficy, 1999) migrant, or the activist fleeing dictatorships, like the activists escaping military repression, often may not “keep links with *homeland*” (Safran, 1991:83-84), for fear of detection and harming. Cohen (1997:26) expanded these ideals in his own suggestions. He put forward nine criteria as follows:

Dispersal from an original *homeland*, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; alternatively, the expansion from a *homeland* in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; A collective memory and myth about the *homeland*, including its location, history and achievements; An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation; A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate; A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Cohen, 1997: 26).

Thoughtful as these ideals are, the danger of overgeneralisations limits their credibility. For instance, the question of return movements gaining “collective approbation” is yet inapplicable to the migrant experiences. There is also yet to be a “strong ethnic group consciousness over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate” (Cohen, 1997). Some migrants are products of a multi-ethnic society. The often antagonistic groups hardly find permanent bond abroad. Marienstras’ (1999) also overgeneralises in his own classification, as he limits explanations to three elements, namely, time; possibility of movement between home and the *homeland*; and networking amongst diasporic members. He argues:

- (i.) diaspora is a population, which is dispersed from a *homeland* to two or more territories;
- (ii.) the presence abroad is enduring, though exile is not necessarily permanent and it might include movements between *homeland* and host country;
- (iii.) there is some kind of exchange: social, economic, political, cultural between the dispersed populations in the diaspora (Marienstras, 1999:357-8).

Marienstras’ hint of connections of diaspora people and the multi-sectoral framework is important in his description of the different sides to diasporic experiences. Examining the ideas, therefore, Georgiou (2002:15-6) suggests twelve criteria, which highlight transnationalism; the changing nature of diaspora and the influential role of new media in the shaping of diasporic experiences. However, like preceding definitions, her approach is rather too general, as it shrugs off details of groups testing dispersal, but seen only via regional or more global

¹ *Galut* and *Golah* are Hebrew words. The first often refers to exiles, while the second means diaspora (accessed at www.zionistyoungster.blogspot.com/2007/04/out-of-galut.html-45- on 18/02/2008).

classifications.

The experiences of these groups are temporally and spatially useful for the understanding of the general picture. The beginning of identification from a broad description always overwhelms these neglected groups.

Indicatively, the term is experiencing an evolution in meanings in terms of “semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space” (Brubaker, 2005:1). It can therefore at once be too essentialising or too exclusionary, when one, two, or a few ideas define it. This often amounts to reductionism. The assumptions, like Safran’s (and others), will always include and exclude. Hardly can a people also “qualify on all counts, throughout its history” (Clifford, 1996, 306; 1997: 250), apart from the descriptive tendency of the ideal definitions (Kalra, et al, 2005).

The models also undermine the mediation impact of modern media like the Internet (Gilroy, 1997; Georgiou, 2002-2003; Kalra, et al, 2005:19) in diasporic processes of seeking integration, and in the likely idealisation of the *homeland*. The thought of “homogeneity and a historically fixed identity” (Vertovec, 2005:2) is constantly in contest following these definitions of diaspora. It is why Gilroy (1993) and Clifford (1997) depart and regard diaspora as a process. To some others, it is an ideology; a type of consciousness; and a mode of cultural production (Vertovec and Cohen, 1999: xvii-xix; Benesch and Genevieve, 2004; Kalra, et al, 2005: 13).

Common features of diasporas, however, include dispersal; memories and commemoration; myth and imagination (Georgiou, 2006a: 40); nostalgia, or *homing* (Brah, 1996: 180); idealisation or a practicalisation of return; and sometimes, a strong communal sensitivity. These, to a degree, make diaspora matters to revolve around the “*homeland*, displacement and settlement” (Sayyid, 2004). It all makes the concept different from other forms of movements like tourism, migration¹, and excursion (Braziel and Mannur, eds, 2003). This is in spite of Tolayan’s argument that:

The term that once described Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community (Tololyan, 1991:4, cited in Brubaker, 2005:3).

Tourists and migrants may turn into diaspora people, but diaspora people are not continually tourists or migrants. Diaspora may not also be equivalent to exiles or refugees, but exiles and refugees can turn out to be diaspora people after a considerable passage of time. The crisscrossing character of the concepts can however be regular. Imperatively, long period of domicile in host societies characterises diaspora people. A period long enough to challenge the mere reproduction of an original culture. These alongside the position of diaspora vis-à-vis exiles, refugees, tourism, migrants, alongside other evolving concepts² are still subject of intense academic disagreements.

Many groups have fallen into the description of being a diaspora over the years. The biblical connection of diaspora with the exile of the Jews to Babylon following the 586 BC demolition of Jerusalem temple somewhat stands as a scriptural antecedent of the term as a synonym for travails, dislocation, insecurity, and homelessness (Cohen, 1997; Sheffer, 2003; Kalra, et al, 2005). While they later went back to Jerusalem, they spread across Babylon, Rome, Syria, Greece, and Egypt.

The Jewish dispersal, first out of Jerusalem and then out of Babylon, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, has the foremost diasporic description. The Armenian dispersal experience from the 18th to the 19th century, which rose further after the 1915 murder of their leaders, qualifies them (like the Jewish), as victim diasporas (Cohen, 1997: 42). The Greek migration to Asia Minor in 800 to 600 BC for reasons of overpopulation and poverty disconnects with the first two experiences to give the term an encouraging colour (Cohen, *ibid.*: 2). That prepared the grounds for present day use of the word for non-traumatic migrancy occurrences (Georgiou, 2002: 15).

Some cases may belong to this non-traumatic category, as dispersal is not, in most cases, necessarily a result of ordeal, as was the case of the Jewish for instance, but largely a result of a search for a better economic life. Notably though, the initial experiences of the Jewish, the Armenians and the Greeks, which today confirm them as traditional diasporas, is a prototype of sorts, for the Latter-Day description of dispersing peoples as diasporas (Kalra, et al, 2005:9).

¹ Though migration is different from diaspora, the definition of diaspora begins from migration experience. Every diaspora person was once a migrant, or could also become one, in a case of re-migration. As said earlier, the word migrant is used in this work sometimes as a synonym for the diaspora person. It is not necessarily as an effective replacement, but as a description of their otherness.

² The study of diaspora has produced a motley crowd of related concepts including diasporism, diasporology, diasporists, diasporan, diasporific, diasporography, diasporfolio, diasporion, diasporopathy, diasporactivists and diasporanto (Brubaker, 2005). There are also diasporic, diasporisation (Braziel and Mannur, eds, 2003: 4; Brah, 1996: 179), diasporist, diasporism (Clifford, 1999: 332), diasporicity (Dudrah, 2004), re-diasporisation (Clifford, 1997:305; Brubaker, 2005), de-diasporisation (Kalra, et al, 2005:7; Brubaker, 2005). *Diasporic* is sometimes used in this work as a verb to describe a diaspora or migrant process.

Seen as a “category of practice, project, claim and stance, rather than as a bounded group” (Brubaker, 2005:13), the concept also depicts “the migration of borders over people, and not simply from that of people over borders”. Other than this, it defines:

a very large residual set of putative ethno-cultural or country defined diasporas (like) Belarusian, Brazilian (and) Cambodian...and then there are putative diasporas of other sorts: the dixie diaspora, the yankee diaspora, the white diaspora, the liberal diaspora, the conservative diaspora, the gay diaspora, the deaf diaspora, the redneck diaspora, (and) the digital diaspora...(Brubaker,2005:3)

Early diasporas like those of the Jewish, the Armenians and the Greeks, have been extensively studied. Some Latter-Day diaspora, like the Cubans and Mexicans in the US, the Chinese in South-East Asia, the Blacks in the Caribbean and in North America, the Magrebs in France, the Turks in Germany (Safran, 1999: 83) and the Lebanese in West Africa (Cohen, 1997:98) are common in investigations.

Emerging diasporas belong to recent classifications that include populations not necessarily moving because of violence, but voluntarily migrating to improve their living standards. With global changes resulting from the compression of time and space (Giddens, 1990), which new technologies of communication help, economic reasons play an important role in determining present day migrations. Many modern migrants move in search of economic wellbeing, mainly from the developing South to the industrial North, where the “natural end point” (Braziel and Mannur, 2003: 285) appears to be. Recent stories of diaspora are resulting from the usual shattering source to economic, educational, and cultural reasons (Cohen, 1997:1; Appiah, 2005).

Characteristically, diaspora people make at least one major journey, and interact with a minimum of two cultures (Georgiou, 2001: 68), which arises in a progression (Gilroy, 1987: 161). Within the sequence is loneliness, as a common feature. The Jewish experience in Babylon as in Psalm 137, where they “sat and wept...by the rivers of Babylon”, again gives a scriptural beginning to this experience of diaspora people. It illustrates the usual loneliness of many diasporas. In another land, the Jews were lamenting, remembering their origin with nostalgia. They regretted their helplessness when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, humiliated them in different ways. That experience is largely the lot of diaspora people, as in the traumatic tales of dispersing Jews, Greeks, Irish and Blacks.

To diasporas, the *homeland* could evoke deep emotions, illustrating the link to a source, usually described with different tags. Some are motherland, fatherland, ancestral land, native land, home (Connor, 2001: 1), land of birth, or origin. Literary enthusiasts including Petrarch (1946), Mehmed Emin (1977), besides Walter Scott, and Joseph Plunkett (all cited in Connor, 2001: 54-55), poetically document the *homeland* feelings, in what further demonstrates the diversity of its appeal, particularly at the level of emotions. A shaping of the appeals may, however, arise in host society through an engagement with modern media like the television (Robins and Aksoy, 2003), and in the case of this research, the Internet.

Diaspora usage sometimes relates only to people that are not Caucasian (Karim, 2003:2; Kalra, 2005:106). That is probably because of little references to “white” movements as diasporas. For instance, the Poles in Canada, the Germans in Argentina and the Australians in Earl’s Court, London, are different from the Cubans in America or the blacks in the Caribbean in terms of diasporic experience. Kalra argues that “the USA, for instance, is often cited as a ‘nation of immigrants’, yet the conflation of European migrants that constitute part of its population are never termed diasporic or hybrid in the same way” (2005: 106). This provokes arguments that diaspora is more often used to describe the have-nots, rather than the haves inhabiting the main destination of migrants, which is the West.

Nevertheless, diaspora and migration discourse needs to consider specifics that represent shapes of movements. This means, for instance, that there should be a proper classification of the expatriate who leaves her/his domain in the “North” for the rich oil fields, or promising colleges/universities in the “South”, and again the thousands of the over 50,000 transnational corporations’ (Webster, 2002: 69) personnel that are mainly Western, who are spread across the globe. Are they less diasporic, and more transnational, or less transnational and more migrant international workers or experts? That is besides the old Western Christian priests on missionary work in the “South” that eventually take up homes in those countries, and the Caucasian spouses of migrants from the South to the North, who eventually return to the South with their spouses, with the former resolving on a “Southern” home.

From another perspective, there is sometimes a problem when economic reason causes migration. This is because it would imply all classes of labour. However, it may not easily be applicable to the investing entrepreneur or industrialist (Brah, 1996: 178), who is exploring markets in the North from the South. The investing entrepreneur, like the Rothchilds and Hinduja group (Karim, 2003:5), is likely seeking further economic prosperity in the North instead of some insignificant breakthroughs. The eighteenth century banking business successes of the Rothchilds and the Hinduja diasporic group (Karim, *ibid.*) in global business, which thrives mainly in the West, where 37,000 of the world largest companies (Schiller, 1996: 94) operate from, testifies to the investment mission

of some new diasporas (Van Hear, 1998).¹

This leads to the thinking that security could be a key cause of migration, but which lack attention in literature. Insecurity can be destabilising both emotionally and physically. Insecurity limits the potentials of a being, sometimes leading therefore to a search for ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Bilton, et al, 1996: 665). Ontological security is a form of security resulting from mental stability through an ability to predict events (Bilton, et al, *ibid.*: 665), or the regularisation of a person's experience and the possibility of sourcing meanings from there (Giddens, 1991). Arguments speculate that anxiety, depression, disturbances and crises, which are more common in migration source countries, are obstacles to ontological security.

On the other hand, orderliness, predictability and stability of the social process that features more in dominant global migrants' and diasporic destinations are grounds for ontological security. A likely human desire for ontological security drives the need to reject ontological insecurity, and, therefore, leading to movements. This is because of people's preference for stability as against instability, comfort as against discomfort, and peace as against crises. The condition that takes priority influences ontology in contradiction to the other situation.

The absence of, and search for security, has another biblical reference (Deuteronomy, 28: 58-68; Cohen, 1997:1) in diasporic elements of place, placelessness, and the search for a soothing permanence. Weighed down or not, the moving person who partly desires safety is longing for security, simply as the investing entrepreneur that Brah identifies above. S/he is, for instance, from the South but investing in the North, in the course of seeking security of her/his capital in the more vibrant economies of the North.

Again, the individual labour migrant in pursuit of better working condition elsewhere is also looking for some form of financial security. From the biblical, teleological viewpoint, insecurity is a curse following disobedience. Logically, if there were security in the *homeland*, dispersion that come with its own physical and emotional inconveniences (Portes, 1996) will likely not be an option. Some cases are within this framework-that is the search for security, economic security, as a main cause of migration.

Largely, however, diasporas do evolve. Their experiences are not only an evidence of a changing same (Gilroy, 1993, 2000)², but evolve across borders. The borders are unequal, discontinuous and are complete with regulations. The differences in the wealth of nations explain this inequality. The discontinuity is in the limits to the reception of moving groups, while regulation is about the expression of the limitations. "Citizenship, passports, visas, surveillance, integrated databases and biometric mediums" (Brubaker, 2005:9), are some of the ways of regulation. Others are deportation, designation as asylum seeker and periodisation of residency time. These processes imply categorisations in terms of citizens or non-citizens and natives or non-natives. They are psychological reminders of "strangeness" to the stranger, or "otherness" to the other.

To migrants, I am proposing that the rigid interest in migration has become a way in which they understand personal or collective progress. Travelling and re-settlement is not essentially a matter of pleasure, or an epistemological engagement, but one to add to the self, in ontological terms. It should even up to an improvement of living standards, especially in the face of persisting economic crises, political instability, high crime rates, insecurity of lives and properties, poor health facilities, better educational facilities and qualitative provision of social amenities.

Migration for many is therefore a result of disillusioned citizenry preferring an external alternative to better life, instead of hoping for an elusive solution from country. In the furtherance of these migration ways, the media becomes relevant, as it enhances the ways, through the sustenance of contacts in the distance. The Internet, as a new medium, can be particularly useful both in the manner it helps in shaping their character in migration and as medium of mediation. How therefore do we situate the Internet as a new and important medium? I shall examine this in the section that follows:

3.1: DIASPORAS AND MIGRANTS' CONSUMPTION OF MEDIA PARTICULARLY THE INTERNET

Dayan (1999:22) argues that interdiasporic media are not only limited to the conventional media but also includes a reconstruction of the traditional, which is "neotraditional". These include:

- (1) production and circulation of newsletters, audio and video cassettes, holy icons and small media in general...
- (2) Exchange of letters, photographs, home videos and travellers...
- (3) constitution of religious communities or cultural associations...
- (and) (4) creation of interdiasporic networks (and circulation of directives, slogans, sermons,

¹ The economic pull to the more prosperous West is in fact that (the rich) for instance "pay only 4% on debt compared with the 17% paid by poor nations. The gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' widens daily", (Mohammadi, ed, 1997: 10). In addition, of the United Nations estimated 6 billion world population, 25% have, while the remainder 75% have not. Halloran (1997:45) argues that \$50 billion was paid by developing countries to the developed as interest in 1990 alone. Moreover "from 1960-91" he stresses, "the share of the world's poorest population fell from 7.35 to 1.7%, while the share of the richest 20% increased from 70-85%" (Halloran, *ibid.*: 45), indicating an increase in inequality between nations in half a century.

² The concept "the changing same" describes "something endlessly hybridized and in process, but persistently there", (Clifford, 1994: 320, cited in Brubaker, 2005:7). A further explanation is in the section on identity.

preaching, (etc) by religious or political organisations, with specific agendas...(Dayan, 1999:22-3).

These experiences of diasporas occur in the process of global movements, symbolising networks (Castells, 1996, 2001; van Dijk, 1999; Barney, 2004), or *mediascapes* (Appadurai, 1996), in unprecedented ways that reflect the complexities of the new age. In the process, it enhances migrants' ability to negotiate meanings (Fiske, 1987), as the control over the space between then and now becomes easier. Their identity is then positioned in an age of globalisation, of "planetary reconstruction" (Gilroy, 2000: 107), despite the contradictory role of the media in the shaping and shifting of identities (Scholte, 1996: 597; Ang, 2001).

To Ignacio (2003: 161; 2005), the media, particularly the Internet, helps dispersed peoples' sense of positioning, and in the case of Filipinos, assists them in setting aside "differences", and to "form a strong community" across distances (p.161). Other studies with similar themes as Ignacios', seek to explore the relevance of the Internet to particular groups at different points in time. (See for instance Kadend-Kaiser (2000) on Haitian diasporic group; Georgiou (2001) on the Greek Cypriot community; Miller and Slatter, (2001) on Trinidadian diaspora; Ang (2001) on the Chinese diaspora; Tsaliki (2003) on the Greek community; and Schulz and Hammer (2003) on the Palestinians). Karim (2003: 3) notes that the new media helps diasporic "nostalgic reminiscences".

He argues further that the technologies facilitate the avoidance "of the hierarchical structures of traditional broadcast media" (p.13). By this, the linearity of the old media, their hierarchical and capital intensive nature are lost to the non-linearity, the minimised or non-existent hierarchy and the relatively low cost of engaging with Internet resources, like e-mails, e-mail attachments, usenets, newsgroups, blogs, listservs, and/or in using social networking spaces like Facebook, Myspace, *Orkut*, *Bebo*, and the all-embracing "Second Life".

The new diasporic communication experience is possible because in late modernity, the media connect distant people, given the redefinition of a sense of place (Moores, 1993). It indicates a "connection of presence and absence" (Sreberny, 1991: 94). Gillespie describes this as the dissolution of distances and the suspension of time, which "create new and unpredictable forms of connection, identification and cultural affinity" (2000:169). Besides, this takes place in everyday life (De Certeau, 1998; Silverstone, 2005:1; Georgiou, 2002, 2003), where "acceptance of, or resistance to new communication and information technologies" (Silverstone, 2005:1) occurs.

Also taken for granted in literature is that dispersions are central to global changes. Many times, moving groups lead us to think of people in need of a temporary or permanent alternative home. The way the old home is thought about becomes subsequently important. The frameworks of changes in communication technologies, which are a part of global transformations, are equally significant. With migrants and diasporic networks (Hanafi, 2005: 583) rising almost in pace with phases of communication technologies, trends in new interaction processes (Siapera, 2005: 501), which dislocation experiences bring out, require critical monitoring, to understand their full implications.

The Internet provides an important location where migrants and diasporic spaces are re-negotiated. With the Internet deterritorialising space, diasporas re-construct the *homeland* in imagination processes (Karim, 1998; Georgiou, 2002; Ignacio, 2003). They, therefore, possibly increase our understanding of transnational online communication. The understanding is better appreciated when migrants witness the features of anonymity, informality and immediacy (Franklin, 2001: 400), through interactivity, that gives rise to new publics.

While anonymity and informality may allow for greater freedom of expression, immediacy guarantees a higher pace in the display of the new liberty. Apart from anonymity, the internet brings the familiar closer, like friends and family members in distant places. Besides, online activities limit hierarchical relationships between the centre and the periphery from the conclusion of some studies (See for instance Hanafi's, 2002, analysis on Palestinian Scientists and Technologists Abroad, accessed at www.palesta.gov.ps, and Georgiou, 2002, discourse of Hellenic Resources Network, HR-NET).

It is noteworthy that communication has gone through shades of revolution in history. The way they vary in forms and concentrations (Winston, 1998; McQuail, 2000) reveal the creative potentials of peoples in different economic systems, especially capitalism. Before this technology came, however, diasporas and migrants already had communication systems in place (Thussu, 2001; 2007). Newspapers, first published in England in 1665, were of some relevance for communication.

In addition, photography invented in 1827 reproduced images in the *homelands*, and the 1837 invention of the telegraph was of importance to imperial diasporic communities (Winston, 1998; Thussu, 2001). The postal services, which came in 1840, played its mediation role as well, besides the first radio airing of the human voice in 1902 and the coming of telephone about twenty-six years before. The television as a medium has been of importance to diasporas from its coming in the early 1930s (Goldberg, 2006). However, how does the internet challenge these preceding media for migrants?

Karim (2004) again notes that diasporas use the Internet for the production of different cultural resources. Furthermore:

A primary motivation on the part of immigrant communities seems to be survival in the face of the overwhelming output of the dominant culture and the limitations of their access to

the cultural industries in the country of settlement (Karim, 2004:56)

Beyond that, the need to lessen the pains of distance, pains that can be reduced through virtual relations, which Rheingold (1993) claims, implies doing “just about everything people do in real life” (ibid.: 3), and in this case, in the *homeland*, encourage the cyber activities of people in dislocation. Regardless, it is logical to check aspects of these relations, especially with a focus on course and effect. The investigation is again necessary given assumptions that the Internet is a leader in the mediation process of moving people. For instance, one claim is that the Internet helps migrants to “feel at home”, as Mallapragada (2000:185) argues of the Indians in the United States. Alternatively, it helps the recreation of pre-dispersal relationships (Karim, 2004: 27). However, how do we contextualise and conceptualise these?

The media equally helps other migrants’ groups and diasporas to reinforce communal feelings. Examples of these are the Filipino diasporas; the Kurdish; the Iranians in the US; the Indians and Pakistanis in Britain; the Armenians; the Jewish; and the Palestinians (Dayan, 1999: 18; Ang, 2001; Ignacio, 2003: 2005). The reinforcement happens through interactions with variants of media like radio, television and the Internet. Dayan notes that the media remain a major instrument of unity for dying out cultures or fragile communities, which diasporas are (Dayan, 1999:22).

In empirical terms, how then do we understand this unity and possible disunity? Robins and Aksoy (2001, 2003) have shifted the emphasis from the diaspora framework in the understanding of migrants’ mediation of distance. They argue that instead of integration in hostland, or a hold on the departed culture, something else emerges in between (ibid., 2005:26). This emanates from their study of Turkish migrants in London. Can this “new thing” emerge in migrants’ engagement with the Internet?

It is significant to note that transnational television and film industries strengthen globalisation. It also makes them important to reflections on present times (Gillespie, 1995:2). The industries facilitate the distancing of time and space (Giddens, 1990), or their compression (Harvey, 1990). Transnational network screens suspend the sense of distance, simply as they add to the “remapping [of] media spaces and involving new media practices, flows and products” (Chalaby, 2005a:30). Alongside the rise of the Internet and mobile telephony, transnational television and film industries broaden ways of visualising distant places. They provoke thoughts on the coming of global communication. The consumption of transnational television and film products again reshapes the space of interaction, such that “it is no longer dependent on simultaneous spatial co-presence” (Gillespie, 1995:3).

Interactions with a close person or group can be virtually similar with persons and groups in distant places. Television screens have become virtual spaces for the production and reproduction of images in remote places. This makes it relevant to transitory or resettling peoples and groups, like migrants, trans-migrants and diasporas. As actors in transnational flows, they are central to the understanding of transnational networks. Now between locations, they negotiate relationships between places. It could be in search for belonging; to live between places; or to mitigate longing. Modern technologies of transnational communication become handy therefore for the mediation of multiple interactions.

The industries, Robins and Aksoy (2005) discuss, enable the realisation of “long distance ‘bonding’” (Page 20), as it helps the advancement of what they term “transcultural disposition” (Page 14). These prevent the dissolution of minority cultures into those of the majorities in distant places of residence. The transnational expansion which extends televisions’ scope of operation beyond the “national territory” (Chalaby, 2005a:1), permits the virtual integration of global spaces. Isolated events become closer, simply as nation-states expect a reproduction of remarkable actions in remote places.

4.1: CONCLUSION

Webster (2002:60), for instance, argues that transnational television exposes the underbellies of nation-states. He writes “The whole world watched as the Berlin Wall came down, when Boris Yeltsin resisted a coup attempt in Moscow, and when the former Yugoslavia was torn apart” (2002:60). Migrants and diasporas use of the rapidly expanding transnational networks of origins go on alongside the rising operations of leading transnational networks, like the CNN, BBC, *Aljazeera* (English), and Sky News. The networks combine with the Internet to offer dispersing people a wider space for the expansion and contraction of imagination.

For many diasporas, the internet is being embraced as a medium of information about origin. The reason is that satellite broadcasting from the *homeland* is still limited. In few cases of availability, subscription rates are rather expensive for the typical economic migrant, while there is still a restricted time for broadcasting. These factors lead to less dependence on satellite broadcasting and a relative higher preference for the cheaper, timeless and easier access to websites that report events on country of origin.

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