

Framings of “Diaspora”

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<http://www.civilstrategies.net/resources#two>

Here is a list of resources about the meaning of “diaspora.”

- I. You are perhaps familiar with the derivation of the word from the Greek, meaning “to disperse.” Classic diasporas are the Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and on and on goes the list. The references below delve into them in varying levels of detail.

- II. From an anthropological perspective, if I could leave you with three takeaways, they would be that:
 - As an identity-making process, diasporicity hinges on one’s sense of belonging, which can change. Diasporans actively identify with at least two nations. I met a Lebanese-Senegalese-American two weeks ago, who travels to both countries regularly to visit friends and family and participates in cultural organizations in all three social spaces.
 - Diaspora is an over-used term that has become confused with refugee, exile, ethnic minority, and immigrant. They are all transnationals, though. Immigrant groups are not necessarily diasporas, e.g., Cambodians from the Pol-Pot era and overseas Chinese. The sense of belonging, or attachment, to the place from where you (or past generations) were scattered is one main distinguishing feature.
 - People activate their diasporicity when it suits their needs. It’s advisable to not assume someone who has active ties with her country of origin self-identifies as diasporan. A couple of years ago a doctoral student in class told me she assumed her East Africa-born spouse considered himself part of a diaspora. When she asked him, he rejected the notion in the true spirit of individualism.

- III. The following links go from simple (but not simplistic) to multi-layered:

<https://www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/diaspora-engagement/infographic>

<https://www.usaid.gov/partnership-opportunities/diaspora-engagement>

https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20121206_discussionpaperindiplomacy_125_trent_beveiligd.pdf -- (pp. 7-8) from the vantage of governmental engagement with ethnic diasporas

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01419870.2018.1550261>-- a systematic, expansive literature review for framing the meaning of diaspora.

- IV. Here are some additional citations, for digging a little deeper (thanks to Prof. Stephen Lubkemann (George Washington University), from his excellent anthropology class on diaspora circa 2006-7):

Cohen, R. 1996. "Diasporas and the nation-state: from victims to challengers," *International Affairs* 72(3): 507-520.

Friedman, J. 2005. "Diasporization, Globalization, and Cosmopolitan Discourse," in Levy, and Weingold, A. (eds.) *Homelands – Diasporas*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Gerstle, G. And Mollenkopf, J. (eds.) 2001. *Immigrants, civic culture, and modes of political incorporation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Klimt, A., and Lubkemann, S. 2002. "Argument across the Portuguese-speaking world: A discursive approach to diaspora," *Diaspora*¹ 11(2): 145-162.

Levitt, P. 2001. *The transnational villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Levy, and Weingold, A. (eds.). 2005. *Homelands – diasporas*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Markowitz, F. and Stefansson, A. (eds.). 2004. *Homecomings: Unsettling paths of return*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Markowitz, F. 2004. "Leaving Babylon to come home to Israel: closing the circle of the black diasporan," in Markowitz, F., and Stefansson, A.H. (eds.). *Homecomings: Unsettling paths of return*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Morawksa, E. 2001. "The new-old transmigrants, their transnational lives, and ethnicization: A comparison of 19th/20th- and 20th/21st-century situations," in Gerstle, G. and Mollenkopf, J. (eds.) *Immigrants, civic culture, and modes of political incorporation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Ong, A. 2003. *Buddha is hiding*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹ Unfortunately, the journal *Diaspora* is no longer published.

- Pattie, S. 1994. "At home in diaspora: Armenians in America." *Diaspora* 3: 185-98.
- Safran, W. 1991. "Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return," *Diaspora* 1(1): 83-99.
- Safran, W. 2004. "Deconstructing and comparing diasporas," in W. Kokot, K. Tololyan, and C. Alfonso, (eds.), *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*. New York: Routledge.
- Shain, Y. 2002. "The role of diasporas in conflict perpetuation or resolution." *SAIS Review Vol. XXII* no. 2 (Summer-Fall): 115-144.
- Sheffer, G. 2003. *Diaspora politics: At home abroad*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tololyan, K. 1991. "The nation-state and its others: in lieu of a preface." *Diaspora* 1(1), 3-7.
- 1996. "Rethinking diaspora(s): stateless power in the transnational moment." *Diaspora* 1(1): 3-36.
- Um, K. 2006. "Diasporic nationalism, citizenship and post-war reconstruction." *Refuge* 23(2): 8-19.
- Van Hear, N. 1998. *New diasporas: The mass exodus, dispersal, and regrouping of migrant communities*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

V. My dissertation has a section on diaspora that I've pasted below. Formatting of references at the end varies slightly with the ones above.

Trent, D. L. (2012). *Transnational, trans-sectarian engagement: A revised approach to U.S. public diplomacy toward Lebanon* (Order No. 3524305). Accessed January 12, 2020, at <http://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/1038836409.html?FMT=ABS>

pp.56-60

What constitutes diasporan identity? How is the concept of diaspora relevant to the expanding arena of diplomacy and administering foreign policy? The diaspora literature has exploded in the past four

decades for many reasons. Two primary reasons have been the socioeconomic impact of “brain drain” of diasporans from their countries of origin and of their remittances to kin and other investments there. There has also been increasing interest in diasporan transfer of knowledge and other non-monetary assets. A minor but significant reason is a fascination with the topic of diaspora and identity on university campuses (Tololyan, 1996). All of the reasons for greater attention to diasporas in social science and public policy/administration research relate to increases in migration and individual access to communication technology, and other conditions of globalization that have significantly accelerated the process of diasporization.

Scholarly debate about definitions and framings of diaspora is a continuing process. Most relevant to the present study is the literature on diaspora in contemporary international politics. At least one concise, useful definition has emerged. Modern diasporas can be considered: “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homelands” (Sheffer, 1986). Later on, Cohen (1997), noting Safran’s (1991) research, offers nine common features of diasporas around the world. They are (1991) research, offers nine common features of diasporas around the world. They are quoted verbatim, as follows:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
4. an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
6. 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;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnics in other countries of settlement; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive[,] creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Cohen, 1997, p. 26, Table 1.1)

Building especially on Cohen’s ninth common feature of diasporas, their potential to participate actively in pluralistic host societies, a more recent framing of diaspora is useful to counter “marginalization of immigrant, minority, and ethnic communities, in terms of both societal inclusion and inclusion in the foreign policy process” (Berns-McGowan, 2007-2008, p. 3). Classic definitions of diaspora by Cohen and

Safran have been helpful and appropriate in the past, but a current, “workable definition of a diasporic community must allow for change in the relationship with the wider society” (p. 6).

Berns-McGowan argues that:

[d]iaspora, then, is best defined as a space of connections-connections in two dimensions, to be precise. The first is the tension between elsewhere-let’s call it the “mythic” homeland, and here-the adoptive country. The second lies in the connection to the wider-‘mainstream’-society, which may or may not be fraught. The nature of both of these connections is critical to questions of social harmony, tension, or cohesion, and they have immense implications for security, social policy, and foreign policy. (p. 8).

Berns-McGowan is addressing the Canadian government’s multicultural project to foster the diversity of the country’s immigrant communities as well as cooperation among them and Canadians of aboriginal and European descent. The main implication of the tensions and connections among the various diasporas in Canada is the need to “move beyond tolerance, in our actions and in our rhetoric, to understand ourselves as having shared diasporic pasts-and equal, shared futures” (p. 20).

To summarize, a diaspora is a people tracing their ethnic heritage and sense of belonging to one nation, after dispersing to two or more other nations. An ethnic diaspora bonds to both the home and host countries. Identifying as a diasporan is a social process that is intercultural and transnational, ever-changing with the diasporan’s personal development and social connections, as well as with transnational socioeconomic and political changes. The political experience of diasporans is therefore relevant to public diplomats in their efforts to interpret U.S. foreign policy in ways that resonate favorably abroad and in the U.S.

The political experience of diasporan communities is relevant because they are “constituted by a compelling sense of moral co-responsibility embodied in material performance which is extended through and across space” (Werbner, 2005, p. 42). A moral sense of transnational responsibility is a quality in the political identity of members of diasporan organizations that makes them agents of change and pertinent in PD and international development. Because of a diasporan’s commitment to country of origin, diasporan engagement in the politics of host country foreign policy can be beneficial to overall socioeconomic progress in the homeland (see, e.g., Shain, 1999; de Haas, 2006; Brinkerhoff, J., 2008) and also to democratic pluralism and reduction of ethnic tension in the host country (Shain, 1999).

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Tololyan, K. (1996). Rethinking diaspora(s): Stateless power in the transnational moment. *Diaspora*

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Werbner, P. (2005). The place which is diaspora: Citizenship, religion, and gender in the making of

chaordic transnationalism. In A. Levy & A. Weingold (Eds.), *Homelands and diasporas: Holy lands and other places* (pp. 29-48). Stanford: Stanford University.