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Diasporas

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FOREWORD

Diaspora—as both concept and social practice—is in vogue. One doesn't have to look far for evidence of interest in this idea. We can begin in the academic world, starting with the interdisciplinary journal called *Diaspora* (in publication since 1991) and continuing on to the librarian's favorite tool, the World Catalog, where a search for books with “diaspora” in the title, published since 2005, yields more than 450 hits. The kaleidoscope of groups mentioned—Indian, Armenian, African, Scottish, Dutch, Muslim, Catalan, Cuban, Greek, Mexican, Central American, and southern—exemplifies the phenomenon that Rogers Brubaker has labeled the “diaspora diaspora”—the wide, indeed unending, dispersion of this concept beyond the classic case of the Jews.

For academic purposes, therefore, to say “migration” is now to say “diaspora,” a trend that makes it necessary for any student to understand how the concept is used and why, even though its ubiquity may deprive it of analytic utility. But even more surprising than the shift from an occult to an everyday term is the concept's

practical importance. Today, diaspora is not just a category of analysis; it is also a category of practice. That is to say, it is a strategy or a project undertaken by a broad range of actors interested in what the people ready to think of themselves as members of a diaspora might be willing to do. Diasporas are of interest to states seeking to organize emigrants (and their descendants) into a collectivity that can be controlled and from which resources can be extracted, and to emigrants (and their descendants) eager to use the advantages acquired from residence *outside* the home state in order to gain leverage *within* the home state. Diasporas also are of interest to international organizations, such as the World Bank, that want to manage the resources generated by dispersed populations, thereby reducing their predilection for fomenting long-distance violence at home while increasing their capacity to generate feedback that might help the stay-at-home populations improve their lives. Whether India, Italy, Israel, Ireland, or what have you, there is no “emigration state” without a so-called diaspora that it is trying to mobilize; likewise, there are few emigrations in which self-conscious diaspora talk or social action is not to be found.

But with so much activity within and beyond the academic world, the problem for the student (beginning, advanced, and professional) is how to understand diaspora—as both an intellectual phenomenon and a social process. For that task, there is no better book than this short volume, a translation of a book originally written for the venerable French series *Que sais-je?* (What Do I Know?) and a model of intellectual economy.

In a sense, the book reflects diaspora’s travels, as it is a view from the other side of the Atlantic, reporting on intellectual developments unlikely to be known to the great majority of Anglophone

readers and doing so in a distinctive French idiom. It succeeds in giving the reader the best of both worlds, which is why it is so valuable a contribution.

Dufoix’s is a cosmopolitan rendering: he is fully up to date with trends, not only on both sides of the English channel, but also on both sides of the Atlantic. His discussion is consistently right on target, fully relevant to the concerns of U.S. scholars and framed in a way that the latter will find novel. Small in size, but large in scope, *Diasporas* tells a coherent story, capturing the key elements needed for any effort to understand the phenomenon. The book extends well beyond the continental, or at best, hemispheric, concerns that preoccupy students and scholars in the United States: its global range befits the concept and phenomenon to which it is addressed. Likewise, Dufoix steers clear of the presentism that afflicts the social scholars of today’s world of mass migration: an advocate of a dynamic analysis, Dufoix moves effortlessly across time, demonstrating both the continuities in diasporic experiences and the features that distinguish today’s world. Grounded in deep knowledge and extending across languages, disciplines, and times, this volume will be equally appreciated by scholars and students.

Dufoix’s interest in the career of the concept of diaspora bespeaks a sensibility more common in the French, than in the American, academic world. The American reader would do well to attend to his uncommon perspective: Dufoix extends the concept from a limited number of cases to an almost unlimited set, and from academic discourse to real-world politics, which makes the question of its meaning all the more important. As it turns out, the concept occupies an honorable place in the history of American sociological thought, notwithstanding contemporary scholars who insist that a

so-called transnational perspective is new and illuminates phenomena that their predecessors could not see. Indeed, Dufoix's discussion shows that the "diaspora diaspora" began early, as thinkers concerned with the experience of the peoples dispersed from Africa were quick to take up the analogy with the history of the Jews. As usual, scholarship on "the African diaspora" yielded not one but many conflicting interpretations, but the concept put the question of a connection to a distant place of origin at the center of debate.

However fascinating the intellectual history found in these pages may be, the volume does far more than merely captivate. Dufoix develops a conceptual framework for thinking about the relationship between dispersed populations and their homelands, all the while presenting a wealth of fascinating, empirically grounded case studies to illustrate key experiences and substantive conceptual points. Dufoix masterfully guides the reader through the various scholarly attempts to define diasporas. As he points out in chapter 2, this effort assumes that one can find real, existing diasporas and then distinguish them from other seemingly similar, but essentially different, phenomena. The problem, however, is that the quest is fundamentally fruitless. Not only do scholars fail to agree, but also the attempt to define diasporas leads to static, historical approaches that assume the existence of communities, rather than explaining why "diasporic" communities might arise or decline. Moreover, the many definitional attempts cannot take into account the self-conscious diasporic discourses and projects of states and émigrés, who are busily developing collectivities they call diasporas, regardless of whether those collectivities meet the scholars' criteria.

Recognizing the definitional quest as bootless, Dufoix has something better to offer: namely, a framework for comparing the relationships between homelands (which he describes using the term

"referent-origin") and their dispersed populations, which he develops in chapter 3. Dufoix proposes an ideal type with four stylized components:

- Centroperipheral mode, in which the home state is the controlling force, with links extending *between* home states and emigrant collectivities, but with little or no connection *across* collectivities.
- Enclaved mode, in which the emigrant collectivities draw on a belief in a common origin, but without any corresponding effort directed (positively or negatively) toward the home state or state intervention oriented toward control. These collectivities are localistic, with few, if any, flows or exchanges across populations or nodes.
- Atopic mode, in which the emigrant collectivities draw on a belief in a common origin, but without any corresponding effort directed (positively or negatively) toward the home state or state intervention oriented toward control; flows (of ideas, people, and resources) extend across the emigrant collectivities.
- Antagonistic mode, in which the emigrant collectivities draw on a belief in a common origin in order to organize *against* the home state; thus, flows (of ideas, people, and resources) extend across the emigrant collectivities in order to apply pressure against the home state.

While this ideal type *can* be used for typological purposes, Dufoix has something else in mind: namely, to identify a range of possible configurations that are likely to vary across time and space. Drawing on a wealth of examples, he shows how populations can move from one configuration to another, with the Jews, for example, exemplifying the atopic mode for most of their postbiblical history and shift-

ing toward the centrop peripheral mode following the creation of the state of Israel. He shows exiled east Europeans, in another example, moving from the antagonistic mode of the cold war era to something approximating the centrop peripheral mode in the years since the Berlin wall fell. The mode itself can be the object of conflict: thus, a home state eager to subordinate and control "its" emigrants abroad by fashioning a relationship that resembles the centrop peripheral mode will be at odds with the exiles eager to take advantage of their location in a new state in order to overturn the old order left behind. And one mode need not exclude the other: in any one population, the enclaved mode may best describe the reality of working-class immigrants interested in sociability and social support; the atopic mode may correspond to the network-building and -maintaining activities of entrepreneurs; and the antagonistic or the centrop peripheral mode may exemplify the activities of a politically oriented elite.

Put somewhat differently, there are no diasporas, only different ways of constructing, managing, and imagining the relationships between homelands and their dispersed peoples. In chapter 4, Dufoux discusses three possible approaches: state efforts to control and manage "their" diasporas; the long-distance nationalism of émigrés (possibly directed against existing homeland states or regimes or oriented toward host states in support of homeland causes); and the Internet as a mechanism for building the "imaginary community" and doing so in relatively costless ways. In each case, the distinctiveness of the contemporary situation comes into view: dispersion, once a liability, is now a value to be put into play.

In the end, we are left with a paradox: the world's peoples are mainly sedentary, but a growing proportion is on the march. While

dispersions take any number of forms, the question of connectedness—to a homeland, to a state, to fellow migrants located in the same or a different "new" land—emerges wherever the movers go. Hence, diaspora—as concept, as program, as phenomenon—is here to stay. This book is the indispensable guide for the perplexed.

Roger Waldinger