Reexamining Diasporism and Transnationalism
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Introductory Comments

There is almost no need to repeat that at the beginning of the 21st century neither "diasporas" nor "transnational communities" (or "transnational social fields") are vanishing. Quite the contrary, despite difficulties in exactly evaluating their existence, boundaries and the numbers of their members in different locations, a great variety of diasporas and transnational communities are growing quite rapidly and greatly. (Cohen 1999; Wahlbeck 2002; Brenner 2003)

By the same token, and as a result of the current extremely chaotic cultural, social, political, economic and migratory developments all over the world, both the positive and negative influences of these entities on their countries of origin, countries of permanent residence, regional organizations (such as the European Union) and the general international system, are mounting. Notwithstanding restrictions and negative reactions, mainly those generated by social and political groups and governments in various states, including some "liberal" democracies, the capabilities and influence of transnationalists and diasporans will only continue to grow.

In view of those global processes that also affect the emergence, and the actual activities of such groups as well as the "quadrangular relationships" between them (Sheffer 1986) and their countries of origin, countries of permanent residence and other international formations there is a continuous need to reevaluate the past, present and possible future situation of the entire dispersal phenomenon in connection with the theoretical approaches to its analysis and understanding.

Some politicians and academics have realized that these entities constitute different, highly complicated and heterogeneous formations. Yet,
the general public, most politicians and too many students of these entities lump all dispersed persons and entities together according to their specific perceptual or theoretical approaches.

This pattern makes it pretty difficult to understand the natures and behaviors of such different entities, and pretty tricky to assess the challenges facing them. Though the approach that focuses on ethno-national-religious diasporas is not immune from such generalizations, (For this distinction see Miles and Sheffer 1998; on the ethno-national approach see, for example, Braziel and Mannur 2003; Sheffer 2006) this problem is particularly evident in the academic literature that has been based on the "transnational" approach. (see, for example, Smith 1986; Glick Schiller et.al. 1992, 1995; Clifford 1994; Lie 1995; Anthias 1998; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Tambiah 2000; Morawska 2001; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004; Vertovec 2004; Brubaker 2005; and various articles in Sahoo and Maharaj 2007).

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to briefly summarize these two approaches' comparative relevance and contribution to a better understanding of the general dispersal phenomenon and of specific types of such formations. Additional purposes are an attempt to argue that there are a need and a possibility to use the term "ethno-national diasporas" as adequately characterizing a certain type of dispersals, to suggest the need for a theoretical "synthesis" between certain elements of the two approaches in regard to the characterization of ethno-national diasporas, to provide a relatively short and concise conceptualization of the ethno-national diasporic phenomenon and its main characteristics. And finally, the purpose is to discuss the challenges facing these entities.

The transnationalist and diaspora approaches

The "transnational communities" approach (here I am using one of the various terms that have been utilized by adherents to this approach) was conceived

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1 Here I must refute what Roger Brubaker has commented on one aspect of my and other researchers' theoretical arguments. Brubaker (2005) In all my many publications on this subject I have never lumped together all dispersed persons. Quite the contrary, I was among the few scholars in this field that have always argued about the fact that the general phenomenon and each diaspora are utterly heterogeneous, and suggested the differentiation between various types of diasporas and diasporans. In fact, this is one of the arguments in this article too.
by anthropologists, ethnologists and some sociologists and historians. Initially the main theorists were the anthropologists. In the first stage of the development of this approach these scholars were mainly motivated by the growing postmodern migratory trends and the growing numbers of what they called "Transmigrants". Their studies focused on the nature and impact of relationships in which people, not necessarily migrants or decedents of migrants, had been engaged in two or more counties. They regarded the past of these entities as static and being of homogeneous cultures. On the other hand, they perceived the modern and postmodern situation as highly fluid. As far as the identity of the transnational migrants was concerned, they suggested that all of them have been hybridized. (Glick Schiller 2003)

Most scholars that adopted this approach did not distinguish between various forms of transnational connections. Basically, these scholars viewed all dispersals as espousing imagined deterritorialized identities that were robustly influenced by postmodern, globalized and hybridizing trends. The main argument of this school was that migrants lose their ties to their homelands and, like other dispersals, exist as independent or highly autonomous individuals or entities in the new global transnational environment. They maintained that basically membership in such entities was conceptual and entirely self-selected by each member. This membership became fully developed when people had established transnational relationships with other persons across borders, but other than kin. (Basch et. al. 1992; Glick Schiller et.al. 1995; Kearney 1995; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Anthias 1998; Glick Schiller 2003)

Essentially, the conception was that transnationalist formations consist of large groups, some of which, certainly not all members of these entities, regard themselves as forming coherent entities. It should be emphasized that actually, not all persons who regarded themselves, or were regarded by others, as forming transnational entities, are of the same ethno-national origin, or migrants, or descendants of migrants. Rather, many of them have in common some other characteristics that in their own perception and in the eyes of outsiders determine their belonging to such entities, which are usually ill-defined. Thus, they may have in common religious beliefs and affiliations with certain churches or sects, or the same regional geographical
background, or the same language, or the same profession, or even shared ideological beliefs.

Furthermore, a broadly accepted, but a quite problematic, and by now also a contested popular view that has been held by writers in the field of the study of dispersed "others" and migrants of various types, has been that most dispersed persons are members of actual transnational, or multicultural, or hybrid, or borderless globalized entities. Among other things, by lumping together all such individuals, their families and their wider social groups, and by stressing the multiplicity and hybridity of their identities and senses of belonging, to a large degree, this view has opposed and challenged the significance of some of these individuals' and groups' specific ethno-national identities, their modes of identification and their connections to their old or new countries and societies of origin.

However, later some of the founders of the early transnationalist approach have admitted that it proved problematic because there are many forms of transnational processes and associations beyond migration and migrants. (Glick Schiller 2003 p. 123) Hence a second wave of views about transnationalism has emerged. I'll discuss this new version later in this paper.

Let me turn to the second approach which is focused on ethno-national diasporas.

First, here it should be mentioned that among the general public, politicians and media persons the term "diaspora" is by far more known, popular and used than all the variations of "transnationalism."

In any case, it seems that this second approach has mainly been suggested by political scientists. Some of these writers have argued that diasporas are a kind of transnational communities and therefore should be examined within that overarching approach. These scholars have given equal emphasis to both "sides of the colon". That is, diasporas constitute a part of the general transnational phenomenon. (Tololyan 1991; Cohen, 1997). However, since the 1980s there have been scholars who argued that because of their inherent ethno-national identities, patterns of identification and deeply rooted connections to a real or imagined homeland, most diasporas cannot be viewed as simply transnational entities. (Miles and Sheffer 1998)
Observations of actual developments, surveys and academic studies of various aspects of the identities of diasporic formations, their boundaries, their organization and organizations, their patterns of behavior and the activities of specific diasporas (including their "positive" roles in the economic development of their hostlands and homelands and the political support they render to their brethrens, on the one hand, and their "negative" involvement in terrorism and criminal activities on behalf of their homelands and brethrens, on the other hand) have led these scholars to argue that these entities form a clearly separate category and therefore greater significance should be attributed to each of these groups' ethno-national identity, their historical background and the connections between them and their actual or perceived ethno-national homelands.

One of the main arguments of this approach is that in view of the perseverance and even strengthening of ethnicity, nationalism and ethno-nationalism, and in view of the significant roles and various impacts of ethno-nationalism in most states and among most of "their" dispersed persons, and the continuation of the ethnic revival worldwide, the diaspora phenomenon should be separated from the general discussion of transnationalism. It seems that recently also transnationalists have realized that nationalism and ethno-nationalism are not dead and that these facts have a marked impact on a certain type of such entities.

In fact, researchers adhering to each of these two approaches are beginning to realize that dichotomized theories are not realistic, and that transnational communities and diasporas exhibit characteristics that fit both theoretical approaches. (Braziel and Mannur 2003; Glick Schiller 2003, Levy and Weingrod. 2004; Sheffer 2006; Lyons 2006; Safran 2007)

Thus the "second wave" of researchers of transnational migration/transnational communities started to ask new questions, such as: is the current period of transnational migration similar to or different from previous periods? What is the role of Transmigrants in sustaining nationalist ideologies and nation-state building? Is there "long distance nationalism"? (Anderson 1991, 1994) Do forms of transnational connections, including familial connections, continue across generations? What are the relationship between the "transnational social field" and various forms of religious networks,
organizations, ideologies and activities? (Glick Schiller 2003) These new questions and changed attitudes concerning the study of these entities clearly demonstrate a narrowing gap between the two basic approaches especially concerning the ethno-national diasporic phenomenon.

**Certain Actual Similarities and Differences between Transnationalism and Diasporism**

There is a need to elaborate a little bit more on the actual similarities and differences between various dispersals. Thus, the following is only a brief discussion of the distinctive characterizations of what I regard as two distinct categories of dispersed persons.

It is a fact that essentially the first category—the transnational one—is composed of large and widely spread groups some of which, but certainly not all members of these entities, regard themselves as forming coherent communities.

Like some transnationalists, I would argue that these entities are "networks" 2 rather than communities and that the use of the term "community" is more characteristic of the ethno-national diasporas.

As has been mentioned above, actually persons who regard themselves, or are regarded by others, as forming such entities/networks are not necessarily of the same ethno-national origin. Rather, they have in common some other characteristics that in their own perception and in the eyes of "outsiders"—such as the general publics in their hostlands, politicians and researchers—determine their belonging to such networks, networks that are usually ill defined. Thus, they may have in common religious beliefs and affiliations to a religion or a sect, or the same regional geographical background, or the same language, or shared ideological beliefs. Hence, groups such as the “Moslems,” “Buddhists,” and “Catholics”; the “Africans,” “Latinos,” and “Arabs”; the “Francophone” and the “Chinese-speaking” communities, probably also the “Greens” and, in the past, the “Communists,” can be included in this category.

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2 There is a rapidly growing literature on social and cultural networks that should be further considered in this context.
The argument is that these networks are strongly influenced by postmodern epistemological trends and ideas, as well as by various actual aspects of globalization, such as the easiness of migration, current communication systems, individualization, neo-liberalism, and spreading hybrid cultures. Essentially, members in these entities who do not have noticeable physical markers, can relatively easily change their cultural, religious and social affiliations and loyalties, up to the extreme stage of full assimilation into the societies in the countries that they live in; that the main glue tying together these persons, and hence also their networks, is cultural or economic interests; that these entities are constantly changing; that their boundaries are very far from being clearly drawn, fixed and stable; that most of these entities and their members who permanently reside in certain countries experience continuous processes of cultural hybridization that cause substantive heterogeneity in the entity at large and also in smaller subgroups residing in the same country, region or city; that consequently they tend either to assimilate or to fully integrate into their host societies; that their memories of their historical and more recent ancestors, or of their “original homelands” are not very significant for their continued existence as coherent entities.

As has been noted, the current processes of globalization constantly influence and cause changes in the identity and identification of such persons, changes that are either “positive” or “negative.” Thus, on the one hand, globalization processes diminish the numbers of the members of these transnational communities and make their cultural and social boundaries even less defined and more porous, but on the other hand, due to current means of communication, these processes increase the number of such members and enhance their solidarity and connections to their “communities,” or rather networks.

The second category, that of the "ethno-national diasporas", includes, for example, the Irish, Armenian, Greek, and Jewish diasporic communities. The most significant feature that determines the similarity between these entities, and establishes their difference from the "pure" transnational entities, is that their core members, as well as most peripheral members (that are fully or almost fully integrated in their hostlands), are of the same ethno-national origin. According to their ethno-national background and own awareness and
self-definition, as well as according to the perception of relevant external observers, their identification with the diasporic formation is neither questionable nor objectionable. It should be emphasized that this applies not only to first-generation diasporans, but also to later generations of historical, modern, and incipient diasporas, whether these are state-linked or stateless.

As far as the analysis of these entities is concerned, adherents to this approach argue that a clear distinction should be made between the two types of dispersals and that as far as their age, collective identity, organization, and behavior are concerned, diasporas constitute a perennial phenomenon. (Smith 1986) This means that, although over the centuries certain historical diasporas that still exist today, such as the Chinese, Indian, Jewish, and Armenian, have indeed changed considerably, nevertheless, these are ancient entities that have overcome many actual as well as more abstract acute threats to their identities and existence. In fact, they have survived planned and spontaneous actual attempts to annihilate them totally or to assimilate them. It also means that especially their core members are capable of existing as relatively organized distinct communities in today’s globalized, postmodern world in which there have emerged some expectations that ethnic minorities and diasporas will totally disappear, either through assimilation or by a return to their homelands.

These facts apply to historical, modern and incipient stateless (such as Basque, Palestinian, Polish, and even to some reawakening Scandinavian diasporas in the United States) and state-linked diasporas.

Furthermore, the cores of such diasporas are more united, and they demonstrate greater cohesion and solidarity than the transnational networks. This is the case because of a number of factors: the identity of their members is more firmly established because it is an integrative/"synthetic" combination of non-essentialist primordial, psychological, and instrumental factors. (Kellas 1991; Sheffer, 2006) Also, there is no tremendous gap between their identity and identification. These days, such diasporans are not so shy or reluctant to publicly identify themselves as belonging to these entities, and it is becoming even fashionable to do so and to behave like diasporans.

Furthermore, in comparison with the purported transnational communities, it is a fact that ethno-national diasporas are better organized,
their connections to their real or perceived original homelands are constant and intensive, and their involvement in their homelands’ cultural, social, political, and economic affairs and in the affairs of various hostlands where their brethren reside is significant. On various occasions, they are involved in conflicts in or pertaining to their homelands and to other states that host their brethren. Diasporans are also involved in aggressive, terrorist and criminal activities. Some members of such diasporas consider a return or actually return to their homelands. This is the case, for example, with the Irish, Jews, Turks, and even Japanese.

Based on these facts, it seems that the current processes of globalization and liberalization would neither cause total assimilation, full integration and hybridization, nor an eventual total disappearance of the cores of these entities. By the same token, though these diasporas’ geographical and demographical boundaries are constantly changing, and though these boundaries are porous, they are still quite clearly drawn and can be maintained and sustained. In fact, there are signs that the current trends of globalization, liberalization, and multiculturalism, and consequently their effects, strengthen many diasporas. These trends provide them with additional cultural, ideational, economic, and social resources and means that ensure their sustained existence.

Thus, my argument is that in view of the complexity and variety of dispersed people, clear distinctions should be made between the various transnational networks, on the one hand, and the veteran/historical, modern and incipient ethno-national diasporas, on the other hand. For example, such distinction should be made between the worldwide general historical and more recent Moslem religious dispersal and the various Moslem ethno-national-religious entities, whose core members mostly maintain their original ethno-national identity and close relations with their actual or imagined homelands. A very similar distinction should be made, for example, between what is called the "Latino Diaspora" and the various South American entities that maintain their ethno-national identities and intensive connections with their perceived and actual homelands.

In short, when discussing the nature and main issues facing diasporas and transnational entities at the beginning of the 21st century one should avoid
generalizations and make very careful and clear distinctions between the origins, nature and patterns of behavior of the various types of such entities. In fact, however, all human dispersals exhibit characteristics of their identities that partly fit both theoretical approaches and hence there is a need for a "theoretical synthesis approach" to this major question concerning the composition of these entities.

A Profile of Diasporas
Since I have focused on ethno-national diasporas let me focus now on this category.

There are several short generalized definitions of diasporas that illuminate their distinction from other groups, such as tourists, refugees, asylum seekers and Transmigrants. However, because of the current extreme complexity of the diaspora phenomenon it is vital to expand on these definitions among other things by providing a profile of these entities. (For other profiles see, for example, Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Shuval 2000; Buttler 2001).

Following are the most significant elements of a profile that I have suggested, which can serve as the basis for a shorter definition and conceptualization of the diaspora phenomenon:

An ethno-national diaspora is a cultural-social-political formation of people who actually are, or who are regarded, as united by the same ethno-national origin, and who permanently reside as minorities in one hostland or in a number of hostlands. Such diasporas emerge out of voluntary or forced migration, or out of both types of migration, from one ethno-national state or homeland to one or more host countries. Members of such entities and groups permanently reside in host countries. The members of these diasporas maintain their ethno-national identities via an intimate connection to primordial elements, myths, psychological factors and interests related to their homelands. (Connor 1986; Kellas, 1991; Smith, 1992) Such diasporas seek to create communal solidarity, or to maintain it, if it already exists. This solidarity is the main basis for diasporas' cultural, social, political and economic cohesion and activities. A main characteristic of members of these entities is that they preserve regular contacts with their homelands, whether or not these
are independent states. They create elaborate transstate networks that permit and encourage multiple exchanges of money, political support and cultural influence with their homelands and other segments of the diaspora whenever these exist. These networks facilitate the organization of activities in the cultural, social, economic and political spheres. In turn such activities create a potential for friction with both homelands and host countries, which are related to highly complex patterns of divided, dual or ambiguous loyalty. The variety of strategies for coping with the complex situations of diasporans' lives include various degrees of integration (learning to operate within the hostland, but maintaining cultural separation), acculturation (blending into the hostland culture and society), communalism (maintaining themselves as a separate entity), corporatism (having representative organizations which are recognized by the hostlands' governments and social-political systems), autonomism (acting primarily in accordance with their cultural, social, political and economic background and interests) and isolation (going it alone). Most members of ethno-national diasporas select a combined communalist and autonomist strategy, typically following the applicable rules of both homeland and hostland. (Sheffer 1996: 39, 2003: 9-10)

A Shorter Conceptualization/Definition of Ethno-National Diasporas

Despite the need for synthesis between the explanations of the dispersal phenomenon suggested by the two approaches, based on the profile presented above let me suggest the most significant elements of a short and more specific conceptualization/definition of the ethno-national diasporic phenomenon. This may sharpen the distinction between the two categories of dispersals.

In addition to my earlier definition of diasporas (concerning their quadrangular position and connections with homelands, hostlands, kin entities in other hostlands and international and transnational organizations), the elements of a more specific conceptualization/definition of this category are:

- The ethno-national-religious identity and identification which are based on non-essentialist primordial, psychological-cultural and interests factors;
- The maintenance of boundaries through highly developed multiple organizations;
- Positive and negative actual contributions to their four-sided connections.
- The loyalty to their homeland.

The Challenges Facing Diasporas and Transnational Networks
Both kinds of entities, who on the whole are not facing tremendous pressures from host countries’ governments to assimilate, or to fully integrate, or to refrain from organizing and acting as either autonomous or separatist collectives, nevertheless face major challenges. These will be conceptualized and presented below. The following are not all, but only the most critical cultural-ideational, organizational, and behavioral challenges facing the two types of dispersals. And again, as can be seen below, while the challenges facing the two types of dispersals are not totally diametrically opposite, they are quite different.

The First Challenge: Identity and Identification

The first basic and most significant challenge facing all diasporas as collectivities and all their members as individuals concerns identity and identification. Although these two interconnected factors are essential in any discussion of the future of such entities, with some exceptions (Gleason 1983; Hall, 1990; Mayer and Kosmin 2001; Braziel and Mannur, 2003; Kokot et. al. 2003; Agnew 2006) their academic discussion has been relegated to a secondary place in recent studies and publications in the field of diaspora learning.

As far as their identity is concerned, diasporic entities can exist when two significant preconditions are met. The first precondition is met when, in addition and to an extent “on top” of the existence of individual and familial emotions and cognitions concerning their “belonging,” individual diasporans and small familial groups have a very clear cognitive sense of belonging to a wider group that cultivates solidarity and fosters commitment to the entire ethno-national entity. The second precondition is met when there is an
inherent readiness of individual diasporans, their families, and larger diasporic groups to identify themselves publicly as members of these entities.

Such recognition, feelings, and commitments are not confined to core members. Actually, some peripheral members of these entities—that is, those persons who have integrated into their hostland society, politics, and economics—share and maintain their diasporic ethno-national identity. However, especially because of the still widespread opposition to diasporas and their concomitant rejection, which are engendered by hostile surrounding cultural, social, political, and economic environments in their hostlands, some peripheral diasporans refrain from public identification with the entire entity. Despite their vacillation and hesitation (not so much concerning their identity, but more frequently concerning their identification), very often these persons are generally written off from the attention, memory, and formal and informal membership in these entities. If the leaders of diasporas wish that their communities will survive they must pay attention to this aspect and invest in minimizing it.

However, the greatest difficulty in this respect, and the one that causes the most significant challenges facing dispersed entities, is experienced especially by members of transnational networks. According to the vast literature on transnationalism, the main reason for this difficulty is that the identity of their members is not inherently entrenched and based on primordial factors. The capacity to alter fundamentally one’s basic ideological and religious beliefs can lead such persons to total assimilation or to full integration into their countries of residence and thus to considerable demographic losses.

Usually—and this observation is not confined to persons belonging to transnational networks, but applies to other diasporans as well—both cognitive and emotional confusion and uncertainty about their fundamental identity also prompt severe emotional and cognitive doubts about the need and benefits that they can gain from identification as members of such entities. In turn, such attitudes and decisions will lead to new difficulties facing such individuals and to major challenges to the leaders of such collectivities, who are interested in maintaining such entities.
Therefore, if leaders and core members of such transnational entities—for example, the leaders and core members of what is now referred to as the Moslem and the Latino diasporas—determinedly intend to organize, prevail, and then maintain some sort of cohesion, commitment to the entity and to its causes, and an ability to act politically and economically as an effective group, the basic challenges facing them are whether and to what extent to define more clearly their identity. It seems that recently, such leaders have relied on a combination of religious ideas plus economic and social promises to encourage and strengthen the commitment of vacillating and indecisive persons to remain members or at the least to maintain close connections with the diaspora.

In most cases, the maintenance and encouragement of truly united and organized transnational networks will require on the part of actual and potential members of such entities an ideational, emotional, and practical substantial detachment from the ethno-national elements of their emotions and beliefs. Basically, this means that such individuals and groups must decide whether they give up their primordial ethno-national identities—if these exist among members of such groups—and join these less-defined transnational entities and later remain or become active members in these entities, thus helping shape a larger, persistent network that is coherent and capable of demonstrating solidarity and initiating and implementing actions. The diametrically opposite option is that they can try to assimilate or to integrate fully into the societies where they live. Given favorable conditions in their countries of residence, such decisions may lead to a situation that would prevent the establishment of truly united and coherent transnational networks. It can be very easily understood that such decisions concerning their identities will have a tremendous impact on individuals’ public identifications.

This does not exclude the possibility that some persons or groups would try to identify as members of both the transnational networks and ethno-national diasporas. Actually, in most cases, such persons do not discard their original identities. At most, these persons “add” such transnational identities to their original ethno-national identities, and they either suffer or enjoy a dual identity.
In view of the more firmly established base of identity and identification of core members of ethno-national diasporas, questions related to the need for protecting and promoting identity and identification are not as severe as they are in the cases of transnational entities. However, in view of current cultural and social temptations for assimilation and full integration in the more liberal democratic hostlands, members of ethno-national diasporas must also invest emotional and concrete resources in maintaining the given primordial elements of their identity. In other words, if they are inclined to maintain their memberships in their ethno-national diasporas and willing to augment their activities, they must try to prevent processes of sweeping hybridization of their individual and collective identities that may lead to its blurring and, later, when circumstances in their hostlands would permit, also to full assimilation. In turn, this may result in the total eradication of their identities and thus to the end of their membership in organized entities.

The Second Challenge: Dealing with Actual and Virtual Boundaries

The second major challenge facing existing diasporas is closely interlinked to the previously mentioned challenge concerning their identities and identification patterns. This challenge pertains to the definition, protection, maintenance and expansion of the virtual and actual boundaries of these entities. This has been recognized by various writers as one of the most critical aspects of diasporism. (Barth 1969; Armstrong 1976; Sheffer 1986, 2006; Safran 1991; Laitin 1995; Tölölyan, 1991; Cohen 1997)

While the identities of core members of ethno-national diasporas are more firmly established and solid, and while the boundaries of their collective entities are more clearly defined, the challenge facing transnational entities in this respect is different from the challenge facing diasporas and with which it is more difficult to cope. Thus, if there really exists a wish to form, consolidate, and later maintain a transnational organized collective, such persons must define and draw more clearly the boundaries of their network, which today are almost nonexistent—for example, there are no defined boundaries of the global African and Moslem diasporas.
If the leaders and activists of these potential or existing entities wish them to have a chance actually to be formed and to exist for longer periods, their leaders and activists should do their utmost to delineate the boundaries of these “communities,” either after or simultaneously with the definition of their identities. From their own point of view, there are a number of “positive” and “negative” reasons for this. Two of these “negative” reasons are, first, because of the total lack of well-defined boundaries it makes it very difficult for leaders and activists to identify, reach out to and mobilize members, to organize, and to locate needed political, diplomatic and economic resources and recruit activists. Second, the definition and drawing of more or less clear boundaries (of course not in physical terms) facilitate the entities' efforts to resist attempts by governments, societies, and competing ethnic and religious groups to penetrate these entities and cause their weakening, shrinking, and even demise in order to punish them for patterns of belonging and actions that they perform or that they avoid, patterns of behavior and actions that infuriate their hosts.

On the other hand, if the leaders and activists of core members of ethno-national diasporas wish that these entities will continue to exist, they must work hard not so much at drawing the lines of their entity’s borders, but at protecting the existing boundaries of their entities and at preventing their further blurring and porosity. They thus may avoid the possible consequent defection of core and peripheral members to either transnational diasporas or to hostland societies, a situation that may lead to a major decrease in their size and resources.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, preserving existing ethno-national diasporas is a major challenge, since the current boundaries of these entities have become less defined and more porous than they used to be in the mid-twentieth century. The main reasons for these developments are members’ assimilation and more often their greater integration into host societies, especially in democratic states. Yet because of the more firmly established nature of their members’ identities, if the leaders and activists of such diasporas invest extensive organizational efforts and substantial financial and educational resources, they are capable of maintaining their
diasporas’ boundaries and thus of preventing more assimilation and full integration of large numbers of their members.

It should be added here that some dormant diasporas whose members are either fully integrated into their host societies or have been inactive for many decades or even generations are now awakening and reviving their organizations and their core members’ joint activities. By doing so, they redraw the formerly indistinct virtual boundaries of their entities in their hostlands. As has been noted above, relevant examples of such processes affecting groups that were almost fully assimilated or totally integrated into their hostland society are some of the Scandinavian communities in the United States and Polish and Irish Americans.

The Third Challenge: Determining the Location and Relations with the Homeland or Center of Diasporas and Transnational Networks

The third basic issue facing all diasporic and transnational entities concerns the definition and formal or informal recognition of the actual or virtual location of their center. A very closely related issue is the nature of the relations between members, leaders, and organizations of these entities and their actual or perceived centers.

The existence of a recognized center, the need to act on its behalf or to oppose its regime—in short, the wish and need to maintain continuous connections with it—dictate the need to organize. Organization is a sine qua non for the persistent existence of diasporas as well as transnational entities.

Thus, if there is a recognized center, individuals and groups of all kinds can and do maintain contacts with it, and conversely, when there is no agreement about the location and legitimacy of a center, these groups experience severe organizational deficits that can be prevented if such centers are recognized and contacts with them maintained. Because of the lack of established centers and the consequent organizational deficits, it is clear that, in fact, these are merely virtual entities with a limited possibility to act and affect the international and national systems, except for their occasional substantial effect on regional and internal affairs in certain states, such as the situation of the Sunni al-Qaeda, which is far from being
recognized by the entire Moslem diaspora worldwide. Because in most transnational networks there is no agreement about the location of a center, the challenge concerning the recognition of and relations with such a center is basically conceptual and abstract.

For ethno-national diasporas, however, this challenge is neither hypothetical nor theoretical. Determining the location of the ethno-national center is a challenge facing members of these entities on almost a daily basis. This is so even though most core members of both state-linked and stateless ethno-national diasporas know exactly the territorial location of their imagined or real homelands. But for this reason, they must repeatedly decide on the nature of their relations with it and negotiate over who determines major cultural and practical decisions concerning the actions of both the diaspora and the ethno-national center—the center, or the diaspora.

After their brethren obtain independence in their homelands, stateless diasporas become state-linked diasporas. Later, up to a certain point and without asking too many critical questions about the policies and behavior of the new rulers in their homelands, members of such new state-linked diasporas tend to support the new political systems in their homelands. Usually during that initial period after independence, they continue to invest politically, diplomatically, and economically in enhancing their homeland’s security and development. Later, former activists in such diasporas are inclined to view more critically the situation in the homeland. In cases where the new rulers in the homeland pursue policies and behave in a fashion that does not fit the views of the diaspora, which in many cases are influenced by liberal and moderate norms of behavior prevailing in their hostlands, they might alter all or part of their previous relations with the homeland.

In any event, locating and recognizing the center of the entire ethno-national entity is a two-sided process. On one side, recognized homelands have tried and now more intensively continue to try to influence the situation and activities of “their” diasporas. (Connor 1986) In this respect, there is a relatively new pattern: for many reasons—including obtaining remittances, donations, investments, political and diplomatic support, and so on—more homelands are showing a much-enhanced interest in their diasporas. Accordingly, many countries of origin have established special ministries or
agencies to deal with “their” diasporas. Generally speaking, the overall purpose of these homeland governments is to enhance their relationships with and, in fact, their control over their diasporas, or at least to gain substantive influence concerning their positions and inclinations vis-à-vis their homeland and, possibly even more importantly, concerning the diaspora’s activities on the hostland, regional and international levels.

Thus, more homeland embassies and organizations are involved in the affairs of the diasporas, and more frequently, such governments attempt to “guide” the diasporas in what they should do in the social, political, and economic spheres in their hostlands. Moreover, homeland governments are now ready to invest more in cultural, educational, and socialization processes in their diasporas. More homelands also encourage their diasporas to organize. Such homeland governments' wish that, in the final analysis, they and to an extent also their diasporas will stand a chance to gain from such close mutual relationships and homeland involvement in diaspora affairs.

Frequently, however, these connections with homelands and their interventions in the affairs of the diasporas are not welcomed by diasporans. Most organized state-linked diasporas and their core members prefer to maintain their collective and individual autonomy in determining their strategies and actions in their hostlands and in fact also vis-à-vis their homelands. Consequently, more diasporans realize that in view of the new possibilities open to them in many hostlands and their better chances to survive as autonomous collectives for longer periods, they should either reform existing organizations or form new and more efficient ones that can either resist the interventions of the homeland or pursue their autonomous policies.

The Fourth Basic Challenge: Loyalty to Whom?

The fourth interlinked basic challenge facing all diasporas is that of loyalty. (Shain 1989; Sheffer 2006) This challenge is connected to all three challenges already mentioned and particularly to the third—the issue of the location of the centers of ethno-national diasporas. Members of all such diasporas must decide whether—and probably more importantly, the extent to
which—they owe loyalty either to the ethno-national center or homeland or to their hostland. This is far from a new issue. It has accompanied and confronted diasporas from ancient times until now.

Though, as noted above, the need to define to whom they owe their primary loyalty faces all dispersals, this is a major issue especially for the transnational group of entities. The main reason is, again, that members of such entities have no clearly defined centers. This is not only because of their own individual and collective priorities concerning to which social and political formation they belong and owe their loyalty, but because of a number of other reasons. It is due to the image that they project to all external actors, the emotional and rational reactions that they provoke from these actors, and the actions taken these days by hostland societies and governments to counter real or imagined threats. Hostland societies and governments are now very determinedly inclined to do all that they can to prevent the use of force and terrorism, tactics that are wrongly attributed especially to members of such emerging transnational diasporas. (Sheffer 2006 B)

Intense reactions to these entities, which are accompanied by racist and violent actions by host societies and governments, cause ideational, emotional and practical splits within these entities. Thus, on the one side, the moderate diasporans insist on loyalty to local societies and states. They are advocating restrained actions in accordance with the prevailing legal norms and requirements in their hostlands. On the other side, the radicals, who insist on loyalty to the causes of their emerging entities, frequently tend to use tough tactics, including terrorism vis-à-vis their hostlands.

Though less critically, diasporas that usually accept the rules of the game in their hostlands and that opt for either full loyalty to their hostlands, or at least adopt a vague posture in this respect, also face this challenge and must make some critical decisions concerning its various aspects. The issue is grave in cases where and when there are conflicts or clashes between their hostlands and homeland. Generally, the decisions that these diasporas must make pertain to their remittances, other unilateral transfers of money, economic investments, political involvement, lobbying, and criminal cooperation with various elements in their homelands.
Most of the stateless diasporas find themselves in a more delicate and problematic situation concerning the loyalty issue. They must decide to what extent they would support the struggle of their brethren for independence and sovereignty in their homelands. If there is no inconsistency between their own inclinations and strategies and the position of their hostlands authorities, their ability to make autonomous decisions concerning their assistance to their kin in the homeland is ensured. Things are by far more complicated in cases in which a hostland adopts a policy that contradicts the inclination of core leaders and members of a stateless diaspora.

The Fifth Challenge: Determining Strategic and Tactical Policies and Activities

A whole range of strategies is available to diasporas - from active political, social, economic, and practical support of violence and terrorism in hostlands, homelands and third and fourth countries, to legal attempts to promote their interests publicly and openly. Generally speaking and as already noted, most state-linked diasporas pursue quite moderate and balanced communitarian policies. More often than not, these entities prefer to act in accordance with the laws and the rules of the prevailing social and political games in their hostlands and in the international system.

On the other hand, the more radical activist members of transnational networks and stateless diasporas tend to adopt more radical policies, including violent and terrorist tactics, as well as cooperation with criminal groups, which is a rapidly expanding problem facing all the actors involved. In fact, most, if not all diasporas are involved in various criminal spheres. In view of the tough reactions of hostland governments in countries such as the United States, Britain, Spain, and Germany, diasporas have been forced to make difficult decisions in this respect. In fact, it seems that as time has passed since the 9/11 events, in view of the tough reactions of these and other hostlands, the extremist activists in these diasporas have moderated their positions, strategies, and actions. It is clear that despite the recurrent

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terrorist attacks launched by members of such diasporas, on the whole, Western democracies are not seriously threatened by such radical postures and actions on the part of these diasporas. This fact must lead these diasporas to rethink their positions concerning the methods to achieve their goals. However, the abandonment of the more radical postures and actions may alienate and further radicalize certain segments and individuals in these diasporas.

Concluding Comments

I have noted that here is a wide agreement that the transnationalist and diasporic phenomena are complex. Therefore, when discussing the main issues, dilemmas, and challenges facing all dispersal, one should avoid generalizations and make very careful and clear distinctions between the various types of dispersed persons. The main distinction suggested here is between transnational networks and ethno-national diasporas.

Generally speaking, it seems that transnational networks face more substantial dilemmas and challenges in comparison to the various subcategories of the ethno-national diasporas.

However, despite the differences between the two types of entities and in addition to their specific problems and challenges analyzed above, dispersals in both categories and subcategories share a number of additional concerns that have not been elaborated in this article but which should be very briefly mentioned here. Among such other issues, these are the need to establish and maintain cultural, religious, educational, and health systems; organizing social and legal support systems; and defining their relations with other diasporas and minorities in their hostlands. Each of these tasks involves very difficult decisions that affect the resources at the disposal of these entities.

In this context, however, one important thing should be very strongly stated: these entities are not only perpetrators of difficulties, unrest, conflicts, disloyalty, terrorism, and crimes. Rather, their members immensely contribute—in the form of literature, poetry, movies, plays, TV programs—to the cultures and the economies of their host countries. Therefore, they
deserve a lot of understanding and patience from host societies and governments.

Finally, while there is a multitude of studies concerning specific diasporas and transnational networks, and the numbers of these studies is increasing and their quality is improving, there is still a noticeable lacuna in the study of certain aspects of the entire phenomenon, including the challenges that has been discussed here. Among other lacunae the number of comparative and theoretical studies in this field is still limited. Hence, there is a need to develop such studies further and to create theoretical islands that eventually will serve as bases for a more comprehensive theoretical exploration of diasporism and transnationalism, phenomena that are not going to disappear, but rather to grow.

References


