

Virinder Kalra ■ Raminder K Kalhon ■ John Hutynuk



Diaspora & Hybridity



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Diaspora & Hybridity

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Contents

Introduction	1
1 Home and Away: Social Configurations of Diaspora	8
2 Cultural Configurations of Diaspora	28
3 Sexual Limits of Diaspora	51
4 Hybrid Connections	70
5 Hybridity and Openness (or, Whose Side Are You On?)	87
6 Journeys of Whiteness	105
7 Transnational Terror	127
References and Bibliography	139
Index	152

Introduction

It is not that we have been forced to change our minds, or the ways we work, but the gap between the time of this book's conception and its context of publication is large. The reassertion of borders and the closing down of multiple perspectives in the current political climate has undone the progressive potential of the terms with which we were to engage. We began this work in 2000, when, given the cultural promises of diaspora and hybridity, it was still possible to discern the beginnings of a transformation in the cultural certainties of the homogeneous, autochthonous nation. A hesitant but real expectation heralded the advent of hybrid forms of culture, working at the point of cultural translation, which many believed were going to disturb the settled formations of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (to borrow from bell hooks). We have agreed to show the traces of this optimism, which may still be found in parts of this book, but on the whole, our gauche enthusiasm has been dashed in the face of the global war on terror, the inauguration of new fear-driven security clampdowns, extra-legal detentions and incarcerations, bombing raids and imperial occupations – a case of 'perpetual war for perpetual peace' (Vidal 2002). It seems that when the United States of America finally joined the rest of the world in having to face the insecurity of a uni-polar globe, the adequacy of theory was put to the test. The grim sequence of events following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have remade a world in which boundaries and borders are even more vigorously policed, the activities of diasporic peoples have been seriously curtailed, and a once applauded hybrid creativity seems meek and mild in the face of an aggressive neo-liberal conservatism.

Is this, then, the obituary of the terms of diaspora and hybridity? Should this book be read as an ode to the time when the terms carried some resonance? Certainly this is not our intention. Rather, we wish to pursue an agenda that provides some insight into how these tools could, and may still, provide assistance to those struggling for social justice and equality. While we are critical of the (in)adequacy of current theorisations of diaspora and hybridity, this does not mean that, given the correct organizational context and praxis, they cannot yet emerge as useful modes of engagement for progressive struggle. What is absolutely clear is that we are living in an era that requires a defence of diasporic Muslims/Asians (and their varied substitutes among the demonized 'others' of our times – asylum-seekers for one) and a promotion of hybrid forms of collective action. It is a sad fact that creative responses are not often forthcoming from the schools of cultural studies

and the humanities. The institutions that sponsor and promote the circulation of key academic terms seem less likely than ever to be places that encourage critical questions (or answers) about (to) the urgent politics of today. Rather, there is an ever starker contrast between the symbolic capital used by those building coalitions to 'Stop the War' and those using the language of diaspora and hybridity.¹ This is regrettable, but, as this book will illustrate, it is not unexpected, given the intellectual histories of these terminologies.

This is not a textbook in the sense that it offers a comprehensive overview of the literature on the uses and abuses of hybridity and diaspora. This would be an impossible task, given the appearance of an ever-increasing number of publications that are either exploring or making passing references to these concepts. It would also be disingenuous as our perspective would necessarily favour certain approaches over others. Rather, our concern is to consider those texts that most persuasively illustrate how academic works can be used to relate diaspora and hybridity to some form of social change and to the pursuit of equality. To contextualize our stance, we offer provisional definitions of these terms and a review of the main theoretical viewpoints, with the caveat that the use of the terms 'diaspora' and 'hybridity' is often discipline-specific. If we sometimes seem overtly critical of the work that diaspora and hybridity can do, it is because our intentions are specific. No doubt the inclusion of hybridity and diaspora in certain academic fields has opened up a range of possibilities for intellectual activity, but the main effort of this book is to seek possibilities that go beyond the comforts of arm-chair rumination/thinking. Our emphasis on criticism for change provides the reader with frameworks with which to assess the various arguments, theories and narratives under review, and to explore implications for action. It follows that we are not attempting to offer some sort of balanced view. Nor do we conceal where our politics lie. By making this transparent, the reader has adequate information to judge the nature of our intervention.

Within this directive, familiar terrain on hybridity and diaspora is covered and issues of identity, social relations and historical change are made present. Our concern is to delineate the way in which diaspora and hybridity have certain commonalities in their relationship to notions of migration and disjuncture and to show how these have come to be articulated in terms of the subversion of naturalized forms of identity centred on the nation. This is not to dismiss the power of nationalism, nor to valorize the identity-building activities that are signified by hybrid or diasporic processes. It is rather to indicate the nature of the dialogue between the two; perhaps also to highlight the often violent nature of this dialogue, and the costs associated with the production of hybridity and the formation of diaspora.

We also note the unspoken racialized assumptions involved in diaspora and hybridity. Too often these terms have been used to avoid confronting issues of racial inequality and so they become substitutes for talking about the racial or minority ethnic group without having to enter into the sullied world of institutional politics. We attempt to expose this kind of posturing and also turn the lens of diaspora on to the study of whiteness, posing questions as

to why it is the movements and settlements of peoples of colour that have attracted so much attention in the literature on diaspora and hybridity. This focus on whiteness, like all the categories that are used in this book, does not preclude the changing nature of social identification. As we will show, the term diaspora was first used to describe Jewish people, a group that in certain contexts appear as 'white' and in another appear as racialized 'others'. Our point of critical departure is to note how inadequate this shifting knowledge is when confronted with the ongoing plight of, for example, the Palestinian people.

The book begins by considering the idea of diaspora in a relatively conventional mode, tracing what is often called the classical diasporas of Jewish and Armenian peoples. Our intention is to introduce key facets of the concept without limiting the various uses to which diaspora has been put. In particular, the criticisms that diaspora offers towards settled notions of immigration and ethnicity are scrutinized. By comparing concepts related to diaspora, we are also able to home in on those features that consistently arise when the term is deployed. We note how diaspora more often than not evokes two social spheres of interaction – the place of residence and the place from which migration has occurred. Agency, in these multiple locations, is in the diasporic group which exhibits some form of collective mobilization around the tensions between home(s) and abroad(s). It is the ongoing political, economic, social and cultural ties between multiple institutionalized spaces that characterize diaspora. Citing examples from social movements, articulating national liberation and organized through diasporic networks, such as those of the Kashmiris and Kurds, our first chapter explores these political connections in detail. We also consider economic ties, recognizing that the limit of diaspora's usefulness as a tool for progressive politics is reached when those same networks are used for consolidating new forms of capitalist accumulation attendant with neo-liberal policy. In the end, there is nothing inherently progressive in the contours that make up diaspora's social life, but the historic role that diasporas have played in progressive mobilizations stands as testimony to its potential.

Broadly, we find a theoretical divide between those who use diaspora as a descriptive tool (such as Safran 1991 and Cohen 1997) and those who apply it as a process (such as Gilroy 1993a and Clifford 1994). This distinction divides the first chapter from the second. There are consequences in this division for both main theoretical approaches to diaspora, where one approach is more interested in categorization and the *post hoc* implications of this, while the other finds diaspora as a way to critique the categories and essentialisms involved. This theoretical divide is also played out in terms of those areas which come under empirical scrutiny. In Chapter 1 we note political and economic implications of diasporic formations, whereas in Chapter 2 our attention shifts to the more cultural aspects of diaspora. These wide, sweeping distinctions are necessarily heuristic and the importance of politics and economics to cultural production is not forgotten. Rather, the distinction is maintained as a means of critique of an approach

to diaspora that is overly focused with textual concerns which emerge from some cultural studies work and is common to Clifford as much as it is to Safran, to descriptive just as much as to processual approaches to diaspora.

The notion of belonging and the imposition of a single idea of belonging to the nation are potentially brought under question by diaspora. The nation is the foil against which we attempt to delineate various conceptualizations such as 'diasporic consciousness', 'multivocality' and 'deterritorialization'. Each of these notions attempts to unsettle and unpack the problems associated with having multiple belongings or no sense of belonging at all. These somewhat abstract concepts are considered through the cultural arenas of music, film and literature. Cultural creativity is also a site for the ferment of hybridity, in a way that many claim offers great potential for resistance to the politics of homogeneity. We note that in an era where cultural industries increasingly form the most dynamic and profitable parts of capitalist production, diasporic cultural works fall into familiar patterns of marketing, management and consumption. The moments where these works provide inspiration or form part of a wider mobilizing campaign become more and more squeezed. This does not render diasporic cultural products forever to Theodor Adorno's graveyard of popular culture, but forces a recognition that all culture is available for exploitation even where its intentions are not that way inclined.

In Chapter 3, we ask whether being a man or woman, boy or girl, makes a difference to the experiences of living in new lands, and whether there is any scope here for equality, not only between diasporas and host societies, but also within diasporic contexts. We consider the legalistic and economic reasons for the migration of men and women to new terrains. We look to see how this has impacted differentially on the lives of men and women with the example of case studies such as marriages between Punjabi men and Mexican women in the early twentieth-century USA, and the 'maid-trade' – that is, the migration of domestic labourers or sex workers – in the twilight of the twentieth century. The latter enquiry also permits us to ask why labour migration is conventionally not seen as part of diaspora studies. The movements of 'maids' and sex workers raises the issue of citizenship in establishing new diasporas. This is a potentially contested site in the making of what may be called silent/silenced diasporas that, by way of negotiating the institutional limitations placed upon actual people's lives, opens up diaspora to critical practice and politics.

The case of genital mutilation of sub-Saharan African Muslim women in Britain permits us to consider how far diasporic women have been struggling not only with the rights for women, but also with the education of their men: in addition, there is the burning question of how much of this issue to expose to mainstream society. We also ask why, classically, men have been excluded from studies of gender? Why is it that masculinity is implicitly taken for granted whereas femininity has been rigorously studied? We look to some work that addresses this absence. Finally, in our challenge to monolithic identities, we briefly turn to the developments in queer

theory, whose main thesis suggests that homosexuality is not the opposite of heterosexuality. We observe how 'Otherness' inflects the lives of non-heterosexuals in diasporic communities, while at the same time calling into question issues of boundary with regard to the variety of possible identities. Ultimately, we are a complex residue of several, often overlapping, identities today – described best by Gloria Anzaldúa as 'heterogeneous identities' (Anzaldúa 1987). The fact that we prioritize one over the other at any one time is to do with the socio-political circumstances of the enunciation.

In Chapter 4, we begin by providing a link between hybridity and the previous discussions on diaspora. Insofar as hybridity is often located next to diaspora, and because the cultural mix that hybridity invokes is a 'problem' for conceptions of both the host culture and the diasporic arrivee, hybridity marks diaspora in varied ways. This chapter explores these co-ordinates through a close reading of a number of key texts on hybridity and a comparison with organized politics around issues of race and ethnicity. This task initially offers a description of the term 'hybridity' and its uses in anthropology, cultural studies and related fields, followed by a critique of assumptions (those of purity, of marginality and identity) that underpin much of hybridity theory. A discussion of cultural creativity, syncretism, diffusion, race and biology (the history of migration, language, culture and 'blood') leads on to a consideration of how syncretism and hybridity seem to do duty as terms for the management of the more esoteric cultural aspects of colonialism and the global market. The argument focuses on cultural creativity – innovation and authenticity, ownership of cultural forms and of technological modes of cultural mix – with examples drawn from film and television. In this way, we are able to underscore how lack of attention to political and economic difference makes possible celebrations of hybridity as the fruit of late capitalist globalization.

In Chapter 5, we further evaluate the relation of host and guest, home and away, here and there, and do so with reference to the nation and the cross-border theory of 'post-nationalism'. We begin with a consideration of what is and what is not considered hybrid, and why there is good reason to consider the selective ascription of hybridity to the marginal and not the centre. In this way, we note that border theory, for example, highlights hybridity but is notably absent from discussions of campaigns against the detention camps which maintain borders. This links hybridity to more explicit political terminologies and construes hybrid artefacts as commodities of difference in the context of transition – urbanization, privatization, trinketization. Urbanization in particular is picked up as the terrain upon which more problematic dimensions of hybridity-talk are cast. Our theoretical attention is drawn to one of the founding figures of hybridity theory: Homi Bhabha, whose stance is subjected to scrutiny. Given an agenda anticipated in a redistributed future, the subsequent discussion then advocates more militant approaches and wonders what must be done with the hybrid today if we are to take seriously Marx's old point of not just interpreting the world but wanting to change it.

In pursuit of radical questioning, in Chapter 6 we again review the main propositions on diaspora and hybridity, but this time in relation to a subject that rarely gets a mention when it comes to race and diaspora studies – the position and movement of white people. We do this not just to say that this is a group (or set of groups) that has been overlooked and therefore needs to be taken into consideration. Rather, we highlight the invisibility of such groups in regimes of supremacy to do with whiteness. We also question whether diaspora can adequately account for the variety of movements associated with white people, as with (settler) colonialism, tourism and travel, retirement migration and expatriate cultures. Our foray on this terrain first considers studies on whiteness as such and then focuses on the ways certain diasporas have been permitted to ‘disappear’, often ambivalently, due to a variety of features, such as skin colour, religion, economic status and the particularity of history. We go on to address the ambiguous cases of the Jewish and Irish diasporas. In a consolidation of the discussion of hybridity in the previous chapters, Chapter 6 pursues the question of hybrid racial mixtures, their institutionalization within racial hierarchies, and considers why only raced people are seen to be altered in processes of hybridity: we look to the cases of the Anglo-Indians in colonial and post-colonial India in comparison with the liaisons between Europeans and Native Americans in the so-called New World from the seventeenth century. The obsession with racial purity has led to the suppressions of the fact that millions of white people in the USA have multiracial roots. As with the dynamics of whiteness in general, invisibility and the suppression of hidden histories leads to regimes of supremacy which need to be dismantled.

Our final chapter does not act as a conclusion, but is rather a way of asking whether hybridity and diaspora can help us in the struggle against the forces of imperialism that are, with apparent impunity, re-enacting nineteenth-century colonial policy. As a new emperor surveys a domain on which, yet again, the sun never sets, we choose ‘Transnational Terror’ as the title of the closing chapter. This is intended to evoke both the question of just who the terrorists are in this context and to address how the transnational dimension of the activities of the US administration, of New Labour’s UK Inc., and of the ‘coalition of the coerced’ have changed or transformed our understanding of diaspora and hybridity. At the nexus of these processes is a conflation between terrorists, Muslims and asylum-seekers/refugees. These new pariahs are intimately caught up in a web of conceit that reworks the connections that exist between all people, and thus remakes those who dare to step outside the reformed, concrete-blocked and sacrosanct borders of Western nation-states. Terrorists and asylum-seekers are those without a home, without status (as those in Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, the immigration ‘centres’ at Woomera and Baxter in Australia, the detainees at Belmarsh, UK, or at Kumingting in Malaysia, and too many more) and therefore those who are out of the pale of rights that are granted to people with qualifications and papers. The enactment of the Patriot Act in America and the equivalent acts in Britain are examples of legislation

which seeks to legitimate de-diasporization – the breaking of transnational links – revocation of citizenship and what, in Britain, was always a dream of the right: repatriation. At a time when the kind of key thinking that has been developed to understand hybridity and diaspora is most needed, scholarly work seems overly concerned with issues of a purely cultural type, too closely related to the particular, and not able to deal with the transnational dimension of the 'threat'. We need to read these terms critically in order to act, and our book is designed as an intellectual tool to clear a space for action. The various forms this action takes are still to be suggested, of course. And we are not explicitly prescriptive here. Our task is one we see as an evaluation of earlier theorizing with a view to engagement in the now. This is, for us, the basis for any engagement at all. We do not claim all the answers, or even all the right questions about hybridity and diaspora, but we do think we have, at least, to ask.

Note

1 Evidence for this can be seen by the various literature produced by these movements. Stop the War websites have a conspicuous lack of engagement with terms such as diaspora and hybridity. In the UK, see www.stopwar.org.uk and in the USA www.notinourname.net.

Home and Away: Social Configurations of Diaspora

I want to begin by asking how resistance is itself to be understood? (Gilroy 1991: 3)

It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide. (M.K. Gandhi, Navajivan, 28 June 1925)¹

If words could change the world, then 'diaspora' is one of those terms that promised much but delivered little. Events have neutralized the purchase of many agreed conceptual staples and today it is transnational networks (often labelled 'terrorist') that have entered into the social science and broadsheet vocabulary. Such a change of terminology – not for the first time – marks a transition in the significance of diaspora for a whole range of cultural, social and political formations. Thus, our aim is to present theory and illustrations that allow us to gauge whether the conceptualization of diaspora has helped to enhance or has diverted attention from issues of social justice, and to ask if this has offered either hope or disappointment for those engaged in struggles for equality.

The contemporary significance of diaspora as an area of study that emerged alongside related intellectual movements in the academy such as post-colonial studies and the ubiquitous and poorly defined processes of globalization. There are many links between these areas and it is only possible to indicate briefly where the main moments of overlap occur. Phil Cohen (1999) itemizes academic interest in diaspora by quantifying articles and books that have a diasporic title or theme. Pre-1990, there was little academic interest in the term 'diaspora', and the few publications with diaspora as a theme were primarily concerned with the historical Jewish or African experience. Post-1990, there is a mass proliferation of written work as well as a huge diversification in terms of those groups who come under the diaspora rubric. The breadth and diversity of diaspora now stretches from queer theory, where sexuality is the site of difference from which settled notions of belonging are challenged, to economic network theory, where diasporas are examples of effective entrepreneurial networks.

Our perspective is opposed to the kind of study which advocates research and commentary that remains solely concerned with trends in the world of academic writing. The point, not made by Phil Cohen in his survey of diaspora use, is that the period of exponential increase in interest in the concept also

coincides with events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent new political terrain in which the foreign policy interests of the USA are unfettered by competition with the Soviet Union. Since the end of what was commonly called the Cold War, a credible global opposition to the US administration has not emerged in any renewal of communism, but rather with Islamism, which, it can be argued, has its own version of diaspora in the notion of the *umma* (Sayyid 2000b). Teasing out the relationship between these events and trends in the conceptual and socio-political frameworks of diaspora is a theme that will be running through all the chapters of this book, though the particular issue of the Islamic diaspora will be taken up explicitly only in the final chapter.

This chapter outlines the conventional view of diaspora, beginning with the Jewish experience. We then address the question of diaspora as a social form by looking at some of the other terms that hover around it, such as 'immigration' and 'ethnicity'. Notions of ethnicity, immigration, settlement and race are all found to intersect and dissect conceptualizations of the diaspora. Following this tour of terms, we will then return to two key themes. First, that of the relationship between home(s) and abroad(s), which will be examined in terms of economic, political and social ties. Secondly, our critical perspective on diaspora demands an assessment of how the term contributes to strategic thinking concerned with addressing the condition of the dispossessed and marginalized in our uneven world.

Convenient convention

In a conventional mode, diaspora is related to the Greek gardening tradition (as is hybridity), referring simply to the scattering of seeds and implying some description of dispersal. While the etymology of seeds and sperm as carriers of both culture and reproductive capacity is central to this description of diaspora, these themes are taken up in Chapter 3. Rather, we take the accepted site of the Jewish experience of forced exile as a starting point for discussing diaspora. In Jewish historiography, the source of diaspora experience begins in the sixth century BC with the destruction of the First Temple and Jerusalem. The expulsion of Jews from the city and their subsequent exile to Babylon has become one of the central Jewish cultural and political narratives. This is despite the fact that there were already Jewish settlements in many parts of the region, notably in Egypt and Greece, at the time. By the fourth century BC there were more Jews *outside* rather than inside the region of Jerusalem (Ages 1973). Nevertheless, the association of the term 'diaspora' with loss or exile or some sort of suffering has meant that the Jewish experience has come to be seen as the prototype diasporic experience. This description of a group is seductive as it allows people living all over the globe to articulate a connection with each other and to think themselves connected, to a greater or lesser extent, with a piece of land (whether this be mythical or actual). Of course, we are aware that in the

Jewish case this has also precipitated tragic consequences and injustice for the peoples of Palestine. Ironically, given the intimate connections between the exile of Jewish peoples and the concept of diaspora as trauma, this has not prevented the creation of another victim diaspora in the Palestinian people.² This may have something to do with the Jewish diaspora occupying an ambivalent place in racial hierarchies, an aspect explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The classical form of diaspora, then, relates to forced movement, exile and a consequent sense of loss derived from an inability to return. This is also conventionally applied to the mass movement of Africans via slavery to the Americas. Zygmunt Bauman (2000) notes that it is only through the work of African studies scholars in the 1960s that the term 'diaspora' comes into academic use and this is specifically in relation to the Jewish and African experiences. Indeed, the use of Babylon as a signifier of the oppressor is often found in invocations of the experiences of slavery from diasporic black communities (Gilroy 1987). A vast literature traces the history of slavery, but the cultural outcome of the Atlantic trade is best explored in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993a) and Ronald Segal's *The Black Diaspora* (1996). This association of movement and migration with trauma, and containing within it a constant loss and yearning for an obtainable home, is one of the main foci of critiques of the classical model of diaspora. For instance, this model is unable to deal with highly qualified Chinese migrants to the engineering sector in the USA, migrants who have no bars on their return, yet organize themselves in many ways which we would call diasporic. Despite these difficulties, the association of victimhood with diaspora does lead to the inclusion of other groups, such as the Armenians who suffered forced displacement at the beginning of the twentieth century at the hands of Turkish expansionism (Cohen 1997).

In all of these cases, a defining characteristic is a blockage to 'return' – that there is a difficulty, if not an absolute bar, in returning to the place of migration. Forced exile becomes essential to the heightened sense of longing for home and is central to this understanding of diaspora. Even in those cases where the bar to return is dissolved, such as the movement of African-Americans to Liberia at the behest of Marcus Garvey in 1920, this return journey is not usual. The sense of attachment or, in some way, connection to the land from which exile was forced operates, at the very least, as a powerful metaphor. The idea of forced exile also applies to contemporary migrations and movements. The events in the Balkans in the 1990s witnessed forced movement and resettlements of people to almost all parts of Europe and North America. The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia into Bosnia, Kosova, Serbia and Slovenia means that many peoples are living close to their former homes, yet are not able to return. The displacement of people as asylum-seekers and refugees also brings with it the difficulty of returning home. South African political activists often found their way to Britain and were banned from returning to South Africa during the apartheid era. It is only recently that the concept of diaspora has been