Diasporas and Development

Michael Collyer
University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
M.Collyer@sussex.ac.uk
Diasporas:

- Diasporas common in academic work since late 1980s
- Increasingly common in journalistic or popular discourse
- Government/policy discourse taking up notion – ‘building diaspora’
- Self identification of migrant groups – ‘diaspora consciousness’
BLADI.NET
Le Portail de la Diaspora Marocaine
Mohamed Hamadi BEKOUCHI

LA DIASPORA MAROCAINE
Une chance ou un handicap
Featuring over 30 groups of musicians and other artists from London's rich mix of world communities: Latin, Turkish, South Asian, Romanian, Arab, Ethiopian, Afro-Caribbean, Jewish, Afghan, Irish, Chinese, East & West African.

**diaspora music village**

**London**

FREE FESTIVAL WEEKEND

**KEW GARDENS**

Sat 25 & Sun 26 June 2005

www.culturalco-operation.org
020 7456 0404
‘Lecture’ (9.00 – 11.00)

☐ How to theorise diasporas?
☐ How are understandings of diaspora evolving?
☐ Why are diasporas important for development?
Workshop (11.30 – 13.30)

- Small group discussion of questions/response
- Plenary discussion
- Presentations: 5 minutes on range of ‘diaspora experiences’
- Questions/final discussion
Diasporas and communities of origin

Sheffer (1988)
Meanings of diaspora

- Origins – limited, specific.
- Modern usages – broad, general.
- Vertovec (2009)
  - Social form
  - Type of consciousness
  - Mode of cultural production
- Diaspora or Transnational Community?
Meanings of diaspora

- ‘Ethno-national diasporas’ (Sheffer 2003)
  - Nation state: Mexican, Moroccan, Filipino
  - Sub-state: Hawaiian, Javanese, Scottish
  - Religious: Sikh, Jewish,
  - Supra-national: Amazigh, Tamil

- ‘Methodological nationalism’
Safran (1991): criteria

- Dispersed from an original 'centre' to at least two peripheral places
- Maintain a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland
- Believe they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host country
- See the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right
- Committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland
- continuing relationship with the homeland defines group’s consciousness and solidarity

- Dispersal from an original homeland, or
- Expansion of a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions
- Collective memory and myth about the homeland
- Idealisation of the supposed ancestral home
- Return movement
- Strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long period of time
- Troubled relationship with host societies
- Sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries
- Possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries
3 common features

- Dispersion
  - Increasingly applied to any dispersed group
  - Time-space element significant – generations and locations.
3 common features

- Dispersion

- Enduring relationship with ‘home’
  - Increasingly criticised as essentialist (Anthias 1998) and teleological (Clifford 1994)
3 common features

- Dispersion
- Enduring relationship with ‘home’
- Distinctive identity in place of residence ‘Boundary maintenance’
  - Maintenance or erosion? Hybridity (Stuart Hall)
  - ‘changing same’ Gilroy

- Victim Diaspora - Jewish
- Labour Diaspora - Indian
- Trading Diaspora - Chinese
- Imperial Diaspora - British
- Cultural Diaspora - Caribbean
Why talk of diasporas?

☐ Changing fashion?
  - Fits with current interest in post-structuralism in social sciences

☐ Changing awareness?
  - Highlights processes previous theories overlooked

☐ Changing reality?
  - Points to changing patterns of behaviour
How to theorise diasporas?

- Networks
  - social capital approaches
- Social constructionism
  - ‘imagined communities’
- Political economy
  - World Systems Theory
  - Micro political economy
- Geopolitics
  - Governmentality
  - Territoriality
Continuing controversies

- Diasporas and assimilation
- Seen as alternative to teleological assumptions of earlier theory
- But:
  - Distinction between socio-economic and cultural involvement
  - Transnational involvement may be opposed to integration (Nagel 2003)
  - Others argue that transnationalism and integration mutually reinforcing (Portes 1998)
1) Transnationalism and assimilation are mutually exclusive processes.

2) Transnationalism is a dominant process due to marginalisation.

3) Transnationalism and assimilation are occurring concurrently, but at different rates.

4) Transnationalism and assimilation are occurring concurrently, and can be mutually beneficial – supporting each other.

**Key**

- Blue arrows: Transnational processes
- Orange arrows: Assimilation processes

*Source: Oeppen 2010*
Continuing controversies

- Diasporas and assimilation
- Diasporas over time
  - Generational effects
- Homogeneity of diasporas
  - Over space
  - Reasons for departure
  - Individuals; gender, ethnicity, education, citizenship......
Continuing controversies

“we should think of diaspora not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity, but rather as an idiom, a stance, a claim. We should think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis. [.....] It does not so much describe the world as seek to remake it.’

Brubaker (2005) p12
Diasporas and Development

- Remittances:
Remittance transfers to MENA region 1970-’07
Remittances to Egypt 1977 - 2007
Remittances

- Remittances are large
- Remittances are stable
- Remittances are therefore an opportunity
  - for Southern governments
  - for Northern governments
  - for private companies
How Do We Tap Into the Billions in Cash That are Sent Globally Between Family and Friends?
Remittance charges
2003 ave. (UK data)

Principal amount (euros)
How are remittances spent?

- Consumption 40-70%
- Housing 20 - 50%
- Investment 5 - 20%
- Education 0 - 5%
- Migration?

Feedback mechanisms and multipliers?

- even consumption 2-4x estimated
Remittances

- Size/Significance
- Forms
- Distribution
- Scale
- Timing/Regularity

Maximisation techniques: ‘Home’
- Reducing costs of transfers

Maximisation techniques: ‘Host’
- Encouraging entrepreneurship
Diaspora and Development

- Beyond remittances
  - Political influence – lobbying
  - Social remittances
  - Skills transfer – short term return eg. TOKTEN
  - Return
  - Circularity.
Outstanding questions:

- Diaspora and the state:
  - How do states seek to maximise return? Can state institutions ‘create’ diaspora? How are obligations/rights balanced?

- Performing diaspora:
  - Who is performing? Is diaspora gendered? Does diaspora still resolve clash of state interests?

- The ‘Development industry’:
  - What practical impacts has diaspora inclusion had on development practice?