

Conceptualizing diasporas

Remarks about the Latino and Caribbean experience

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Introduction

In the last decade, the term diaspora have begun to emerge, first in migration studies, then in development studies. Once conceptualized as exile or forced dislocation from a 'homeland', in the recent migration-development literature diaspora has increasingly been used to describe the mass migrations and displacements of the second half of the twentieth century as well as to analyse the developmental 'impact' of these migrants' cross-border activities.

This chapter attempts to contribute to the contemporary debate on what diasporas are all about and how we should understand them in our political society. I suggest two lines of inquiry. On the one hand, to analyze the extent to which widely accepted definitions and conceptualizations of diasporas ignore three empirical problems, namely the role of border redefinition in creating (potential) diasporas, the relevance or irrelevance of dispersion to diasporic identification, and the imprecision of what constitutes diasporic linkages. I argue that we cannot assume that the notion of dispersion is sufficient, and in some cases even necessary, for the articulation of a diaspora. Moreover, the linkages that constitute or inform diasporic development must be tangible and influential, not merely symbolic. On the other hand, we need to pay firm attention to the material and political circumstances which are encouraging or inhibiting the growth of contemporary diasporas.

Using case studies of Latinos in the United States today, I show that four contexts shape the emergence of a group as a diaspora. These are i) the level of community – and in particular elite and activist – consciousness about the needs for a link with a homeland, ii) whether the homeland government is encouraging diasporic identification or links, iii) the perception of emigrants by the society in the homeland, and, finally, iv) the relationship between the homeland and host governments.

Diasporas

The association between diasporas and dispersion is unambiguous in perhaps the case of Jews or Greeks. Once, however, the notion of 'diaspora' is applied to other religious or ethnic groups, "it becomes immediately apparent how difficult it is to find a definition that makes a clear distinction between a migration and a diaspora, or between a minority and a diaspora" (Chalian and Rageau 1995: xiii).

How, then, might one clearly define or establish a concept of diaspora? Shain (1995), for example, uses the term to refer to a people with common national origin who reside

outside a claimed or an independent home territory. Esman (1986) has defined a diaspora as a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin. These, and other, definitions of diaspora¹ share in common notions of a relationship between groups of people that are based on some form of national ancestry, and sometimes of dispersion.

These interpretations or descriptions of diaspora seem problematic. First, assuming the traditional notion of diaspora as related to dispersion leaves out all those groups which, by virtue of the formation of a nation state, were separated but not dispersed by territorial boundaries. Mexicans and the descendants of those living in Northern Mexico before its annexation by the United States are one example. Numerous African groups in the post-colonial period provide other examples of separation without dispersion.

Second, these definitions assume that any group by virtue of their common national origin and scatteredness constitute a diaspora. However, this categorization may include groups who do not identify with what is regarded as the homeland. In other words, not all ethnicities who have a common national origin can be regarded, or regard themselves, as diasporas. Rather, by virtue of these and some other conditions such groups become a diaspora.

Third, the assumption about diasporas as groups that retain some meaningful link with perceived homelands is important but imprecise. The assumption depends on some abstract notion of a link or connection which is difficult to pin down. What act or acts are sufficient to constitute a linkage meaningful enough to be considered as diasporic? How much of a linkage is required to call a group a diaspora? And who is defining the connection - an individual, a community, an outside group, or all of them?

In contemporary transnational migrant communities, diasporic involvement can range from the exclusive maintenance of family ties in the homeland to establishing political connections that may lead to acquiring positions of power. In this regard at least four kinds of involvement can be observed at the family, community, social and political level. In most cases, migrants maintain family ties and some community and social connections with the homeland. Political exiles who struggle to return to their homeland and (re-)gain power are more eager to pursue political links with local constituencies. In these cases, however, the establishment of ties as an indicator of diasporic connection requires further specification. Thus, meaningful contact needs to be tied to another triggering or motivational variable.

As a preliminary definition, and in this context, Sheffer offers a more concrete definition of diasporas as a “socio-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their

¹Other definitions often used are those of Chaliand and Rageau (1996), Laguerre (1996), King (1997), Safran (1991), and Cohen (1996).

homeland and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries” (Sheffer 2003:10-11).

By virtue of this reality, diasporas implicate themselves internationally through relationships with the homeland, other international entities, and host country governments and societies, thereby influencing various dynamics, including development.

Factors

Diasporas do not emerge solely as a consequence of dispersion, common national ancestry, or simply any kind of connection. There is a process by which groups are motivated or influenced to become diasporas. My own and de la Garza’s case study research on Latinos and their links to their homelands indicate that four critical factors enable the formation of a group into a diaspora (de la Garza and Orozco 2000). These are:

1. The level of community – and particularly elite and activist – consciousness about the need or desire for link with the homeland,
2. the homeland’s perceptions of emigrants,
3. the outreach policies by governments in the homeland, and
4. the existence of relationships between source and destination countries.

With reference to case material, I elaborate on each of these factors below.

Homeland links

First, the community must experience a need or demand for values and interests from the homeland. Among national or ethnic migrant groups an appeal to the values or interests common to those of the ancestral homeland can occur. Such an appeal or demand will depend on whether a leader or members of the community (due to some experience with the homeland or with enforcing their values or identities) find it is to the best of their interest or identity to identify with the homeland. When exile groups, for example, look for the support of the migrant community they have found it necessary to appeal to values and interests of the homeland.

Even minorities, whose nexus with a homeland is rather symbolic or historically distant, may find it to their interest to appeal to common values with that homeland. This is for example the case of third generation Mexican-Americans or Mexican-Americans whose ancestry is rooted in California or Texas. Invoking the homeland can increase economic or political interests that benefit their own resources.

The formation of hometown associations (HTAs) is a concrete example of a demand for values and interests. HTAs are philanthropic migrant organizations created under the common cause to support the communities of origin through the transfer of donation and resources (Orozco 2000, Goldring 2003). HTAs develop political capital in the places of settlement, which in turn increases the reliance of the local migrant-sending community on the resources of these associations. Thus leaders of the HTAs can reap personal

benefits from links to both communities. In this regard some observers have seen HTAs as a personal investment for the HTA leaders; leaders may hope that they will take future lucrative leadership positions in their hometowns (Alarcon, 2000). Within that context, HTA leaders come to have more influence from abroad than they would have from their hometown (Zabin, 1998).

Mexican and Guyanese immigrant communities provide two examples of active hometown associations operating in the U.S. In the Guyanese case, an estimated 200 associations have been formed in the U.S.. They carry out projects both in Guyana and in the places of settlement in the U.S. and these projects often address issues such as education and health. One distinct characteristic of Guyanese HTAs is that they often are organized by religious or professional affiliation or formed in order to deal with a specific cause. Another characteristic is that they sometimes depend on membership's dues for fund sources, collecting a yearly average of under US\$5,000. Guyanese HTAs have formed partnerships with the national Guyanese government, local municipalities, as well as non-profit organizations such as churches. Partnerships have also been formed with other Caribbean groups (Orozco, 2003a).

Mexican HTAs are among the better known and studied. An estimated 600 Mexican HTAs are operating in over 30 U.S. cities. Unlike Guyanese groups, they work with a specific geographical location or community. Fundraising efforts result in average yearly collections of under US\$10,000, mostly collected through organized events in the U.S. such as dances, raffles, or dinners. Around 80 percent of Mexican HTAs have collaborated with other institutions towards projects in their hometowns (Orozco 2003b). This articulation of an emigrant group to reconnect with the home country is indicative of a sense of diasporism. Such indications are perceived in the expression of a common and shared interest about the home country's needs and challenges.

Homeland perceptions of emigrants

Second, people in the homeland must have positive perceptions of their emigrants to create an incentive to link to 'distant' brothers. Thus, the kind of perceptions a homeland has of their emigrants plays a critical role in motivating particular groups to link with their countries of origin. The way Latin American states think of their emigrants varies from country to country. Except for El Salvador, Central Americans living in the United States have historically been little known or recognized by their home countries. In Nicaragua, for example, a country whose emigrant population is more than 20 percent the size of the total population, there has been only little official notice of a Nicaraguan diaspora.

Until recently, researchers attached to Nicaraguan universities did not study migration of Nicaraguans to the U.S. or Costa Rica (the other major receiving country of Nicaraguans), nor did the government know much about the Nicaraguan diaspora. Yet, the diaspora's invisibility should not be taken at face value. In the early nineties, in Managua, Nicaraguans who visited or returned to their home country were called 'Miami boys', an expression used to refer to them as different from both U.S. and Nicaraguan native populations.

In Nicaragua, the opinion of Nicaraguans in the U.S. is mixed. For a long time, many groups were very critical of Nicaraguans in Miami as they were associated with the ones who fought with Somoza and created the contra forces (Orozco, 2002). Other sectors of society looked upon the diaspora with indifference or barely noticed them, despite the fact that the country receives millions of dollars in remittances. More recently, however, a 'heroic' view of immigrants, particularly those in Costa Rica, has emerged. These are regarded as hard working people who left their country in search of livelihood opportunities and are now facing hardship in a foreign land. Costa Rica is the destination for 50 percent of Nicaragua's migrants and some 400,000 Nicaraguans are estimated to reside in Costa Rica. In contrast to Nicaraguans living in the U.S., those in Costa Rica come mainly from rural areas with lower incomes. An average of \$100 million dollars is sent from Costa Rica to Nicaragua each year. This trend is recent; 53 percent of Nicaraguans residing in Costa Rica have been sending remittances for less than three years (Orozco, 2004a).

In the Salvadoran case, the diaspora in the United States is considered more positively by the homeland. Salvadoran migrants are generally regarded as those who left during the war and now are helping to rebuild the country from war and natural disaster through remittances and other material support. Guatemala, on the other hand, conforms to the general Central American tendency, with an attitude of ignorance and indifference towards Guatemalans abroad.

The Guatemalan situation is not static, however. Polarization has gradually diminished as the country attempts to heal its wounds from the civil war. Guatemalan organizations in the U.S. (some of them in the South and Midwest) have recently shown an interest in working or returning to their home country (Popkin 2003). One important example refers to Guatemalans residing in Oxnard, California, who maintain deep connections to the highlands of Guatemala.

Former Guatemalan exiles living in the United States – who have established themselves more or less permanently there - have temporarily returned to their country in a display of support for the peace process and a newly-emerging civil society (de la Garza & Orozco 2000). Moreover, in 2004, during the newly inaugurated administration of Oscar Berger, a vice-minister of foreign affairs for migration and human rights was appointed in order to seek implementation of a policy of attention to the Guatemalan Diaspora. However, there is still room for a more significant societal appreciation of the Guatemalan diaspora.

The Guatemalan and Nicaraguan cases thus suggest another factor, that may explain interest in external mobilization of migrants, namely the level of political polarization in the home country. Compared to other Central American countries, El Salvador experienced lesser levels of polarization after its civil war. The success of the peace accord provided an important incentive to Salvadoran émigrés to go back to help rebuild the country. Interestingly, however, as the returnees renew their local engagement, their ideological allegiances are reflected, thus expressing positions in the political continuum of Salvadoran affairs.

Nicaragua, on the other hand, continues to be polarized along the lines of *Sandinismo* versus *Somocismo*, and most Nicaraguans living in the United States are anti-Sandinistas. Because Miami-based Nicaraguans strongly believe that Sandinista control of Nicaragua remains very strong, their interest in mobilizing abroad to support Nicaragua has been limited, except when their direct political interests and financial considerations are at stake. Thus, when Miami Nicaraguans wanted their seized property returned, they used U.S. pressure to help their cause. Nicaraguans living in Miami were also very influential in sending a message to their relatives in Nicaragua during the electoral campaign of 1996 (Orozco 2002). Their message was that if presidential candidate Arnaldo Aleman did not win the election with their families' support, they would stop sending remittances. More recently, the *Sandinismo-Somocismo* divide was revived when former president Aleman was put in jail for corruption charges. The divide was mirrored in the United States with groups blaming the current administration of president Bolaños of betraying Liberal party values and of being too soft with the Sandinistas.

Government outreach policies

Third, positive homeland policies towards its emigrants may shape or enable the formation of a diasporic identity. Outreach programs targeting those regarded as belonging to the nation, but who are living abroad, provide a positive incentive for forging a connection to or identifying with the homeland. Such homeland outreach policies have proven to be quite important in motivating and sustaining diasporic identifications and practices.

An example of such homeland policies is provided by the Salvadoran government towards their emigrants living in the United States. A recent study on Central American transnationalism suggested that “the Salvadoran government as compared to the other governments in the region, both central as well as local, has a much more institutionalized response to international labor migration” (Andrade-Eeckoff 2003:35). Despite the limited resources available in a poor country like El Salvador, the government has sought to adapt to changing circumstances and promote policies towards their emigrant communities.

One of the first steps in that direction was the creation of a General Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to address the Salvadoran community living abroad (DGACE). The directorate, created in January 2000, has been the main official link between the government and the Salvadoran diaspora. The Directorate justifies its existence by pointing to the continuing reality of migration and remittances of Salvadorans living outside El Salvador. The program addresses three areas: economic ties and integration; community and local development; and cultural and educational ties.²

This government office has been active in forging and maintaining relationships with the Salvadoran diaspora by working directly with consulates and the embassy, coordinating

² Direccion General de Atención a la Comunidad en el Exterior, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, San Salvador, El Salvador. Available from World Wide Web: [http://www.comunidades.gob.sv/Sitio/Img.nsf/vista/Documentos/\\$file/DGACE.pdf](http://www.comunidades.gob.sv/Sitio/Img.nsf/vista/Documentos/$file/DGACE.pdf)

projects with other government agencies, visiting the diaspora and its leaders on a regular basis, and keeping the diaspora informed through an online publication “Comunidad en Acción” which reports on various activities and projects implemented by the diaspora as well as by the diaspora in collaboration with government or private entities.³ The government outreach strategy has focused primarily on education and community outreach, but has not addressed political matters such as the right to vote abroad and broader representation of the community.

The government outreach efforts have also been met by other institutions. The media in El Salvador in particular has created an active strategy to keep the diaspora informed about home-country affairs as well as about events in the home country. Newspapers like *La Prensa Gráfica* and *Diario de Hoy* have a section on Salvadoran diaspora news ranging from political events to social issues, including topics like crime and conditions of the community. *La Prensa Gráfica*'s section, “Departamento 15,” maintains a regular news section that also operates online.⁴

Relations between source and destination country

Fourth, the existence of continuous relations between source and destination countries has proven to be of importance to diaspora formation. Such relations may provide the means for the identification of a historical memory and identification with the homeland and some sense of connectedness with it. This issue has been critical in the aftermath of civil wars in Central America, leading to a strengthening of U.S. and Central American ties consolidated into a free trade agreement. In this case, the U.S. government has invited or opened its door to national or ethnic minorities' participation in issues related to their homeland, hereby creating a political opportunity structure facilitating a process of diversity in the foreign policy establishment as well as of the representation of ethnic interests. In October 2004, the U.S. Department of State initiated a historic event by bringing over 100 Central American community leaders to the U.S. to have a dialogue with government officials. The event signified a recognition of a new perspective on, and a transnational approach to, Central America.

It is also possible that the efforts towards the ratification of a free trade agreement between the U.S. and Central America may bring to attention the role of the Central American diaspora to strengthen its ties with their home countries. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) signals an end to Central America's turbulent history and perhaps a new page for the region's relations with the U.S. It opens up the possibility for the Central American diaspora to push for a trade agenda which considers nostalgic goods⁵ from the home countries (Orozco 2004b).

In addition to the four factors discussed above, there may be other additional variables that play an important role in the formation of diasporas. These include the political

³ Available from World Wide Web:

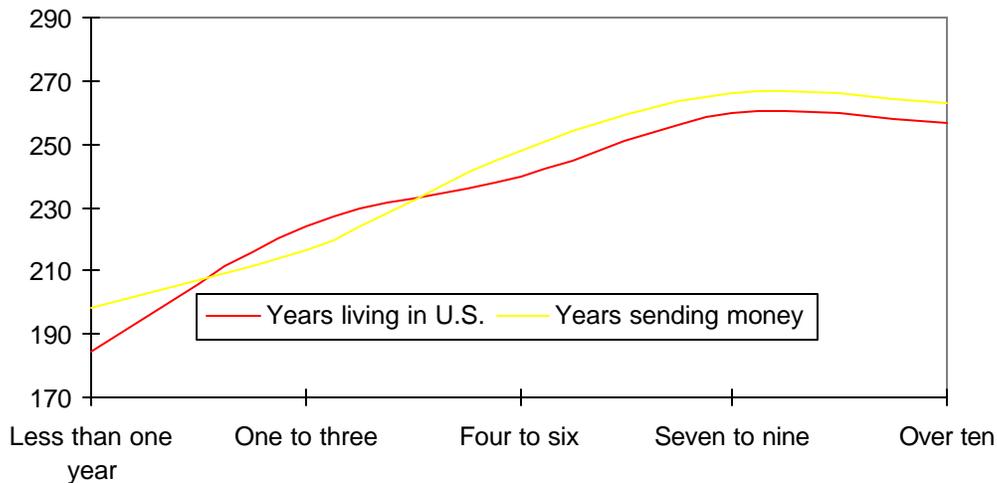
<http://www.comunidades.gob.sv/comunidades/comunidades.nsf/pages/revista>

⁴ See <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/dpt15/>

⁵ I use the term ‘nostalgic goods’ about homeland products such as food products, beverages and music. Diaspora demand of such products may have an important macro-economic impact on local economies.

opportunity structure's openness, the level of cohesion in the ethnic or migrant community, and the length of time from the initial migration. The longer the separation in time between a migrant group's departure, the less likely a connection may exist. This trend is demonstrated in a direct proportional relationship between the length of time immigrants live in the U.S. and the length of time they send remittances. Initially, as the length of time living in the U.S. increases, remittance sending also increases. As the table below indicates, however, remittance sending decreases after longer periods abroad (around 10 years).

Table 1. Migrant remittances over time



Not all four variables (or their subsidiary ones) need to be present in order for a group to turn into a diaspora. Rather, diasporic development depends on the intensity of the interaction established by any one of those factors.

Finally it should be mentioned that such diasporic turns may not be permanent. As Chaliand and Rageau (1996) have pointed out, the identification of a diaspora requires time. And only time will show how long a diasporic connection will last.

Degree, focus, initiation and impact of diasporic relations

Depending on which of the variables outlined above that play a role in determining a diasporic turn, four different dynamics will result. These are: i) The degree or level of diaspora involvement, ii) the focus or orientation the diasporic group takes, iii) who initiates the diasporic relationship, and iv) the impact of diaspora involvement on the host country. I elaborate on these dynamics below.

Degree and level of involvement

A diaspora may get involved in homeland issues to various degrees and at various levels. These can range from the exclusive maintenance of family ties in the homeland to establishing political connections that may lead to acquiring positions of power. In the

following, involvement at the level of family and community is distinguished as is respectively social and political involvement.

In most cases, diasporas maintain family ties and some form of community and social connection to the homeland. Native-born diasporas, that is, those groups who are born outside the land of ancestry and who consider the 'host' country as their first home, are the least likely to establish diasporic connections. When they do, the connection often occurs because of some family linkage or because their interests and values improve with the creation of linkages.

A typical example of this kind of connection is that of remittance sending. The current estimate for worldwide annual remittance flows is US\$200 billion, with the Latin American and Caribbean region being the largest receiver (US\$46 billion in 2004). Although varying by country, overall immigrants in the United States send US\$250 twelve times per year. Mexican immigrants are among those who send the largest amount by, on average, remitting 22 percent of their income (US\$400 monthly). Remittance receivers are most often immediate family members, primarily siblings and parents. These links demonstrate an obligation and commitment to family needs which result in distributing finances to households and sectors that tend to be economically disadvantaged (Orozco 2004c).

Remittances are also part of a process in which nations are further integrated into the global economy through migrant's connections between the home and host countries. They also have multiplying effects through more varied and diffuse economic consequences which appreciate their impact on financial growth. These are the "Five T's" of global integration: tourism, (air) transportation, telecommunications, (remittance) transfers, and (nostalgic) trade. These dynamics, affecting both the home and host country's economies, incorporate the activities and practices in which diasporas remain connected with their homeland and people through visits, buying regional products, telephone calls, and sending money home. About five hundred thousand Dominican expatriates, for example, return annually to the Dominican Republic, spending an average of US\$650 per visit. This represents about 20 percent of total tourism to the country (Orozco 2004d). In the region, between 50 to 80 percent of earnings generated through telephone calls come from home to home calls made by immigrants. Additionally, nostalgic product export has come to reach some 10 percent of total exports for the Central American region (Orozco 2004c).

Community connections mainly occur among small diasporic groups who establish links of various sorts with their community's hometown. For example, Mexican, Salvadoran and Guyanese migrant groups, to name some, correspond to this trend. Mexican and Guyanese hometown associations maintain active contact with their communities through liaisons in the hometown which transmit needs and oversee the implementation of projects. Some Mexican HTAs communicate weekly with appointed representatives working in the hometown. The social connections that have been established between a diaspora with local homeland organizations are varied. Most of these connections are

carried out with the purposes of helping to promote social causes, such as health care, education, or cultural connections.

Interestingly, however, the number of people that participate actively or have membership in these kinds of associations is relatively small compared to the total immigrant population.

Table 2: People who belong to a kind of HTA
(% of total who send remittances)

National origin	%
Colombia	5.6%
Ecuador	10.0%
El Salvador	1.5%
Guatemala	2.8%
Guyana	26.3%
Honduras	6.7%
Mexico	2.1%
Nicaragua	4.0%
Dom. Rep.	3.3%
Bolivia	1.4%
Average	5.5%

Source: Orozco, Manuel. “Transnationalism and Development: Trends and Opportunities in Latin America Survey of transnational communities”, in *Remittances: Development Impact and Future Prospects*, editors, Samuel Munzele Maimbo and Dilip Ratha, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2005.

Political links are less varied among non-exile diaspora groups and occur predominantly among migrants with political aspirations or who are interested in pursuing political careers in the homeland or in the destination country. Political exiles who struggle to return to their homeland and gain power are more eager to pursue political links. More recently, however, the political issue has been a struggle to affirm political rights of diasporas to vote and be elected in the home country.

Arguments towards the ‘vote from abroad’ in homeland political elections include the bi-national nature of the migrant community and its relationships and social networks with various actors within the home country. With reference to the Mexican case, Miguel Moctezuma points out that migrants, especially through their participation in hometown associations, remain active and influential in their home communities. Therefore, their participation should be extended beyond the local level, and into national political issues. The Mexican government recognizes the value of migrant participation through pursuing partnerships with hometown associations, and through regular discourse between governors and migrant leaders in the United States. Furthermore, Moctezuma argues, Mexico seeks to gain a greater negotiating capacity with the U.S. by granting the vote from abroad to Mexican immigrants (Moctezuma 2003).

Focus

Focus refers to the orientation in which the diaspora puts or invest its energies in mobilizing politically. Milton Esman has conceptualized the triadic network between

diaspora, homeland and host government. He further argues that the continuing links between diasporas and homelands can be politicized. In Esman's framework, seven classes of activity of either the home government, the host government or the diaspora – all observable in the context of international relations – are determined, namely:

- a. Diaspora attempts to influence home country events
- b. Diaspora attempts to influence host governments foreign policies towards home countries
- c. Home government outreach to the diaspora for self-interest
- d. Diaspora outreach to home government for protection from host government
- e. Host country outreach of diaspora to cultivate goals in home country
- f. Diaspora influence on international organizations on behalf of homeland, and
- g. Home government outreach to host government to influence diaspora (Estman 1986:340-343).

To the international activities mentioned by Esman, two more can be mentioned. One is international links among diasporic groups (particularly from the same source country, as in the case of linkages between Nicaraguans in the U.S. and Costa Rica). The other is diaspora international mobilization to pursue non-homeland issues, such as environmental protection or democracy.

The international orientation of diasporic mobilization can have three different components. First, the diaspora may choose to mobilize to influence homeland domestic interests that benefit the homeland and the diaspora. This is the case of Esman's points b, e and g. The interest of Central American diasporas in supporting CAFTA is illustrative of this. Second, the diasporic group may mobilize on home country affairs in order to influence national politics or to keep links between sectors of society or a local community. This is the case of Estman's points a, c and d. The experience of hometown associations, for example, illustrates such practices. Third, and less likely, a diaspora may choose to mobilize on international issues per se. Point f and the additional two mentioned fall into this category. This is a less prominent practice and may be a function of resources and interests available to diasporas. Finally it must be noted that not all diasporas 'implicate' themselves in all of these activities. Their involvement will depend on how institutionalized the diaspora is as well as on the influence of any of the four variables outlined in section three.

Sponsors

Who initiates diasporic communication also depends on which variables have a dominant influence on the ethnic or national group. Thus, sponsors of diasporic connections will usually originate from the ethnic or national group. This point is illustrated in the case of an organization like La Raza, the largest Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. However, the host country as well as the home country can initiate or motivate diasporic contact depending on the value attached by the diaspora to pursue certain interests.

Luin Goldring draws a distinction between ‘migrant-led transnationalism’ and ‘state-led transnationalism’. Transmigrant organizations like HTAs preceded the Mexican government’s efforts to reach out to its diaspora. Beginning in the 1980’s, the subsequent state efforts embodied in the various matching grant schemes and the overt promotion of HTAs and their incorporation into federations, was a response by the state to the migrant-led transnationalism. These pursuits were motivated by a variety of factors, including legitimizing the PRI’s political hold, responding to the legalization and reunification of Mexican families into the U.S. due to IRCA, the creation of a ‘pro-NAFTA’ lobby within the U.S., as well as encouraging remittance and donation sending by migrants and their associations (Goldring 2002).

Impact

Finally, diasporas can effect an impact on the host country policies. The impact of diasporic involvement on the foreign policy of the host country can have four implications. A diaspora may undermine the foreign policy of the host country when its mobilization runs contrary to the country’s official foreign policy and thwarts its efforts. In other cases, the diaspora’s international involvement may have no impact on the host country, as in the case of diasporic links with communities and social organizations where there are no issues at stake between the host country’s foreign policy and the home community or social group. A recent experience is one in which a diaspora re-enforces a host country’s foreign policy. Diaspora organization sponsoring development or community programs compatible with those of the host country reinforce that country’s position towards the homeland. Finally, ethnic lobbying can help to expand a country’s foreign policy by educating the establishment about important issues about which they were not aware.

Conclusion

The word ‘diaspora’ has crept into the migration-development vocabulary in an under-theorized way. As my introductory discussion of the limitations in conventional definitions of what constitutes a ‘diaspora’ has hopefully shown, there is scope for more theoretical reflection and conceptual work. In this regard I have pointed to the fact that not all diasporas are the result of migration. Some diasporas, like the Mexican, are the result of border redefinitions. Secondly, diasporas are not necessarily defined by dispersal. The act of migration, even to areas with high concentrations of migrants belonging to the same nationality or ethnic group, will not automatically nor necessarily lead to diasporic identifications. Finally, the maintenance of links to the homeland may, or may not, have a diasporic character.

That being said, however, the experience of Latino and Caribbean migrant collectivities in the United States – as well as the growing awareness of the potential benefits in sustaining diaspora links among home and host governments – points to new and interesting areas of development cooperation on a local, national and regional scale. Such links can be fruitfully explored by paying analytical attention to the factors enabling

diaspora formation as well as to the different dynamics resulting from diasporic engagements.

To that end what is important to consider are those factors that can create an effective system of diaspora outreach. This system should consider at least five efforts. First, an outreach state policy towards the diaspora that at a minimum recognizes and validates its communities living abroad. Second, establishing a communication mechanism between organized diaspora groups and the state. Third, developing a joint agenda that addresses the interests of the diaspora and the state on issues of common concern. Fourth, diaspora and state confidence building efforts that in practice recognize the importance of diasporas in nation-state. Fifth, investing substantive resources, material and human, to implement the outreach efforts. These efforts should be considered as minimum considerations for an effective process of cooperation in an increasingly intertwined world between states and migrant communities.

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