

# **REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA**

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**Lecture 25**

**Lecture 25 : Diaspora: An Introduction**

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Refugees, Migration, and Diaspora. So, today is going to be our introductory lecture on diaspora as a discourse. We are going to understand diaspora, the definition of diaspora, and then we are going to look at the different essential terms associated with migration, diaspora studies.


Our lecture today is going to be an overview of diaspora. So, when we try defining diaspora, the term derives from the ancient Greek verb diaspeiro, which means to scatter or to disperse. In Hebrew, according to Judith Shuval, the term initially referred to the setting of Jewish colonies outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile, and it has assumed a more general connotation of people settled away from their ancestral homelands. So, the term diaspora, meaning to disperse or to scatter, originated in reference to the Jewish diaspora that had settled outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile. However, subsequently, we see this connotation expand further

to accommodate and include different other kinds of experiences of people settled outside their ancestral homelands. So, diaspora refers to a population that is dispersed across different geographical regions, but they retain cultural connections to their homeland. Critic and scholar Rogers Brubaker proposed three fundamental criteria for defining diaspora more inclusively. First, according to Brubaker, the geographic dispersion of any given group,

**Diaspora : An Overview**

**Definition of Diaspora**

- The term 'diaspora' derives from the Ancient Greek verb διασπείρω (*diaspeirō*), meaning "to scatter."
- In Hebrew, "the term initially referred to the setting of colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general connotation of people settled away from their ancestral homelands" (Judith T. Shuval, 2003)
- Diaspora refers to a population that is dispersed across different geographical regions but retains cultural connections to its homeland.
- Rogers Brubaker (2005) proposed three fundamental criteria for defining diaspora more inclusively:




University of Delhi
2

Whether through voluntary or forced means, this refers to the term 'diaspora.' So, a diasporan people or a diasporic people are those who have geographically dispersed outside their homeland, either voluntarily or due to political upheaval. Secondly, it refers to a connection to a real or imagined homeland that serves as a source of identity, values, and loyalty. Finally, the preservation of a social boundary is associated with the term 'diaspora.' So, the diasporan population preserves a social boundary, which helps maintain a distinct diasporic identity for these people, and this identity is essentially maintained in juxtaposition with—or rather in contrast to—the culture of the host society.

A term like 'heterotopia' refers to the diasporic identity, where the diasporian population consciously does not wish to merge or assimilate entirely with the host society. These are some of the salient features of diaspora. Now, Gabriel Sheffer notes that the first theory of diaspora dates back to the work of John A. Armstrong, particularly Armstrong's paper titled 'Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas,' published in 1976 in the *American Political Science Review*. Sheffer himself argues in his 1986 book, titled 'Modern Diasporas in International Politics,' that it is misleading to restrict the concept of diaspora solely to the Jewish experience.

**Diaspora : An Overview**

- First, the geographic dispersion of a group, whether through voluntary or forced means; second, a connection to a real or imagined "homeland" that serves as a source of identity, value, and loyalty; and third, the preservation of a social boundary that helps maintain a distinct diasporic identity, which contrasts with the culture of the host society.
- Gabriel Sheffer notes that the first theory of diaspora dates back to the work of John A. Armstrong, particularly to his paper titled "Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas," published in 1976 in the *American Political Science Review* (Dorai et al., 1998).
- Sheffer himself argues in his 1986 book "Modern Diasporas in International Politics" that it is misleading to restrict the concept of diaspora solely to the Jewish experience. Furthermore, groups such as the Nabataeans, Phoenicians, and Assyrians, existed prior to the Jewish diaspora.



3

Moreover, groups such as the Nabataeans, the Phoenicians, and the Assyrians, in fact, existed prior to the Jewish diaspora. Further, critic and scholar William Safran's definition of a diasporic community, discussed in his essay titled 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,' identifies certain key characteristics associated with diaspora or diasporic communities. What are some of the salient features of a diasporic community? Safran discusses certain qualities associated with a diasporic community.

First, they are dispersed from a specific center to two or more locations. They maintain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their homeland. They view their original homeland as their ideal true home and harbor dreams of returning. Additionally, the diasporic community feels a commitment toward preserving or restoring ties to their homeland and fosters strong ethno-communal bonds through this ongoing connection. Moreover, they often experience a complicated relationship with the broader host society, feeling that they can never be


fully accepted in their immediate surroundings, which rather leads to a sense of being partly alienated and insulated. Thus, the diasporic population is marked by a sense of unbelonging. The question of belonging and unbelonging, learning, unlearning habits, and belonging both here and there—as well as neither here nor there—creates a feeling of being partly alienated, fragmented, and insulated. All these features are part of a diasporic identity.

These are the features that define diasporic identity. Now, in the context of diaspora studies, there are certain essential terms on migration and diaspora that we need to familiarize ourselves with. First, we have the term 'internally displaced persons' or IDPs. It refers to individuals who have been forced to leave their homes but remain within their country's

borders. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, I quote, 'There were 75.9 million internally displaced people across the world at the end of 2023.'

**Diaspora : An Overview**

- William Safran's (1991) definition of a diasporic community, as discussed in his essay "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," identifies several key characteristics:
- They are dispersed from a specific "center" to two or more locations; they maintain a "collective memory, vision, or myth" about their homeland; they view their original homeland as their "ideal true" home and harbor dreams of returning.
- Additionally, they feel a commitment to preserving or restoring ties to their homeland, foster strong ethno-communal bonds through this ongoing connection, and often experience a complicated relationship with the broader society, feeling that they can never be fully accepted, leading to a sense of being "partly alienated and insulated."




4

These numbers show that internal displacement is a crisis of enormous proportion, and yet the world is largely unaware, unquote. So, internally displaced people are people who are traveling to different regions, other regions, but still staying within the borders of their own country. Next, we have transnational migrants. It refers to individuals who move across national borders and maintain ties to their home and host countries. So, Steven Vertovec, in his work on migrant transnationalism, 'New Perspectives,'

**Essential Terms in Migration and Diaspora Studies**

- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):** Individuals who have been forced to leave their homes but remain within their country's borders.
- "There were 75.9 million internally displaced people across the world at the end of 2023. These numbers show that internal displacement is a crisis of enormous proportion and yet, the world is largely unaware. " (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre)
- **Transnational Migrants:** Individuals who move across national borders and maintain ties to their home and host countries.
- Steven Vertovec in '*In Migrant Transnationalism: New Perspectives*' (2009) suggests that current migrant practices can be viewed as involving modes of transformation across different levels of abstraction in three primary domains of activity, including the following:



5

which came out in 2009, suggests that current migrant practices can be viewed as involving modes of transformation across different levels of abstraction in three primary domains of activity. So, the migrant practices, the migrant movements, actually involve three primary domains of activity. One is the socio-cultural domain. It refers to a perpetual transformation which affects what can be described as the migrants' habitus. Right.


So, it affects the migrants' sociocultural functioning or sociocultural understanding or evolving. Next, we have the political domain. It is a conceptual transformation of a migrant which influences meanings within the analytical framework of identities, borders, and orders. So, basically, how the discourse associated with immigration influences you know, speaks to the policies, the national policies of the host country, as well as the immigration policies, the questions of security, the questions of border security, and the government's rules and regulations pertaining to a migrant.

So, it basically talks about the protocols, the existing rules, and how the migrant actually deals with or how the migrant understands and dialogizes with the existing political scenario, both in his or her home country as well as in the host land. The third dimension is the economic domain. It refers to an institutional transformation which impacts methods of financial transfer and local development. So, here we are talking about the economic domain,

**Essential Terms in Migration and Diaspora Studies**

1. **Socio-Cultural Domain:** A perceptual transformation that affects what can be described as migrants' *habitus*.
2. **Political Domain:** A conceptual transformation that influences meanings within the analytical framework of 'identities-borders-orders.'
3. **Economic Domain:** An institutional transformation that impacts methods of financial transfer and local development.

- **Settlers:** People who move to a new country with the intent to reside there permanently, often associated with colonial contexts.



we are talking about the money that a migrant worker sends back to his or her family in the native country, in the homeland, and how this foreign currency, this remittance, this transference of money to the homeland leads to local development, how the financial transfer by the migrant worker to his family in the homeland, can aid the development of the family, can aid the upliftment of the socio-economic status of the migrant worker, and how it can lead to the socio-economic development of the migrant worker's family. Next, we have a term called settler. Settler refers to people who move to a new country with the intent of residing there permanently, and this is often associated with a colonial context. So, when we talk about settler cultures, when we talk about settler colonies, we are mainly referring to the British and the

French colonies, as well as the Dutch, right? The Dutch, the Portuguese. So, these were the groups that had settled and made colonies. They had established their colonies in different countries across the globe. Next, we have the term refugee, referring to individuals who have been forced to flee their country due to persecution, war, or any other form of violence.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the definition goes as follows, I quote, A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to seek safety. They cannot return to their country without risking their life or freedoms, unquote. The next term we have is asylum seekers. It refers to people who seek refuge in another country and have applied for asylum, awaiting a decision on their status.

So, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, I quote, an asylum seeker is someone who intends to seek or is awaiting a decision on their request for international protection. In some countries, this term is used as a legal term for a person who has applied for refugee status and has not yet received a final decision on their claim, unquote. Next, we talk about cultural migrants. When we talk of cultural migrants, we are referring to exchange students, international students, and, you know, basically individuals who move to another country primarily for cultural exchange or educational purposes. They are attending some educational program, attaining a degree from a foreign country, and that is the motivation for moving their base, often temporarily.


Cultural migrants visit a country, acquire their degree, attain their degree, and actually contribute in the process of earning their degree to the host society, and then normally they return to their native country. That is a cultural migrant. Next, we have naturalized citizens. It refers to immigrants who have legally acquired citizenship in their new country after meeting certain criteria. And when we talk of immigrants, we are referring to people who move to another country with the intention of settling there permanently.

So, Alejandro Portes, in his work *Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities*, states the following, I quote, 'Transnational communities are dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition,' unquote. Next, we have the term emigrants, referring to individuals who leave their country in order to settle in another. So, immigration is basically the act of a population entering the borders of a country, whereas emigration refers to a population leaving the border of a given country, often the border of their

homeland, in order to settle in another country. Next, we have the term expatriate. This term is derived from the Latin word *ex*, which refers to 'outside of.'

**Essential Terms in Migration and Diaspora Studies**

- Expatriates:** The term "expatriate" is derived from the Latin words *ex* ("outside of") and *patria* (meaning one's country). It is referred to citizens residing outside their home country, often for work or personal reasons, who may or may not intend to return. It can also describe individuals who have given up their citizenship in their home country to become citizens of another nation.
- Exiled:** Individuals who have been forced to leave their home country due to political reasons or persecution.
- In late-18 C Europe,** the term "exile" carried significant weight and evolving meanings. The 1798 fifth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defined "exil" as a political punishment, contrasting it with "bannissement," which resulted from court sentences.



When we say *ex*, this prefix *ex* means 'outside of,' and *patria* means 'one's country,' so 'outside of one's country.' Expatriate refers to citizens residing outside their home country, often for work or personal reasons, who may or may not intend to return. It can also describe individuals who have given up their citizenship in their home country to become citizens of another nation. Next, when we talk of exile, we think of individuals who have been forced to leave their home country due to political reasons or for fear of persecution.



In late 18th-century Europe, the term exile carried significant weight and evolving meanings. The 1798 5th edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* defined exile as a political punishment, contrasting it with banishment (in English, banishment), which resulted from court sentences. So, exile has a juridical connotation. It refers to punishment, political punishment as a result of court decisions. Robin Cohen, in his work *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, which came out in 2008, states that diaspora studies have evolved through four distinct phases.

The first is the classical phase, where initially the term diaspora was primarily applied to the Jewish experience, with occasional references to the Greek diaspora. From the 1960s and 1970s onward, this classical understanding expanded to include the dispersions of other people outside the Jewish and Greek populations, such as Africans, Armenians, as well as the Irish. So, these groups viewed their scattering as resulting from traumatic events, fostering a collective sense of victimhood. The Palestinians were later also considered in this same context, although not without debate. The second phase, which comes after the classical phase, is the metaphoric designation phase.



**Diaspora : A Discourse**

- Robin Cohen in *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (2008) states that diaspora studies have evolved through four distinct phases;
- **Classical Phase:** Initially, the term "Diaspora" was primarily applied to the Jewish experience, with occasional references to the Greek diaspora. From the 1960s and 1970s onward, this classical understanding expanded to include the dispersions of Africans, Armenians, and the Irish.
- These groups viewed their scattering as resulting from traumatic events, fostering a collective sense of victimhood. The Palestinians were later considered in this context, although not without debate.
- **Metaphoric Designation Phase:** Beginning in the 1980s, as noted by William Safran, the term "diaspora" began to be used more metaphorically, encompassing a variety of groups, such as expatriates,

10

Beginning in the 1980s, as noted by William Safran, the term diaspora began to be used more metaphorically, encompassing a variety of groups, including expatriates, refugees, immigrants, and ethnic minorities. This phase acknowledged the diverse historical experiences and relationships to homelands, as well as host countries, of over 100 newly identified diasporas. And then we have the social constructionist critique phase. From the mid-1990s onward—or rather, toward the end of the 20th century—new critics emerged with theories that challenged the earlier definitions of diaspora. Social constructionists argued that the concepts of homeland,

and ethnic or religious community were overly rigid, right? So, terms such as homeland, or ethnic or religious community, are very rigid terms, and they need to be revisited, right? They posited—or rather, they would posit—that in a postmodern context, where identities are flexible, context-specific, and therefore constantly in a state of flux, a re-evaluation of diaspora concepts is important. So, they necessitated a re-evaluation of diaspora concepts.

And the last phase we have is the consolidation phase, which happens at the turn of the century. So, a phase of consolidation emerges where critics are being acknowledged but also seen as potentially weakening the analytical power of the diaspora concept. So, the journey had begun with certain specific understandings or certain specific contexts associated with diaspora, which further get diluted, which further get questioned and problematized in the postmodern era where, you know, homeland is seen as, perceived as not something so rigid. I mean, home is where the heart is.

It is where we are coming from. It was the end of the century, right? Or at the turn of the century. So, and then the consolidation phase wants to reconsolidate these concepts that the diaspora studies had begun with in the first place. So, it would say that there is no point



in weakening the diaspora concept by saying that these terms, these definitions, these concepts are overly rigid.

So, we keep, you know, evolving and then revisiting our former phases. That's how a study, any field of study grows. It, you know, transforms, evolves, and yet connects with its former discourse. While the complexities of identity and deterritorialization are significant, the notions of home and homeland still continue to hold substantial relevance, leading to a reaffirmation of the core diasporic ideas and characteristics.

So, there are tendencies to dilute these concepts, to take them, you know, in a more expansive sense. And yet, there are also forces that reaffirm these core diasporic ideas and characteristics, such as at the heart of a diaspora, we have the notion of home and homeland, which still holds a lot of relevance. Sir Robin Cohen argues that diaspora encompasses a broader spectrum of mass population movements. Based on this perspective, he identifies five distinct types of diaspora.




First, the victim diasporas, which include classic examples of people who have been forced into exile, such as the Jewish, African, and Armenian diasporas. Next, we have the labor diasporas. This category encompasses mass migrations driven by the pursuit of work and economic opportunities. And it includes mainly, you know, the Indian and Turkish diasporas. Next, we have the trade diasporas.

These migrations focus on establishing trade routes and connections. And here we are talking mainly about the Chinese and Lebanese diasporas. Next, we have imperial diasporas. This type of diaspora involves those who migrate with the intent to serve and sustain empires or the expansionist ambitions of empires, and they can be chiefly exemplified by the British and French diasporas, which had their own colonial aims and ambitions, right? Next is the cultural diasporas.

These are formed through processes of chain migration, as illustrated by the Caribbean diaspora. Scholar Rima Berns-McGown's article titled 'Rethinking Diaspora: A Social Political Approach,' published in the International Journal, critiques existing definitions of diaspora and emphasizes the need for a more flexible understanding that accounts for diverse experiences and identities within diasporic communities. Rima Berns-McGown points out that the discussed definitions on, about, or centering diaspora can be problematic in themselves. Not all diasporic groups fit Safran's or Cohen's criteria.

**Diaspora : A Discourse**

- Trade Diasporas:** These migrations focus on establishing trade routes and connections, as seen in the Chinese and Lebanese diasporas.
- Imperial Diasporas:** This type involves those who migrate with the intent to serve and sustain empires, exemplified by the British and French diasporas.
- Cultural Diasporas:** These are formed through processes of chain migration, illustrated by the Caribbean diaspora.

13

As an example, the 23 million Mexicans in the US remain diasporic even if they are primarily in one country. Furthermore, groups like the Roma or former Ugandan Asians may not share a strong sense of a homeland, but they are still diasporic. So, this kind of complicates the concept of diaspora itself. The diaspora as a definition and a concept cannot find its closure because we have certain peculiar cases in point that further complicate, further bring in new dimensions, new layers to this term, to the understanding of the term 'diaspora.'



So, McGown critiques the idea that a diasporic community must feel like a bounded minority or have a troubled relationship with the host society. This is also something that sounds very archaic, very staid, and sometimes misguided, maybe not relevant. It may not always hold true that a diasporic community shares a problematic relationship, a hostile relationship, or a rivalrous relationship with the immediate surroundings, with the host society. So, this perspective overlooks the potential for change within the host society as well as within the diasporic community itself.

So, there could also be many positive instances where the diasporic community and the host society are influencing each other in a very positive manner, in a meaningful way; they are leaving influences, leaving an impact on one another. So, it could be that the host and the diasporic communities are interacting, exchanging meaningfully, and they are leaving very positive cultural, social, and linguistic influences on one another. So, a more meaningful or useful definition of diaspora should recognize that not all communities wish to return to their homeland. So, the basic premise of diaspora, where the home and homeland are very strongly accentuated concepts that find a lot of emphasis here,

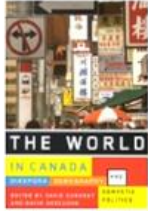

may not hold true anymore or may not hold true for everyone. The desire to return to the homeland may not be similar for all groups and in all cases. And some may have no single homeland to go back to in the first place. So, it should also account for evolving identities and the complexities of belonging in a multicultural world, where a person has multiple understandings of home, multiple places they call their home, and no one home to go back to. And the fact that a person has had several displacement experiences and the person's identity has evolved as a result of these displacements, so we see as a result


Consequently, further complexities in human identity emerge against the backdrop of a multicultural world, where pinpointing home, pinpointing identity, and pinpointing a closed nature of one's own community—all these identities, identifications, and categories basically change. They become more layered, more nuanced, right? They do not remain enclosed or whole entities, right? David Carment and David Bercuson, in their edited book *The World in Canada*, argue that the concept of diaspora now includes a diverse range of people, such as ethnic migrants, immigrants from various generations, expatriates, students, guest workers, and refugees. It reflects the emergence of truly transnational populations, such as individuals who actively participate in two communities and essentially live in two places at once.

So we are talking about global citizens. We are talking about a more condensed, more compressed concept of the globe, where people, you know, have two homes simultaneously. They are moving back and forth. So identities are derived from both worlds, or maybe from a third or fourth source too.

**Diaspora : A Discourse**

- A more useful definition of diaspora should recognize that not all communities wish to return to their homeland, and some may have no single homeland to go back to. It should also account for evolving identities and the complexities of belonging in a multicultural world.
- David Carment and David Bercuson, in their edited book *The World in Canada*, argue that the concept of diaspora now includes a diverse range of people, such as ethnic migrants, immigrants from various generations, expatriates, students, guest workers, and refugees.
- This reflects the emergence of truly transnational populations—individuals who actively participate in two communities and essentially live in two places at once.


University of Guelph
15

So that makes, you know, these closed definitions rather more and more inadequate in themselves. Rima Berns-McGown notes, I quote McGown here, Any workable definition of diaspora must be able to take into account the demonstrable facts that the composition of wider societies changes over time, that the distance from the center of that wider society changes over time for any particular diasporic people, and that the connections they have with their roots change whether that represents a place or a culture, change, but do not disappear in the face of more inclusion and less othering. So the home is not as close as it seems to be, just like the host society is not as other as it has been assumed traditionally.

Vijay Mishra, in his work *Diaspora and the Imagination: The Dialectic of Fantasy*, talks about the concept of the diaspora imaginary, by which he refers to a state of self-identification where individuals see themselves favorably, envisioning an image of what they would like to be. Mishra argues that the diaspora is rooted in fantasy, serving as what he calls a joy, a pleasure around which anti-miscegenation narratives of homeland are constructed, unquote. William Safran has further built on this concept to comment on how the diaspora has turned from what he calls an object of suspicion to one of fascination, unquote, right. So, the negative connotation, the vacuum, the unbelonging is not the only perspective anymore.

There could be, you know, joy, pleasure, you know, also associated with the diasporic experience. There could be some kind of fascination, some positivity also associated with the diasporic experience, especially as the home becomes a more complicated entity, a multiple-existence entity, you know, and so a person gets more and more attached to his or her immediacy, immediate reality rather than where one came from, where one's ancestors came from. The present tends to become more important and more relevant for many diasporic communities. Critic Avtar Brah, in her work *Cartographies of Diaspora*:

Contesting Identities (1996), focuses on the notion of homing desire, which derives diasporic consciousness, differentiating it from the longing for a homeland.


So, Brah argues that the concept of diaspora critiques the idea of any fixed origins while acknowledging this homing desire, which is distinct from a desire for a homeland. Right. It's not always true that the homing desire, you know, the desire to settle down, always coincides with the desire to go back and settle down in one's own homeland. Right. This homing desire could find its fruition, could find its culmination in a foreign land, in what we initially call a




foreign land, a host land, right? And the host land could eventually become one's home. That is also possible, according to Avtar Brah. So, this distinction between a homing desire and desiring for a homeland is crucial, as not all diasporic communities embrace the narrative of return. This is what I have been trying to explain again and again.

In her analysis, Avtar Brah explores the implications of the idea of home within the concept of diaspora and addresses the complexities of the indigent subject position and its tenuous relationship with nativist discourses. So, with this, we come to the end of our lecture today. Let us meet for another topic and another round of discussions in our next lecture. Thank you.

### Diaspora : A Discourse

- William Safran has build on this concept to comment on how the diaspora has turned from "object of suspicion, has become one of fascination." (Safran, William. "Concepts, Theories, and Challenges of Diaspora: A Panoptic Approach." 2007.)
- Avtar Brah in "Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities" (1996) focuses on the notion of "homing desire" that drives diasporic consciousness, differentiating it from the longing for a homeland. She argues that the concept of diaspora critiques the idea of fixed origins while acknowledging this homing desire, which is distinct from a desire for a "homeland."
- This distinction is crucial, as not all diasporic communities embrace a narrative of "return." In her analysis, she explores the implications of the idea of "home" within the concept of diaspora, addressing the complexities of the "indigene" subject position and its tenuous relationship with "nativist" discourses (Brah, 1996).





17