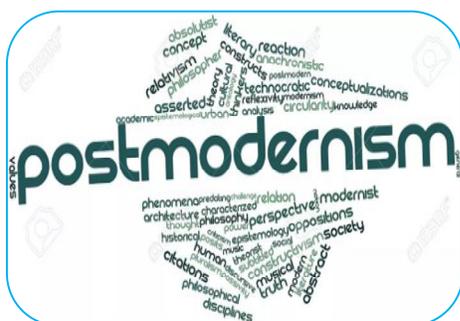




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WHO IS NOT A DIASPORA: A STUDY FROM POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper problematizes the establishment and canonization of Diaspora studies by looking into the neo-colonial Eurocentric latent politics behind the term that persuades the non-Europeans living in USA, Canada, and Australia etc. that they are Diaspora, this project establishes the Europeans as proper citizens despite the fact that they are no less outsiders than the non-Europeans are.

KEYWORDS: *Diaspora, Postmodernism, settler-invader societies, rootedness, deterritorialization.*

INTRODUCTION :

Diaspora is a political term with numerous political agendas and connotations associated with it. Not all displaced people are called diaspora and many other communities that are called diaspora now were not called diaspora historically, in some other cases come communities do not want to be known as diaspora while some others are struggling for diaspora status. Virinder S. Kalra and others reflect on the political dimension of “Diaspora” as a discipline in the following words:

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. (Kalra: 8)

A close study of movement of people across geographic boundaries and later on political boundaries shows that people have always moved across the

world however not every movement is termed as diaspora movement. There are forces that determine only certain movements as diaspora movements. Marie-Aude Baronian et al. while “Analyzing the diaspora boom as a phenomenon of the Western intellectual market,” (9) quotes Timothy Brennan who argues that “the fascination with the “hybrid” cultures of diasporic communities tends to obscure the fact that very often these people themselves do not want to be diasporic” (674). More or less the discipline of diaspora studies is a product of postmodernism that according to Marie-Aude Baronian et al. shifts attention from “political questions of citizenship and the nation-state as an agent of political power to vague concepts of “subject formation” and “cosmopolitanism,”. Historically

this term was used for Diasporas like Jewish diaspora, Armenian diaspora, and Greek diaspora, later on it is extended to the African and Palestinian communities in displacement. However in our contemporary period according to Nicholas Mirzoeff diaspora is used to designate a “majority condition in global capitalism,” (6) which according to Kim Butler Kim makes it difficult for diaspora to maintain itself as a “distinct category” of cultural and historical analysis (189).

As mentioned earlier not all movements are called diaspora movements and not all such settlers are called diaspora the very idea of diaspora revolves around the rights over the land one lives on. In the age of nation states the most important concern is who owns the nation and the community that owns the nation terms other settlers as diaspora and at the same time the communities that are persuaded to demand and accept the diaspora status forgo their claim on the nation. Therefore the idea of diaspora is very much ingrained in the idea of who owns the nation and hence a deeply political entity. While reflecting on the relationship between geographical space, people living on it and the idea of nation Deleuze and Guattari say:

The constituents of the nation are a land and a people: the “natal,” which is not necessarily innate, and the “popular,” which is not necessarily pre-given. The problem of the nation is aggravated in the two extreme cases of a land without a people and a people without a land. How can a people and a land be made, in other words, a nation—a refrain? The coldest and bloodiest means vie with upsurges of romanticism. The axiomatic is complex, and is not without passions. The natal or the land, as we have seen elsewhere, implies a certain deterritorialization of the territories (community land, imperial provinces, seigneurial domains, etc.), and the people, a decoding of the population. The nation is constituted on the basis of these flows and is inseparable from the modern State that gives consistency to the corresponding land and people. It is the flow of naked labor that makes the people, just as it is the flow of Capital that makes the land and its industrial base. In short, the nation is the very operation of a collective subjectification, to which the modern State corresponds as a process of subjection. It is in the form of the nation-state, with all its possible variations, that the State becomes the model of realization for the capitalist axiomatic. (456)

As the question of land and people are integral to nation, so they are integral to the notion of diaspora. There are communities that have all the traits of Diaspora however neither they call themselves diaspora nor anyone else consider them diaspora Janet Wilson categories as.

[s]ettler-invader societies— notably the white dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand (which originated as migrations from Britain as the imperial ‘mother country’) — are defined as ethno-national communities “diasporas”: that is, dispersed groups that share a collective history, common ancestors, ethnicity and national traits; associated with a specific homeland; and maintain a symbolical relationship with the homeland through these common constructs and shared affinities. (Wilson: 125)

The white settlers or white diaspora who colonized these places and settled there still long for and recognize themselves with Great Britain – the colonizer’s homeland. However all other people who moved to these places after the colonizers settled themselves as rulers were termed as diaspora and with the power of intellectual and economic investment convinced to feel like diaspora. To borrow the phrase from Raymond Williams the feeling of diaspora is a structured feeling however, it may be come naturally.

This notion of structured feeling is valid because if it is a normal human feeling than the white settler must also experience it that is not the case on the contrary white settler’s exhibitions of displacement and longing for the colonial homeland have conventionally been projected in terms of nation building rather than as a Diaspora’s yearning for motherland.

Robin Cohen in his "Seeds, Roots, Rhizomes and Epiphytes: Botany and Diaspora" foregrounds rootedness as one of the features of Diaspora and highlights the role played by non-white diaspora rather than white settlers when he says:

Roots, or more strictly the search for roots, are a frequent leitmotif in diasporic life, which is part of politics that emotionally diaspora do not belong to the land where they have settled. In many instances it is the non-European or non-whites who led the movement to search roots for instance, one can cite the sentiments of the prominent New World leader of the 'Back to Africa' movement, Marcus Garvey: 'A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.' Many African Americans undertook a painful emotional journey to connect with their past. (3)

The idea of rootedness while determining the diaspora status is problematic because it is simple based on the notions of power who owns the land therefore white European Christian is not a diaspora neither on this earth nor in space because they own both the Earth and the outer space on the other hand all others are diaspora except in the place of their ethnic origin.

Another way to establish the political dimension of diaspora is to study the Etymology and first use of the term along with various colors that it takes up to contemporary period. The term diaspora has many connotations: as a religious term, as an academic term, as a category of practice, as a scientific concept and as part of the international bureaucratic lexicon. The first use of the term diaspora around the third century BCE in the Greek translation of Hebraic Bible refers to the divine punishment "that would befall the Jews if they did not respect the commandments of God" (Dufoix: 8). In its initial meaning movement away from motherland and back was a matter of divine justice, not human will. By the first century CE the meaning changes "when the New Testament refers to 'diaspora' as the members of the Christian Church as exiled from the City of God and dispersed across the Earth" (Dufoix: 8). However, at a later stage,

Christian writers eventually abandon 'diaspora' in the second century CE, limiting its use to the Jewish dispersion as an exemplary curse for their sins. With the replacement of Greek by Latin within the Western Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Christian era, 'diaspora' is confined to the Eastern Roman Empire and later the Byzantine Empire. (Dufoix: 8-9)

Again during the eighteenth century a new religious meaning emerges with the rise of the Protestant Moravian Church in Germany that officially calls 'diaspora' the nomadic church that helps maintain the link between the various Moravian communities dispersed into Catholic lands.

Slowly the term diaspora moves out of religious dictionary and enters political and academic dictionary as Stéphane Dufoix says:

From the first decades of the twentieth century onwards, two distinct processes characterise the evolution of 'diaspora': secularisation, i.e. the extension to nonreligious meanings; and the widening of the spectrum of relevant cases. 'Diaspora' starts a new life as an academic notion, without any formal definition, that may encompass more than one relevant case. (9)

Since this time onward scholars started using this term to include more and more people who have moved away from their motherlands for instance Jewish Russian historian Simon Dubnow in his entry on "Diaspora" in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (1931) provides a vision of the phenomenon that goes beyond the Jewish case to include Greeks and Armenians. A few years later, American sociologist Robert E. Park relied on Dubnow's writing to reframe and even enlarge the scope of

diaspora and applied it to Asians. In the 1950s, British anthropologist Maurice Freedman made a similar attempt to demonstrate that Chinese and Indians constituted other diasporas.

With the passage of time in the twentieth century the word is progressively used by social actors from various racial, religious or ethnic groups and associations to describe their connection to a land or state different from the one they lived in. Around 1970 diaspora studies started emerging as academic discipline and are being institutionalized. One stream of the discipline relies "on the paradigmatic Jewish case, sees diasporas as characterised by either migration or exile, nostalgia, perpetuation of original traditions, customs and languages, and a dream of return to the homeland. In this respect, this is a centered, essentially political, version of diaspora" (Dufoix: 10). On the other hand the second stream relies "on the black/African case. Its origins lie in the evolution of British cultural studies, from the mid-1970s, towards a greater attention to identity issues. British sociologists Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy epitomised this version" (Dufoix: 10). Both versions of diaspora are political the first one is modern, centered, territorial and political vision and the second one is postmodern, emancipatory, deterritorialised and cultural one which is also political in a very subtle manner. Along with the scholars located in academics there is one more force that

Appropriated 'diaspora' is the international bureaucratic field. From the early 2000s, some international organisations, in particular the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration, attempted to import 'diaspora' into their own specific lexicon. Relying mostly on previous conceptual works by Robin Cohen or Steven Vertovec, especially Cohen (2008), experts from these international organisations seized the word and made 'diaspora policies' a specific dimension of the 'best practices' that newly independent or emerging states were more and more supposed to implement. As Alan Gamlen (2014) and Stéphane Dufoix (2012) showed in their respective work, a new definition of 'diaspora' emerged within this expertise. The term now described expatriate populations, who possessed citizenship of the homeland or were of national origin, and whom states now had to take into consideration, and for whom they are strongly incited to implement specific policies aiming at embracing them more efficiently into the space of the nation. Through the work of those international organisations, the word came to be globalised. (Dufoix: 10-11)

Therefore it is evident that under the changing nature of nationhood and global conditions the nature, scope, and definition of diaspora is changing constantly. In the postmodern age whole nations are becoming diasporic in relation to their past under the pressures of global media and the vortex of the post-national situation. In the postmodern and post national age home is no longer what it once used to be, either for the nation or for the diaspora. Clearly, national memory today, in an age of ever more transnational institutions, migrations, and networks, is being colored ever more by nostalgia and imagined memory.

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