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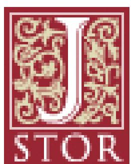

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DIASPORA: GENEALOGIES OF SEMANTICS AND TRANSCULTURAL COMPARISON

MARTIN BAUMANN

Undeniably, the ancient notion "diaspora" has become a fashionable term. Once exclusively used in a context-bound way, that of Jewish history and the plight of Jewish people being dispersed 'among the nations', in late 20th century the folk term became generalized on a grand scale. Since the 1970s, "diaspora" was increasingly used to denote almost every people living far away from their ancestral or former homeland. For example, in his seminal article on "Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas", John Armstrong applied the term straightforwardly,"to any ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a given polity" (1976: 393). For Armstrong, a geographic or cultural point of identificational reference, placed outside the given polity, forms no characterizing feature of "diaspora". Armstrong's equation of "diaspora" with a migrant group comprising "a relatively small minority throughout all portions of the polity" (1976: 393), paved the way, at least within the political sciences, to spread the term rapidly.

Certainly, however, the popularity, even current celebrity of the diaspora notion does not rely on one article only. As shall be sketched out below, the term was already adopted in African Studies since the mid-1960s. More importantly for the term's academic take-over and increasing use had been previous changes in the political and legal sphere in various industrialized nation states. The coming-into-effect of new immigration laws or labour recruitment schemes during the 1960s were followed by at times massive influxes of migrants from Asia and elsewhere to North America, Europe and Australia. In addition, migration to former colonial power states and flight of millions of refugees further enhanced the ethnic and religious diversity of Western nation states. In contrast to widespread assumptions of a rapid as-

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similation or expected remigration, many, often most migrants opted to stay for long. They began to build their own social, economic and religious institutions in their adopted country of residence. Some migrant groups achieved an "institutional completeness"[1] fairly quickly and efficiently, reconstructing known customs and bonds in their new environment.

In order to conceptually map and categorize these both new and persistent national, cultural or religious groups of people and their institutions, researchers progressively employed the old idea of "diaspora". For scholars in various disciplines of the humanities the term seemed perfect to sociologically capture the group-related institutionalisation and the evolving multicultural society. In addition, the term's emotion-laden connotations of uprootedness, precariousness and homesickness provided explanations for the group's enduring and nostalgic loyalty to the cultural and religious traditions of the country of origin. The term "diaspora", once freed from its restriction to Jewish history and experience, came more and more into use to refer to any processes of dispersion and to relate to countless so-called dislocated, de-territorialized communities.[2]

Obviously, migration of ethnic, national or religious groups of people to new territories is not restricted to modern or post modern times. As an obiquitious phenomenon, travel, re-settlement and becoming established in culturally foreign lands is a well known fact and phenomenon in the history of religions and peoples. In contrast to earlier periods, rapidly improved modes of conveyance and communication have enabled a much easier exchange of commodities, ideas and people. In the thus denoted "Global Period of world history" (Smart 1987: 291), the maintenance of close links with the country and kinsmen of emigration is no longer restricted to scarce contacts. Rather, transnational

[1] Quote Breton 1964: 200. Interestingly, Breton does not use the diaspora term.

[2] See Tölölyan 1996: 3. Tölölyan provides a comprehensive list of twelve reasons for what he calls the "proliferation and valorization of diasporas" (1996: 19), see 20-28.

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and transcontinental communication is possible in a historically unprecedented intensity, scope and speed.[3]

Based on this reconstruction, "diaspora" seems to be the right notion at the right time. However, the abundant use went hand in hand with the term's semantic dissolution. In view of this, part 1 shall recall 'basics of disapora' to shed light on the once existent meaning. Such a reconsideration seems even more justified as new etymological derivations of "diaspora" have been suggested. Part 2 shall follow up the ensuing semantic changes, both of the term's adoption by early Christianity and of its take-off within the humanities since the 1960s. Based on this, part 3 opts to conceptualize "diaspora" as an analytical category, thus enabling the term to both qualify situations and constellations and serve as a basis for transcultural, comparative work.

Genealogies of semantics: origin and coinage of the term "diaspora"

The history of the semantics of "diaspora" points to several changes of the term's meaning. As is fairly well known, "diaspora" is a Greek term. The noun διασπορά is a derivation from the Greek composite verb "dia-" and "speirein" (διασπείρειν, infinitive), adopting meanings of "to scatter", "to spread" or "to disperse". Based on this etymology, sociologist Robin Cohen suggested that "the expression was used to describe the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period (800-600 BC)."[4] During the Archaic period, colonies (Greek *apoikía*) were purposefully set up by city states (*mētrópolis*), faithfully transferring administrative and religious institutions and patterns to non-Greek regions (amongst many, Buckley 1996). Such a derivation would enable scholars to attribute a non-Jewish origin

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[3] Features of past and present transnational exchange have been discussed by Rudolph and Piscatori 1997 and Foner 1997; see also the theme issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 22 (2) 1999.

[4] Cohen 1997: 2. Cohen repeats this attribution several times in his otherwise praiseworthy *Global Diasporas*, see 1997: ix, 24, 25, 83, 177. Cohen's suggestion is already taken up by other authors, see McKeown 1999: 308. Aaron Segal seems to have been the first to suggest this derivation of the diaspora term (1993: 82).

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to the earliest application of the term and thus abandon "the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of diaspora" (Clifford 1994: 306). The suggestion, however, appears at best fanciful. It cannot be maintained in the context of historical and semantic facts. The verb, which became more widely used in the fifth century BCE (not earlier) amongst classical philosophers and Hellenist writers, had a negative connotation. It implied processes of dispersion and decomposition, a dissolution into various parts (e.g., atoms) without any further relation to each other (as used by Epicurus, reported by Plutarch). On the whole, "diaspora" had an "unfavourable, disastrous meaning" and was in no way used to imply a geographic place or sociological group, as Willem C. van Unnik underscores (1993: 86-87). The term was definitely *not* used by any classical author to refer to the Archaic colonisation process. In fact, the verb expressed the exact opposite of the close relation, characteristically lasting for centuries, between a Greek colony and its mother city.

The Alexandrian Jewish-Greek translators of the Hebrew scriptures adopted precisely the disastrous connotations of current philosophical discourse. However, in the evolved Septuagint, διασπορά (*diasporá*) and διασπείρειν (*diaspeírein*) were coined as *termini technici* to interpret Jewish existence far from the "Promised Land" in light of an encompassing soteriological pattern.[5] As a matter of fact, surprisingly, the Hebrew words for "exile", "banishment," and "deportation", *gôlā* and *galût*, were *not* rendered into Greek by "diaspora". *Gôlā* and *galût* were understood as "special biblical terms for the Babylonian captivity", as Aiyenakun Arowele specifies (1977: 46). They were thus translated in the Septuagint by Greek words denoting "exile", "captivity", "deportation". Arowele stresses that "Hellenistic Jews avoided making an equivalence between Gola and 'diaspora'" (1977: 47), thus purposefully differentiating between these terms, as Davies

[5] In the Septuagint, the noun διασπορά is used twelve times and the verb διασπείρειν more than forty times. These are translated from various Hebrew nouns respectively twelve different Hebrew verbs. On the specific locations and their context see in detail Arowele 1977: 29-45, van Unnik 1993: 92-105, Tromp 1998: 15-22.

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(1982: 116) and van Unnik (1993: 81-84) likewise emphasize. Why did Jewish-Greek translators of the third and second century BCE intentionally distinguish between *galût* and *diaspora*, adopting a new word to neologically express their situation of living outside Palestine or *Eretz Israel*?

In retrospect, post-Babylonian Jews theologically interpreted the Babylonian captivity as God's punishment for their disobedience to the commands of the Torah. With the return to Palestine and Jerusalem in the late sixth century BCE, this punishment had come to an end. Living outside the "Holy Land" subsequently — that is, from the fifth century BCE on — was understood differently. It was not an imposed punishment for breaking the laws of God. It involved no "deportation" as denoted by the Hebrew terms *gôlā* and *galût*. These terms were translated in the Septuagint by αἰχμαλωσία (*aìchmalosía*, captivity by war), μετοικεσία (*metoikesía*, moving under force), and other terms. In post-Babylonian centuries, Jews left the Palestine region for economic reasons, to serve as soldiers in Egypt or as traders and businessmen throughout the Eastern Mediterranean coast. Also, only a minority of the Judean upper classes exiled to Babylon had returned to Palestine. The majority had become well integrated into Babylonian society, while still maintaining their Jewish observance. During the fifth to first century BCE, numerous Jews fled from Palestine, mainly to escape war, socio-political insecurity, and repression. Although many Jews were quite successful and voluntary economic migrants, they interpreted residing outside Palestine as a transitory, miserable, and unfavourable stay. It was understood as a preparation, an intermediate situation until the final divine gathering in Jerusalem. Fundamentally, the term took on spiritual and soteriological meanings, pointing to the "gathering of the scattered" by God's grace at the end of time. "Diaspora" turns out to be an integral part of a pattern constituted by the fourfold course of sin or disobedience, scattering and exile as punishment, repentance, and finally return and gathering.[6]

[6] See van Unnik 1993: 113-119, 134; likewise Davies 1982: 116-121 and Tromp 1998: 18-19.

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In Hellenistic times, Jews were able to travel to Palestine and Jerusalem. The large number of pilgrims gives ample evidence of this fact. They could have returned and settled in Palestine. Most stayed, however, in the diaspora. Why? Theologically, it was held that the gathering in the "Holy Land" was not to be brought about by men, but by God alone. As Davies clarifies: "If the return were an act of divine intervention, it could not be engineered or forced by political or any other human means: to do so would be impious" (1982: 120). The only activity men and women were able to undertake in the diaspora was to live wholeheartedly in accordance with the commands of the Torah, in order to possibly bring about the final gathering a little earlier. In this way, apart from the indissoluble soteriological meaning and context, i.e. the interpretation of history with respect to God's saving grace, the proper term also takes on meanings of admonition and a reminder to obey the Torah. Socio-culturally, it appears that quite a number of Jews (certainly not all) fared rather well in cultural centers; the Jews of Alexandria or Sardis maintained religious and administrative structures of their own, acquiring an 'institutional completeness' with synagogues, gymnasia, baths, cemeteries and societies.Many preferred to stay in the diaspora, rather than returning to more or less regularly war-torn Palestine.[7]

Ensuing changes of diaspora semantics: co-optation and popularization

Since the neologism by Jewish translators, the diaspora term was used by Jews and Judaic scholars alike to refer to Jews who lived outside the "Promised Land". Its usage encompassed the geographic, sociological, and soteriological semantics as summarized by van Unnik:

[7] Studies on Early Judaism and Hellenist Jews amount to legion; see, amongst very many, Delling 1987, Cohen and Frerichs 1993, Barclay 1996, Gafni 1997. A 'must' on the diaspora term's origin and coinage is the examination by the late Dutch Old Testament scholar Willem Cornelis van Unnik on the self-understanding of the Jewish Diaspora in Hellenistic Roman Times (1993). The painstaking analysis dates back to 1966-67 and was posthumously edited and published by Peter W. van der Horst. The thorough discussion is written — unfortunate for many — in German.

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"διασπορά interprets not only the land, across which one is dispersed, but also the activity of dispersion as well as the people, who are dispersed."[8] This semantic particularity became the established version for the two millennia to follow, although a further meaning came to the fore as Christianity developed its boundaries and identificational focus.

In the first century CE, Christians adopted the term, but altered its soteriological meaning according to Christian eschatology. The New Testament uses the noun *diasporá* and the verb *diaspeírein* three times each. Without going into detail on the complicated usages, the individual writers of the different Biblical stories and letters interpreted the early Church "as a pilgrim, sojourning and dispersed community, in the understanding that it is the eschatological people of God" (Arowele 1977: 476). On earth, Christians living in dispersion would function as the "seed" to disseminate the message of Jesus. The Christians' real home, however, was the "heavenly city Jerusalem", the goal of Christian pilgrimage.[9]

In the same vein, patristic writers co-opted for the diaspora notion as a polemical device in their attacks against Judaism in the first centuries CE: in the Christian view, the dispersion of Jews after the destruction of the Second Temple was a punishment exercised by the Christian God for the Jews' adopted 'non-pure' way of life and their non-recognition of Jesus as Messiah. On purpose, the Jewish soteriological concept was shorn of its aspects of redemption and return by Christian polemics. The fourfold scheme remained left with its aspects of sin and dispersion only, emphasizing the connotation of divine judgement.

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[8] Quote van Unnik 1993: 149, translated by this author. As for the use of "diaspora" in secular Greek language, primarily restricted to philosophical discourse (e.g. by Plutarch) as outlined before, see van Unnik 1993: 74-76 and Modrzejewski 1993: 66-67.

[9] The three locations using the noun are James 1,1; 1 Petr 1,1, and John 7,35; the verb is used in the Acta Apostolorum 8,1; 8,4 and 8,11; for the controversely discussed New Testament passages see, among many, Arowele 1977: part 2, Schnackenburg 1971 and Krüger 1994.

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The notion of a sojourning people of God quickly vanished in Christian reasoning and treatises, as the one-time minority religion changed to become the established church in the late fourth century. The eschatological meanings became forgotten. A millennium later, the term came into use again, primarily employed as a geographic-sociological signifier. In the course of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, "diaspora" denoted Protestant minorities having emerged in Roman Catholic environments, and Roman Catholic minorities being faced with living in Protestant dominated countries. In the early 19th century, in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, this coinage of a certain confessional church residing in a confessionally different environment became the more widely used and standard understanding of diaspora in Christian terms.[10]

Despite the religious differences between Jewish and Christian diaspora semantics, geographic and sociological connotations are basic to both usages. Surveying in a theoretically interested perspective, Judaic studies and the Christian theologies, almost all studies of Jewish and Christian dispersion and diaspora (confessional) communities have remained and still remain historically descriptive, often supplemented by some theological and pastoral interpretations. The studies do not aim to undertake analytical, comparative, or theoretical research. Indeed, most scholars in Judaic and Christian theological studies have not even noticed the present popularity and wide usage of the term outside their disciplines.

Looking back, until the 1960s, the diaspora term was distinctly confined to the histories of Jewish and Christian traditions and their diaspora communities.[11] The dislogding and semantic broadening of

[10] With regard to the post-Reformation reuse of the term, see the detailed study by Röhrig 1991 and the overview by Schellenberg 1995. Altermatt provides an instructive historical case study of the developments and changes of a confessional diaspora minority, that of Catholics in Protestant Zurich (Switzerland) in 1850-1950.

[11] An exception to this rule is Dubnow's excellent entry on "diaspora" in the 1931 edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Certainly a literature archaeology would bring to the fore a number of early non-Jewish and non-Christian related employments of the term, although primarily of accidental use. For example,

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the thus specifically employed notion has been undertaken first within African Studies. In a now classic paper, George Shepperson suggested the concept of the "African diaspora" (1966). Analogous to the expulsion of Jews in early times, the dispersion of sub-Saharan Africans through the colonial slave trade was described as an enforced expatriation, accompanied by a longing to return to the homeland. Shepperson's metaphorical usage bundled up into one comprehensive statement the at that time current interest among English and American writers, artists and scholars studying the exiled black peoples' experience as an aspect of African history. The taking up of the Jewish folk term in English-speaking circles coincided with African states achieving political independence and African thinkers and writers, both in Africa and abroad, raising their voices and making accusations of racism and discrimination. Although the emergence of interest in an African diaspora concept can be located in the late 1950s to mid-1960s, it took a decade, until a proliferation of related publications gained momentum. Since the mid-1970s, African historians and writers deliberately employ "diaspora" as a concept and topic, thus creating a sub-domain within the broader area of African studies.[12]

Differently, nevertheless in addition to the above mentioned reasons for the adoption of the diaspora term (legal changes; influx of migrants etc.), in the case of African studies, processes of decolonization and of political emancipation, both by nations in Africa and by black peoples

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Shepperson (1993: 48) points to the stipulation of a "Scottish diaspora" in the posthumously published accounts of Sir Reginald Coupland, *Welsh and Scottish Nationalism*, London 1954.

[12] For an overview of the term's emergence and usage within the field, see Shepperson 1993 and Drake 1993; the pioneering role of Black or African Studies in decontextualising and generalizing the diaspora term is highlighted also in Akenson's well-based account, see Akenson 1997: 11. A wide range of monographs with "African diaspora" or "Black diaspora" in its title have emerged since the mid-1970s. The on-line bibliography "Diasporas and Transnational Communities", edited by Robin Cohen in collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Oxford, lists some 200 entries within the category "Africans (including Blacks)", see http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/wwwroot/bibliogr.htm.

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in the once 'New World', gave raise to the term's prominence. Long established 'Black communities' outside the African continent became renamed as diasporas. A unity of those once enslaved thus was and is constructed; a mythical relation of all overseas 'Blacks' with an idealized 'Africa' arose; and politically, former and present power relations were pointed out and questioned. In a quantitative analysis of the use of "diaspora" in book titles, Phil Cohen found that "Black and Jewish history or culture are overwhelmingly dominant as the point of reference for diaspora studies" (1998: 3). As such, "the Jewish diaspora has in the last twenty years become effectively Africanised" (1998: 7).

The diaspora term's virtual take-off within African Studies was followed by a boosted usage of "diaspora" in various disciplines of the humanities. Within the political sciences, Armstrong's afore-mentioned 1976 seminal article provided the definitorial basis for various ensuing studies, including Gabriel Sheffer's by now classic work, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (1986). In a similar way since the 1980s, scholars in disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, or history and regional-thematic fields such as Armenian studies, Irish studies or recent Tibetan studies (Korom 1997) to an expanding extent employ the diaspora term to relate to expatriate national, cultural, or religious groups and communities. The generalized and broad usage of "diaspora" became, so to speak, institutionalized with the launching of the high quality journal *Diaspora* in 1991. Editor Khachig Tölölyan declared: "We use 'diaspora' provisionally to indicate our belief that the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guestworker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community."[13]

[13] Quote Tölölyan 1991: 4. This provisional, rather loose definition was markedly substantialized in Tölölyan's brilliant article "Rethinking *Diaspora*(s)" (1996). For studies on those related exile, overseas or diaspora Armenian, Greek, Irish, Kurd, Palestinian, Chinese, Tamil, Indian and many more nationally, culturally or religiously constitued communities, see the synoptical presentations by Safran 1991, Chaliand

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Parallel to the growing usage and esteem of "diaspora" in the academia, intellectuals, representatives, spokesmen and spokeswomen of the thus renamed diaspora people and communities started to adopt the notion as a self-description. The term gained a currency among the urban, well-educated elite, which itself often formed an aspiring part of university life. The diaspora term earned acceptance and circulation, be it to construct a unity of an actually heterogenous group of people; be it to emphasize one's claim for representation; be it to call for a retightening of bonds with one's former home culture and country; or be it to serve as an indictment of power relations, past and present being the cause for a group's precarious, socially marginalized situation.[14]

Finally, the adoption of the diaspora term within the history of religions should not go unmentioned. Compared to its neighbouring disciplines, the history of religions was a real latecomer in making use of the diaspora term. The first to point to the "The Importance of Diasporas" had been Ninian Smart in 1987, unfortunately presented in a somewhat hidden contribution. It took until the mid-1990s for the term to be applied with more rigor and from a theoretical perspective (Hinnells 1994, Baumann 1995). Historians of religions, quite aware of earlier experiences of ambiguity in transferring culturally and religiously bound terms, shied away from applying the notion to non-Jewish traditions and peoples. Also, their caution was (and is) in many cases based on the knowledge of the term's origin and soteriological coinage, stirring up various theoretical problems for a cross-cultural, generalized application. Despite this difficulty, on an empirical basis and on ideas proposed by Kim Knott (1991), Hinnells systematizes ten

and Rageau 1991, Segal 1993: 82-106, Cohen 1997 and the above mentioned on-line bibliography (Cohen n.d.).

[14] A paradigmatic example of the latter use can be found in the article by the Guadeloupese Hindu and intellectual Lotus Vingadassamy-Engel (1992). The author states: "I choose the word 'diaspora' for the transplantation of my community from India to the French West Indies [...] because it carries psychological connotations of deep sorrow and suffering, inconsolable mourning along with the everlasting feeling of being torn inside" (1992: 6).

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factors in a diaspora religion's change and continuity, differentiating seven areas of research.[15]

Whereas in the history of religions and more vigorously in its neighbouring disciplines "diaspora" was primarily employed as a geographic-sociological category to denote dispersed groups and transnational relationships, since the 1990s a further, different approach has stepped forth. Post-modernist and culture critical authors such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and James Clifford adopted the diaspora term to denote a specific type of experience and thinking, i.e. that of "diaspora consciousness". Aspiring to move beyond essentialising notions such as 'ethnicity' and 'race', in often jargon laden papers, the idea of "diaspora" has been celebrated as expressing notions of hybridity, heterogeneity, identity fragmentation and (re)construction, double consciousness, fractures of memory, ambivalence, roots and routes, discrepant cosmopolitanism, multi-locationality and so forth.

This "diaspora consciousness" is conceived as a specific awareness, supposedly a characteristic of people living 'here' and relating to a 'there': "Diaspora consciousness is entirely a product of cultures and histories in collision and dialogue. [...] Diasporic subjects are, thus, distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience" (Clifford 1994: 319). Similarly, Stuart Hall holds: "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (1990: 235). Importantly, diaspora consciousness is held to carry a creative power and ability, questioning both "configurations of power" (Brah 1996: 183) and the hegemony of the all-pervasive, normative nation-state. In-

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[15] See Hinnells 1997a and 1997b. Hinnell's expression of "diaspora religion" in the singular appears somewhat strange, for it purports an underlying unity and sameness of the actually most varied religious traditions in diasporic settings. Interestingly, Knott did not use the diaspora term in her 1991 contribution. Indicative for the discipline's non-recognition of the discourse on "diaspora" until the mid-1990s is the missing of a related entry in the established *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) or the *Handwörterbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (1988 ff.). In contrast, the 1999 *Metzler Lexikon Religion* provides entries on "diaspora" and "migration" (vol. 1 and 2, Stuttgart: Metzler).

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deed, "diaspora" and its attributed awareness is praised as an alternate consciousness, endeavouring to move beyond normative history and politics and enabling access to "recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitian life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets — resources for a fraught coexistence."[16]

Although growing in number, this famed type of consciousness primarily relates to the still few intellectuals and writers having stepped forth from the diasporic communities. We rather doubt whether the diasporic 'ordinary' men and women think in such categories and subtleties. Nevertheless, the attributed potentiality of diaspora consciousness bespeaks a hope, expectation, and longing which curiously reminds of early semantic fillings of religious hope and ingathering.

"Diaspora" as an analytical category

The semantic broadening of "diaspora", both in terms of relating it to any dispersed group of people and to conceptualize a certain type of consciousness, have made "diaspora" one of *the* most fashionable terms in academic discourse of late 20th century. Authors and writers use the once restricted notion in an arbitrary, unspecified, fairly free way. Apparently, an often plainly metaphorical application of "diaspora" is prevalent, encompassing under the very term a wide range of phenomena considered appropriate. The term's popularity has resulted in a dissolution of semantics, "decomposing" into exactly the early Greek philosophical meaning the notion's ability to encompass certain situations and relations.

In this respect, Tölölyan warns that the term "is in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category" (1996: 8). And, as Phil Cohen entertainingly remarked: "Diaspora is one of the buzz words of the post modern age; it has the virtue of sounding exotic while rolling sibilantly off the English tongue; it whispers the promise of hidden

[16] Quote Clifford 1994: 328. For a portrait and discussion of these understandings of "diaspora", see Cohen 1997: 127-153 and Anthias 1998.

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depths of meaning yet assimilates them to the shape of a wave breaking gently on native shores. [...] it offers a desirable feminine ending, and much versatility" (1998: 3).

Obviously, the boundaries of "diaspora" have become ever more blurred and confused in its popularization. Certainly there is no lack of ambitious projects to define the term and thus to tighten the semantic boundaries, as carried out by Safran (1991), Hettlage (1991), and Cohen (1997), to name the more systematic and encompassing approaches. It is for the analytical heuristics and capacities that a definitorial specification appears worthwhile, despite the term's overuse. In contrast to proposed definitorial exercises, our approach opts for paying less attention to the noun "diaspora" and to focusing more on the adjective "diasporic". Just as some historians of religions, instead of fruitlessly striving to offer the 348th (or so) definition of "religion", rather choose to elaborate what qualifies a situation, activity, text as "religious" (Seiwert 1981, Gladigow 1988). In this way, we aim to establish the adjectival form "diasporic" as a categorizing qualification. Employing the adjective "diasporic" should qualify certain groups of people, social situations, and transnational or multi-local constellations to encompass specific relations and identificational references. We might ask in the negative in order to gain a better understanding of the specificy: What should be missing in order that certain social forms and constellations are *less* identified or *not* identified as diasporic? In this respect, sociologist Saint-Blancat straightforwardly suggests: "Quand il y a rupture avec l'origine ou assimilation aux contextes d'installation, on ne peut plus parler de diaspora."[17]

Rather than providing a list of defining characteristics and enumerating typologies, our approach emphasizes one specific relation with few components only. This minimal constellation which keeps aloof from extensive ramifications, serves as the working basis from which

[17] Quote Saint-Blancat 1995: 10. Furthermore, both Clifford (1994: 307-310, on diaspora's borders) and Tölölyan (1996: 16-19, on ethnic versus diasporic) have offered insightful suggestions for such an approach.

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further relations follow up and around which prototypical characteristics can be grouped. We comply with Brian Smith who holds that "to define is not to finish, but to start. To define is not to confine, but to create something to refine — and eventually redefine. To define, finally, is not to destroy but to construct for the purpose of useful reflection" (1987: 33). Taken as a thus understood working definition, the religious implications of "diaspora" are bracketed and emphasis is placed on its geographic-sociological aspects. As such, the relational facts of a *perpetual recollecting identification with a fictitious or far away existent geographic territory and its cultural-religious traditions* are taken as diaspora constitutive. If this identificational recollection or rebinding, expressed in symbolic or material ways, is missing, a situation and social form shall not be called "diasporic". Importantly, a diasporic "colouring" or dimension is not a quality per se, but a nominalistic assignment attributed by the scholar or the member of the diaspora community.

The definition places emphasis on the enduring, often glorifying identification of a group of people with a cultural-religious point of reference outside the current country of living. It is this identificational focus which in biblical terms 'gathers the dispersed' (Jer 32,37-38) and forms their specific collective identity. Prototypically, that is in most, but not all cases, this situation came about by a migration process. More often than not it involves an identificational difference of the diaspora group in contrast with the society's dominant cultural and religious norms and orientations. This difference, a cultural-religious identification bound to a region and culture outside the current country of residence, constitutes an important aspect of the fundamental tripolar interrelatedness of diaspora group, country of origin and country of residence. Finally, in contrast to most definitions, the approach underscores the significance of religion in diasporic constellations. This emphasis is meant to (re)direct attention and awareness to the prototypical role of religious identity in situations of settlement after migration; of the perpetuation of a specific identificational difference; or, amongst

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other things, of the demarcation and strengthening of collective identity in a culturally foreign environment.[18]

The thereby sketched definition of "diasporic" aims to provide an empirically applicable approach, conceived in an analytical perspective. Adam McKeown justly notes: "When used in a more adjectival sense, the idea of diaspora can move away from identifying a bounded group, and instead focus on geographic dispersed connections, institutions, and discourses that cannot be readily accounted for from purely local or national frameworks" (1999: 311). Furthermore, it is not only the global and transnational linkages which are of interest. Rather, the discriminatory value of the diaspora term as an analytical category, applicable for transcultural research and comparison, has to become apparent. As an analytical category, the term is conceived as to constitute a complex whole with porous or fuzzy boundaries. For a better understanding of the complexity of the "whole", the analysis "intellectually decompos[es] it into the elements and relations that might be said to constitute it" (Saler 1993: 257). The heuristic value of the analysis is its intellectual organisation of the posited constituencies and relations by subsuming them under a category label. As Avtar Brah holds, the diaspora term's "purchase as a theoretical construct rests largely on its analytical reach; its explanatory power in dealing with the specific problematics associated with transnational movements of people, capital, commodities and cultural iconographies" (1996: 196).

"Diaspora" and transcultural comparison

Conceiving "diaspora" as an unbounded, analytical category, both singling out and encompassing a certain semantic field, is meant to enable and facilitate transcultural research, comparison and understand-

[18] The definitorial approach has been worked out in detail in Baumann 2000. It primarily focuses on "diaspora" as a social form, leaving aside, for the time being, "diaspora" as a type of consciousness. As for the tripolar or triadic interrelatedness of a diasporic situation, see the instructive studies by Sheffer 1986, Hettlage 1991 and Safran 1991. For prototype theory, see the outline by Saler 1993: 197-226.

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ing. Undeniably, modern and post-modern adoption of the diaspora term has extended, although not refined the term's semantics. Implicitly "diaspora" has been used for analytical work and transcultural comparison abundantly already, albeit mainly in an untheorized way. Some few authors, such as scholars in African studies, explicitely have made use of the transcultural, comparative capacity of the diaspora term. Certainly, interests in drawing specific comparisons have had their share too.

Conceptualized as an analytical category, a multitude of research fields opens up. Transcultural comparison of the complex areas of 'dynamics of religion' or religious change, migrated cultures and transplanted religions, or, persistence with change of individual and collective religious identity come to mind. Knott (1991) and Hinnells (1997b) systematized seven related areas for research along the issues of the place of language, transmission of religious knowledge, individual identity, group identity, leadership, universalization and the impact of Western religious ideas. Such fields include forms of religious change which broadly can be grouped as traditionalisation, adaptation and innovation.

Along with Gary Bouma (1996) we might add sociological aspects such as processes of religious institutionalisation and building of community. These typical efforts of the diaspora group strive to create a comforting and invigorating home away from home. Bouma's so-called "theory of religious settlement" (1996: 7) importantly draws attention to the ways a transplanted religious tradition finds a place within the society and amongst the spectrum of existent religions. How does the 'new', diasporic religion become a part of this society and its general culture? And, based on these processes, when in the long run will the religion and its adherents have become established and socio-culturally accepted to such an extent that is might be odd to still speak of a diasporic existence? Diachronic research on thus assigned diaspora communities of one or two hundred years existence have sug-

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gested developmental phase models which bear fruitful points of cross-cultural comparison and insights.[19]

Therefore, in this way, the trans- or cross-cultural study of diasporic situations enables investigation from a similar angle and interrogating approach, different historic and socio-politically contextualized settings, be it Greek settlers in the Archaic Period, Jewish merchants and citizens in Hellenistic and later times, or South Asian migrants and citizens in North America and Britain. Insights gained and structuring patterns recognized in one specific case might heuristically be transferred to a different diasporic case, thus intellectually investigating and re-arranging the data afresh.

Furthermore, transcultural comparison importantly applies to delineating the triangular relationship of diaspora group, (former) ancestral homeland and country of present residence. This might apply to investigating factors and shifts of influence between the relational poles, or to changing identificational foci of the diaspora group, to name two areas only. Significantly for current multicultural political discourses, examples can be stated in which a diaspora group's retention of religious difference does not impede its socio-ecomomic integration and national identification. Touching such areas, Saint-Blancat (1995) on comparing Jewish diaspora histories and current Muslim presence in Europe, has sketched a heuristically valuable fourfold model of a diaspora group's relational attitude to its (former) country of origin and to its actual country of residence. A basic factor is the analysis of the group's favouring of distance on the one hand or proximity on the other hand towards the other relational poles within the triangular diasporic web. Further on differentiating this approach, the model was applied to the case study of Hindu Indians in Trinidad, observing, among other things, paradigmatic changes in the distance versus proximity attitudes

[19] See, for example, Waldmann (1982) on German settlers in Chile from 1850 to the 1970s; and Baumann (2000) on indentured Indian workers in Trinidad from 1845 to the late 1990s. In this way, Altermatt's study (1986) on Catholics in Protestant Zurich 1850-1950 might profitably be restructured along such a developmental scheme, the same applies to further longitudinal studies of relevant groups and constellations.

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due to the granting of rights and socio-economic participation in the country of residence (Baumann 2000).

In view of late 20th century technological achievements such as telecommunication and the internet, the master narrative of a diaspora's triangular relationship has become blurred and multiplied, however. Increasingly, relations of a diaspora group are not aligned with its country of actual residence and its (former) ancestral homeland only. More and more diaspora groups of the same national, cultural or religious bondage in other overseas sites take influence on the form and processes of a specific diaspora group. Rather than thinking of a relational triangle, many globally distributed diasporas such as the present Indian, Chinese, Irish, Tamil, Sikh, or Hindu diaspora constitute a diasporic network or web with joint-venture points and various gravitational centres. Dynamics of post-modern deterritorialization, its global cultural and economic flow, thus demand an on-going refinement of concepts and relational locating of "diaspora."[20]

Last but not least, transcultural comparison in an analytical perspective leads to differentiating diasporic dimensions and proposing typologies of varied ranges. This applies to the economic, socio-cultural, religious, and political spheres. Following Armstrong's early typology of 'mobilized' and 'proletarian diasporas' (1976), useful dimensional systematisations and typological classifications have been proposed by Ikonomu (1991), using Europe's Greek diaspora as an exemplary case, Robin Cohen (1997), illustrating 'victim', 'trade', 'labour' and further diasporas by a wide range of examples, and McKeown (1999), analysing in a structured way the modern Chinese diaspora. A few typologies with regard to the religious dimension in diasporic context have been suggested by Baumann earlier on, accompained by methodological proposals regarding diachronical and synchronical comparisons (1995: 28-29). In all of these and afore-mentioned cases, dias-

[20] Arjun Appadurai instructively points to the changes brought about for diasporic "neighborhoods" in light of new forms of electronic mediation, see Appadurai 1996: 195-199. Certainly, in this respect issues and concepts of transnationalism are of prime importance, see footnote 3.

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poric settings of different times and contexts have been systematized and analysed to enhance an understanding of the complex relations involved. As in the early days of the discipline of the history of religions, comparison, although this time much more reflexively controlled, is taken as a means and method to arrange and classify the wide range of data and to strive for theoretical conclusions and insights.

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