Diasporas, Identity and Belonging in the Global City

Prof. Yunas Samad
Introduction

- This paper considers the relationship between transnational flows of people and the construction of identity.
- It will consider the relationship between transnationalism, diaspora and the global city.
- The different ways the term diaspora is used and understood.
- The relationship between diaspora and hybrid identity.
Global City

- Local and global
- Characterised by ‘super diversity’
- Diasporic spaces are located in global cities
Transnationalism

● Change in the flow of people
  - Old patterns: one way migration from developing to developed countries
  - New patterns: two way flows from developed to developing and visa versa
    ● Return migration
    ● Circulatory migration
    ● transmigration
Transnationalism and Diasporas

- Transnationalism intersect with Diasporas
  - Individual transnational communication overlaps with inter-communal and inter-organisational connectedness
  - Diasporas use technology to go global
Degrees of Transnationalism

- Ties range from the sedentary though to fully transnational
  - Factors of influence length of stay and degree of inclusion
    - Weak: locals and residence of over 15 years
    - Medium: traditional labour migrants labour, low skills and education
    - Pronounced: Asylum seekers, low education or women who come for family reunification
    - Strong: Born aboard, high level of education
Diasporas

- ‘Diasporas’ of Diasporas
  - Everyone and everything is diasporic
  - White diasporas
  - Semantic code for: racialised and ethnic minorities

- Two understandings of diasporas:
  - Empirical and metaphorical
Diasporas

● Criteria for empirical diasporas
  - Dispersal to more that two peripheral areas
  - Myth of homeland
  - Boundary maintenance

● Expansion of the term:
  - Long-distance nationalist
  - Labour migrants
Diasporas

- Typology of diasporas
  - Victim
  - Labour
  - Trade
  - Imperial
  - Cultural
Diasporas

- Critique of empirical diasporas
  - Conflation of multiplicity of historical movements
  - Foundations is ancestry
    - Sectionalised identity
  - Bounded entity that is transhistorical and homogenous
Diasporas

- Metaphorical diasporas
  - Claim staking, place-making, construction of diasporic space
  - Emphasis is on arrival and not origins
    - ‘aint where you are form but where you are at’ (Gilroy)
  - Challenge thinking about ‘race’, ethnic and nationalist identity
  - Emphasises contingency, indeterminacy and conflict
  - Diaspora constituted through narrative, meaning and performance
Diasporas

- Merger of empirical and metaphorical
  - Position, process and a practise
  - Constantly reproducing and transforming difference
  - Full of internal fissures around gender, sexuality and class
  - Connects with debates about multiculturalism, hybridity and conviviality
Diasporas and Hybridity

- Cannot exist outside of representation
- Culturally and politically reflexive
- Transnationalism makes diasporas hybrid
- Full of fissure and division
- Inhabit contested zones in the global city
  - Diasporic space is 3rd space
  - Production of new unrecognisable, new areas of negotiations and representation
Identity and Diasporas

- Two overlapping and contradictory trends
- Both syncretic, hybrid forms of cultural representation
- Cosmopolitanism, multicultural ‘cool’ identities, celebrating difference and elitist
  - Celebratory, bound up in commodification, stripped of political content
  - Erased of specific diasporic habits
  - Or motivated by desire for social justice
Identity and Diasporas

● Alternative trend
  – ‘hot’ loyalties, essentialist identities, ethnic, religious and nationalist absolutism
  – Cultural absolutism and hyper-masculinity
  – Reactionary in politics
  – Essentialised construction of identities
  – Reaction too much cultural and economic change
Paradox of Diasporas

- Trends represent themselves as the juxtaposition of the hybrid versus the pure
- However even the cultural absolutists are hybrid and products of contestation and division within diasporic spaces
  - Hijab/Niqab debate
  - represented as religious fundamentalism, authentic and essentialist identification
Paradox of Diasporas

- Within Diasporic groups seen as a gender struggle for power and position

- Struggle for control over the body and political control by younger generation of women
Conclusion

- Global cities provide the contested space where diasporians, diasporas and the indigenous interact

- Hybrid identity is an integral feature as diasporas are all about representation

- Politics of identity produces trends that celebrate difference or cultural purity
  - Both are novel identity constructions