Chapter 5

Territorial Diaspora Politics: Peoples and Lands

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the classical or traditional definition of diaspora as it relates to a place of origin and/or an attachment to a homeland (whether real or perceived). The chapter highlights theories of classical diaspora and provides an in-depth analysis into the contemporary Kurdish situation of statelessness and increased claims to land (due to their involvement with the fight against the Islamic State). The chapter also makes brief mention of the other prominent case of contemporary diaspora politics in the Middle East, that of the Palestinians. The chapter explains the struggle of the Kurds to self-determination and to establish an autonomous state, and highlights the adoption and use of digital technologies by diasporic communities, which allows for the facilitation of diasporic communities and networks that transcend traditional borders.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional concepts of diaspora maintain the importance of place of origin and migration as roots of political and social condition. Migration politics have become a fairly recent but critical piece of national law and homeland security policy. Gamlen et al. (2013) note that more than half of United Nations member nations have dedicated bureaucratic entities that handle diaspora; “many more states have been experimenting with programmatic
The authors highlight hybridity without referring to it as hybridity, arguing diaspora politics and immigration policies “disrupt the assumed symmetry of the self-governing national population and its territorial jurisdiction, and give rise to unconventional modes of citizenship and sovereignty not envisioned at Westphalia or imagined as consistent with modern geopolitics since” (Delano & Gamlen, 2014, P. 43). The concept of hybridity, which has been discussed previously, threatens the traditional conception of the nation-state apparatus. Although there are still obvious roles that the nation-state plays, such as militarily, rule of law/governance, and economically – hybridity particularly questions the existence and maintenance of national identity in a post-national (or transnational) world. While some theorists argue that hybridity provides an alternative to the static conception of diaspora as a place of origin, location, and rooted identity (Gilroy, 2000; Mercer, 1994), it is still important to consider the existence (or lack thereof) of an autonomous nation-state in examining contemporary diaspora. Cohen (2008, P. 2) notes a main characteristic of “classical, victim diaspora” or the concept of diffusion of a people following a “traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations” – again this understanding of diaspora is commonly associated with the Jewish people, and scholars tend to discuss a trauma such as the Holocaust, as affecting a group collectively, but as the world has witnessed with more recent diasporic events such as the displacement of Syrian refugees or the migrant crisis in Central Africa – not all people within an ethnic or religious diaspora group are impacted identically. Anthias (1998, P. 564) notes that diasporas are not “homogeneous in another sense: they may have formed different collective representations of the group under local conditions. In addition, the extent to which they organize around cultural symbols, develop ethnic cultural organizations and promote their ethnic identity will be diverse”, meaning that the experience of all Jewish, Kurdish, Armenian, Palestinian, etc., will vary depending on the host country and the extent to which other cultures are able to influence the diasporic locals.

In considering diaspora, the role of the nation-state is ever-changing and is dependent on various domestic factors such as the composition of the diaspora; the political type of the regime in the homeland; governmental (formal) and societal (informal) views and opinions on immigration; and citizenship laws. Global factors (or those outside of the host nation) also come to bear in the analysis of diaspora external factors include political type of the host and the existence of national and international organizations (such as the United Nations) (Brand, 2006, 2014). Again the concept of
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