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INTRODUCTION DIASPORAS RECONFIGURED

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Over the past twenty years, the concept of 'diaspora' has played a central role in migration studies, international studies, government studies, postcolonial studies, African American studies and comparative literatures. Centers and journals have been created and a new research area firmly grounded on interdisciplinarity is now thriving: 'Diaspora Studies.' The title of the four-event series launched in Montpellier, 'Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, "Race"' (cf. Greenblatt 2009) serves as an indicator that scholars have moved away from a narrow definition of diaspora with an emphasis on nationalism and forced exile from a fixed origin to a more flexible acceptance in the wake of Robin Cohen's work (1995, 1996). Roots have given way to routes (Gilroy 1993)—that could in turn be envisioned as 'roots' in a new configuration of home-ness—and a rhizomatic model (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) now coexists with that

of 'branchements' or plug-ins (Amselle 2001).¹ Transnationalism, flux, interconnectedness, interculturality, multiple diversity, the varied and troubled modalities of the consciousness of a common culture, the imagined as well as the real 'territories' behind the concept were at the fore of the participants' questionings. Space, place and time—their linkage (Bahktin's 'chronotope' 1981) and the transformations of these notions effected by new technologies, unprecedented economic pressures at the planetary level and the intensified circulation of peoples—profoundly alters our contemporary understanding of diasporic movements, communities and 'identities'. Purely quantitative definitions, such as Lacoste's (1989) no longer suffice. Dispersal, dispersion, borders, host and home, origin and return, insider and outsider correspond to new realities and lived experiences that demand close intellectual scrutiny. At the same time, the violence inherent in the formation of diasporas is still with us: wars are waged that displace peoples, deportation, imperialism, and racism are not things of the past.

At the heart of the first gathering of scholars in Montpellier on 20–23 June 2011, the exchange between Robin Cohen, former Director of the International Migration Institute (Oxford) and Khachig Tölölyan, Professor at Wesleyan University and founder of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, proved to be an intense moment to both assess how much ground had been covered and to recognize how slippery the term still proves to be.² At

1. Jean-Loup Amselle (2006) explains that the biological etymology still alive in *métissage* has led him to forge the concept of *branchements* borrowed from the vocabulary of electricity (2005).

2. Robin Cohen invited Khachig Tölölyan within the frame of the Oxford Diaspora Programme, launched in 2011. Funded by the Leverhulme Trust until 2015 and coordinated by Robin Cohen, Nicholas van Hear (COMPAS) and Alan Gamlen (IMI), the ODP aims to further investigate 'the connections between people who migrate to other countries and those who stay at home'. Connecting, contesting and converging are the concepts privileged to analyze these configurations in the context of increased mobility, the new media and changing realities of the nation and the state. www.imi.ox.ac.uk/research-projects/oxford-leverhulme-diasporas-programme. A video of the conversation between

the inception of diaspora studies, both scholars stressed the need for a term that would be 'good to think with' (*bon à penser*) to borrow Lévi-Strauss's term. Cohen called the notion a 'provocation', while Tölölyan stressed its timeliness and appositeness to account for the plural societies created by new immigration laws in the 90s in such countries as Canada, Australia, and the United States. The intellectual community was no longer content with the notion of multiculturalism to describe the new material social reality and to answer the demands of the academy. The controversy and the debates, far from being a problem, are precisely the markers of the delineation of an area that is relevant, intriguing and challenging. Had 'diaspora' outlived its use for researchers in such diverse fields as comparative literature, sociology, cultural anthropology, African American, migration and international studies or did it need to be further refined to diffuse its alluring pliability? Had its critical success led to its weakening as a heuristic tool? (Brubaker 2005). Used by governments, appropriated by political power, is it thus instrumentalized? Like any other critical concept 'diaspora' has its uses and misuses (Edwards 2003). In their exchange, Cohen and Tölölyan also addressed the very pragmatic issue of financial support within diasporic communities and the difficulty of bypassing governments who have vested interests in maintaining their control on diasporas.

Taking stock of what had been accomplished since the creation of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991, Tölölyan surveyed the changing acceptions of the term that were already contained in the journal's guidelines:

Diaspora is dedicated to the multidisciplinary study of the history, culture, social structure, politics, and economics of both the traditional diasporas—Armenian, Greek, and Jewish—and the new transnational dispersions which in the past four decades have come

Cohen and Tölölyan was recorded at Oxford and covers the same ground as the one in Montpellier. It is available at: <http://vimeo.com/25020401> (June 13, 2011).

to be identified as 'diasporas.' These encompass groups ranging from the African-, Chinese-, Indian-, and Mexican-American to the Ukrainian- and Haitian-Canadian, the Caribbean-British, the Antillean-French, and many others.¹

His widely quoted preface to the first issue of the journal stresses the contesting dimension of diaspora in so far as it

shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile, community, overseas community, ethnic community. This is the vocabulary of transnationalism, and any of its terms can usefully be considered under more than one of its rubrics. (Tölölyan 1991: 3–4)

Cohen, for his part, adopts Safran's definition (Safran 1991) but also 'adapts and augments its contours' (Brazier 2008: 25). His own definition of diaspora serves as a theoretical grid for proponents as well as detractors of the term:

(1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambition; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; (4) an idealization of the supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries and (9) the possibility of a distinctive, creative enriching life in tolerant host societies.

(Cohen 1997: 180)

As the conversation between Cohen and Tölölyan predicted, various competing concepts—'creolization,' '*métissage*,' 'cosmopoli-

1. Originally published by Oxford University Press and now coming out three times a year from the University of Toronto Press, *Diaspora* is sponsored by the Zoryan Institute of Canada and Cambridge, MA. www.utpjournals.com/diaspora. Accessed August 18, 2012.

tanism' (Appiah 2006)—were alternatively put forward. Shu-mei Shih, for example, boldly entitled her intervention 'Against Diaspora,' arguing for the creation of Sinophone studies and critiquing the notion of 'the Chinese diaspora.' These strong intellectual statements are proof of an effort to think diaspora within the complexity that emerges from globalization as well as a need to move away from historically prevalent models, ill-suited to understand contemporary evolutions. Diachrony gives way to synchronic approaches and/or the two must be thought together: the term might remain, but the archetypal models (Jewish, Greek, Armenian) are displaced, complicated. Repeatedly, however, scholars warned against a facile understanding of historical 'progress' and expressed a need to revisit history. Globalization is not a novel phenomenon and cosmopolitanism no hallmark of the post-modern. The black diaspora was indeed global as the slave trade involved all the continents, and the islands of the Indian Ocean were the sites of a thriving cosmopolitan culture as far back as the 18th century (Lionnet 2011). One had to go to the social links and actual behaviors to tap and to map diaporic manifestations: transformation, production and reproduction of diasporic cultures caught in a pattern of repetition with difference and enmeshed in complex power relations. At the close of the conference was voiced a need to mobilize the resources of eco-criticism, feminist, gender, GLBT, queer theory and disability studies in relation to diasporas and diasporic consciousness.

The critical importance of the medium (interviews, autobiographical accounts, fiction, the visual arts, film and photography) and the central place of literature were two salient features of our common reflection. It is a truism to affirm that the literary text displays not only a mirror of the contemporary world, but also elements for an understanding of the consciousness and the elusive 'identity' of the diasporic subject. At its best, re-presentations also contain epistemological resources. Where the social sciences supply analyses and

figures, fiction, poetry, art work, in short, cultural productions, may even anticipate the insights delivered by objective data. More useful in the case of the dimension of consciousness or diaspora understood as an imagined community, these materials are invaluable testimonies, signal articulations of differences, as well as contributions to the construction of diaspora itself. The use of the Internet might be another resource for apprehending the changes in behaviors of diasporic peoples, notably the organization, the return process or the link to the homeland, as well as the connection to the host country. Is the outsider/insider pattern changing? Are migratory fluxes more versatile and complex in the 21st century? What is the role of the nation-state if one considers that diaspora challenges that very notion, linked as it is to transnationalism from the start (Tölölyan 1996)?

Scholars sought to undo binarisms (cf. cosmopolitanism *vs* Creole), dismantle essentialist constructs, such as that of 'the African diaspora', itself composed of other distinct and overlapping diasporas, proposed confrontations and confluences of terms to uncover the ideologies at work in maintaining their opposition. As Cohen insisted, crossovers and overlaps, scholars' inclinations to favor one term over another (globalization, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism) fuel intellectual undertakings and nourish research. Certain categories resist a neat classification. For instance, nationalism, troubled and contested by diaspora, is also coterminous with it in some cases. The theory of chaos, the privileging of discontinuities, gaps and fractures, the notion of 'traveling cultures' (Clifford 1992) and the theory of chaos were as many tools and intellectual ventures in attempts to describe the multidirectional, the plural, the liminal. Postmodernism and diaspora may thus seem to go hand in hand, but the postmodernist advocacy of the death of the subject and its understanding of History often led to the choice of another epistemological frame. The closeness of the field of postcolonial studies

to the notion of diaspora and its engagement in the evolution of the understanding of the term was reaffirmed, together with the centrality of language.

Although not the direct concern of this conference, 'race' emerged as the final notion in this triangulation. The current success of the term 'diaspora' could signal the declining significance of 'race' as a meaningful category in the field and in societies. Yet most interventions either foregrounded or at least took into account the racial factor, often in combination with religion or sexuality. The racialization of the other may be the cause of the foundational moment of expulsion that forces exile and effects dispersion. Where current scholarship prefers 'difference' to continuity, or even '*différance*' (Hall 1990), race resurfaced as constitutive of diasporic consciousness in peoples with a history of discrimination and oppression. The racialization of a population is at times concurrent with the advent of a diasporic community that contains this new 'race' (cf. 'the Yellow Peril'). Indeed race entertains with diaspora a complex yet close relationship that various examples bring to light: should not black nationalism and afrocentrism be analyzed as a particular manifestation of black diasporas? (Chivallon 2002). The terminology of diaspora is itself riddled with a process of racialization (cf. 'the South Asian'). The complexities of the relationship between diaspora and race will be at the heart of the next volumes in this diaspora series, emerging from the conferences 'Diasporas and "Race"' (Wake Forest University 2012) and 'African-Americans, "Race" and Diaspora' (Montpellier 2013). The conclusion (Oxford 2013) has been meant to be part of the conference organised by COMPAS and IMI, within the Oxford Diasporas Programme in June 2013.

This volume follows up on the discussions that took place during the four-day conference in Montpellier as it brings together the synergies that manifested themselves in our exchanges. It aims to contribute to the current debate about how diasporas have been

evolving, how they have modified the world we live in and our vision of it. Essays that were not among the original presentations have thus been included in our selection, so as to deepen our understanding and enrich the collection. Considering that diaspora studies must constantly reassess theoretical analyses and move beyond them to explore the myriad ways diasporic communities experience and refashion their lives, this volume focuses on the new junctures and disjunctures that emerge from increasingly fluid and diverse situations. Theorizations of diaspora do not have to be divorced from practices and specific trajectories and locales have to be examined in all their variety. We have thus sought to explore further the negotiations of hybrid lives and traversals as well as their representations.

As Jane Evans Braziel made clear, 'diaspora studies will need to move beyond theorizing how diasporic identities are constructed and consolidated and must ask, how are these diasporic identities practiced, lived, and experienced' (Braziel 2003: 9). Braziel later insisted on how critical it is to delineate 'the taxonomies and typologies of diasporas (or migrants)' as well as the 'often indistinct and overlapping boundaries between categories' (Braziel 2008: 28). If transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, *métissage* and creolization are coterminous with diaspora, other terms like migration, translocation, out-migration, transmigration, exile are also conceptually close to diaspora. Yet they must still be differentiated from it. Additionally one needs to be constantly reminded that an exile is not the same thing as a postcolonial *émigré*, as a refugee, as a political asylee, as a transnational corporate expatriate, as an internally displaced person (IDP), as an economic migrant or an undocumented worker (Braziel 2008). Our desire was to negotiate theoretical and pragmatic approaches to address heterogeneous situations while foregrounding aesthetic and literary representations. The volume is thus structured in four main thematic sections where the thread is a constant effort to problematize the different fields and terms, dia-

logically. The aim of these chapters is to offer new, more diversified and less normative angles of approach.

The first part '**Questioning Diasporas**' comprises four essays that map the different theoretical borders, territories and taxonomies associated with diaspora. It may be seen as somewhat provocative to open the volume with chapters that interrogate and even question the very notion that is central to our purpose, but this is precisely the aim of the collection. In '**Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Oceans and Insular Identities**' Françoise Lionnet's cornerstone of the Indian Ocean provides the first opportunity to think through the notions of diaspora in relation to cosmopolitanism and creolization and reevaluate them together. Building beyond Isabel Hofmeyr's argument, Lionnet argues that the Indian Ocean provides an excellent vantage point to redefine what it means to be 'Creole' and more specifically a 'Creole cosmopolitan', and to 'open up . . . binaries and the forms of entanglement they hide'. Lionnet interrogates the diffidence that still surrounds the concept of creolization and underlines the necessity to operate convergences and think the three concepts *together*. Understanding the islands of the Indian Ocean as 'cosmopolitan crucibles of creolized cultures' may well appear more crucial to the Western hemisphere than we think. And the example of the Chagossians' forced displacement 'can serve to modify the parameters by which scholars construct the idea of the cosmopolitan' in relation to the diasporan and the Creole.

If Lionnet brings into dialogue 'intellectual histories that have been viewed as distinct', Ashraf Rushdy analyzes another tense dialectic between two terms and two discourses, political apology and diaspora in the African American context. In '**An Apology for the African Diaspora: Race, Regret, and Reconciliation**', far from stopping at the breach that originally separated the two discourses, he thinks them *together* so as to understand the conditions and

meaning of the African dispersal. What is exactly at stake in the discourses of political apology as regards the African diaspora directly inherited from the slave trade? What role does 'race' play in the 'spectacles of public apology'? Rushdy examines how the African slave trade 'represents a moment, a breach, a rupture, a dispersal, a crime, around which two distinct ways of thinking have coalesced', and how 'race' is rearticulated in these two discourses.

In the context of the 'scattering of peoples from China across the globe', Shu-mei Shih in '**Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production**' contests the appropriateness of the use of the term 'Chinese diaspora'. Why should scholars continue to use a term that is political and/or ethnic in order to designate communities that should instead be defined by their linguistic specificities? Why allow the Chinese state to appropriate the Sinophone? Shih's chapter is programmatic, endeavouring to 'parse out a space for Sinophone studies' while doing away with misnomers and warped perceptions, and 'rethinking the relationship between roots and routes'. Not only does Shih debunk the whole concept of the 'Chinese diaspora'; she also asks a vital, more general question: how long can one remain diasporic, for how many generations? When is one allowed to be a 'local' if one wants to? Diasporas should have an 'expiration date'.

Indira Karamcheti's chapter '**Names and Global Habitations: the South Asian Diaspora and the Problem of the Proper Name**' focuses on a peculiarity of the Indian diaspora that is the inverse of the one Shih focused on—its inability to name itself by national origin. Migration and movement in the context of diasporas also include linguistic fluctuations which are far from being trivial. Karamcheti insists that 'the specific history of South Asian people in diaspora does not exist as a concrete and self-referential discourse' because it is always 'imagined in reference to the histories and movements of other peoples'. To understand the impact that such

a difficulty has had on South Asian diasporic identity, she concerns herself with the literature written by and about the South Asian diaspora, bringing into the conversation novels like M. G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003).

Karamcheti's chapter also provides a transition to the second part, '**Diasporic Discontinuities**'. While continuing to engage the theoretical debate, these essays focus on the literary and film representations of the gaps, discrepancies and other interstices of diasporic and migratory existence. Mireille Rosello's concern in '**Gypsy Hospitality: Tony Gatlif's *Gadjo Dilo***' is the transnational Roma community as represented in Gatlif's film. Just like the South Asian diaspora, the Romas are another people victim of the linguistic instability of the names used to refer to them. By bringing into focus the problematic encounter between a Frenchman and the Roma community in Gatlif's film, Rosello addresses the 'contradictory spaces of struggle' and 'unstable and contested link' between the individual and his/her community. She tackles identity politics as well as the difficulties to identify and 'put a border around' any given culture. The ultimate question is also how one defines and represents one's culture, and how a culture is to be carried across.

The following two chapters pinpoint other aspects of the dislocations that migrations entail. In '**Embracing Chaos: Winnie Mandela and the South African Diaspora**' Johan Jacob uses the concepts of diaspora, displacement, migration and relocation in the context of Njabulo Ndebele's four fictional case studies, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003). He approaches the history of South Africa through its large-scale external, regional and internal migrant flows, multidirectional as they are, to decipher how the concepts and the realities overlap. Well aware that not all displaced subjects are diasporic, Jacobs still seeks to identify what Aisha Khan calls a 'diasporic consciousness' and how it can be narrativized. Jacobs sets out to 'understand modern migration and formulate

an appropriate critical language for the cultural conditions it creates'. Bénédicte Ledent starts from the idea that literature should be used as a 'helpful [springboard] towards further conceptualization or re-conceptualization, instead of being read, as is still too often the case, as mere illustrations of existing theories'. In "**Mind the Gaps**": Caryl Phillips's *In the Falling Snow* and the **Generational Approach to Migration, Diaspora and Globalization**', she explores the boundaries and divides, the articulations and ramifications between the terms of diaspora, migration and globalization using the tools offered by Phillips's novel. Along with Phillips she scrutinizes the tensions, gaps and overlaps that separate and bring together three generations of migrants of African-Caribbean descent in the UK. The perspective of the main character-focalizer, Keith, and his ready-made perceptions, are constantly challenged to suggest that meaning can only be derived in relation and diversity, not in isolation and singularity. The novel, according to Ledent, helps reassess established categories and 'take stock of the complex web of possible interactions between the migratory, the diasporic and the global, and of their unavoidable solidarity in spite of the divergences that they also display'.

In further exploration of the terrains of diaspora and transnational mobility, the third part '**Diasporic Negotiations and Passages**' brings together four chapters that look into diasporic subjectivities from literary, linguistic and sociological angles. Echoing Ledent's approach to Black British literature, Corinne Duboin confronts canonical African-American literature with emergent transnational African immigrant writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Dinaw Mengestu, or Chris Abani, redefining the literary contours of the United States. The aim of '**New Transatlantic Passages: African Immigrant Writers and Contemporary Black Literature in America**' is to open up new vistas onto a constantly reshaping transatlantic world to understand the rising hybridization and the 'new ethnici-

ties' (Hall 1996) of an America where African Americans and new Black diasporas have to brush shoulders and negotiate different affiliations more fluidly. In '**Transnationalism, Memory and new Malaysian Diasporic Writings**' fluctuating boundaries and transnational shifts are also at the heart of Shantini Pillai's approach to emerging Malaysian diasporic writers like Preeta Samarasan and Hsu Ming Teo. She examines 'the disorientating visualizations of the homeland held together by the gossamer threads of memory and space' and how the novels of these new writers still reflect and refract questions related to belonging, to the nation and the former homeland.

The relationship to the homeland and homeland imaginings, as articulated by transnational young Palestinian Americans, are also what Louise Cainkar zooms in on in '**Managing Multiple Identities and the Diasporic Self**'. Through the comparison between recent interviews and earlier findings, we gain insight into the discrepancies that have sneaked into the perceptions of young Arab Americans whose parents have taken them 'back home' for short-term periods. How do they perceive their parents' homeland? How do they perceive their Americanness? Their Arabness? Again, what term is the most fitting to describe them? Diasporic, bi-national, transnational? Cainkar's chapter, and the following one, highlight the ways diasporic multiple identities are managed in everyday realities and sentiment. In '**Diaspora and Sociolinguistic Space: The Jamaican Community in Toronto**' Lars Hinrichs analyzes concrete examples of the dialect mix occurring in the Jamaican Canadian community in Toronto to grasp how multiple linguistic variations and 'super-diversity' (Blommaert 2010; Vertovec 2007) now inhabit the urban sociolinguistic space. Transnational mobility is here examined through its linguistic effects, as an interaction.

The fourth part, '**Diasporic Subjects: Plural, Gendered and Queer**', continues to delve into both concepts and practices by addressing

the ways in which diasporic subjects come to represent themselves. Adlai Murdoch's framework in '**Diaspora, Creolization, and the Boundaries of Caribbean Identity**' is the post-war Caribbean diaspora and the articulation of a transnational transformative space. Basing his analysis on the inward and outward migrations that have made the Caribbean a 'twice diasporized' space (Hall 1995), Murdoch posits the Caribbean as 'both a diasporized and a creolized society'. His focus on the francophone Caribbean leads him to develop an analysis of the 'insider-outsider' mentality and the perception of Frenchness. While continuing the investigation of terms and theoretical concepts, the last two articles encourage us to reflect on the ways gender and sexuality inflect diasporic constructions. In '**New Zealand Women Traveller Writers: from Exile to Diaspora**', Janet Wilson's discussion of four white settler women writers from the first half of the twentieth century, identifies a difference between Katherine Mansfield and Robin Hyde as writers in exile on the one hand, and Janet Frame and Fleur Adcock as diasporic writers on the other. Wilson seeks to understand the 'diasporic consciousness of alienation and alterity' and how each writer 'discover[s] ways of articulating the interior changes caused by travelling beyond the nation', whether return to the homeland happens or not. She further examines how perceptions of self and of the nation, as well as constructions of gender and filiations are destabilized in the journeying while new points of reference are created in writing.

Christine Vogt-William's '**Masculinities Out of Line: Navigating Queerness and Diasporic Identity in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night***' discusses how diaspora and queerness are imbricate, one inflecting the other. Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* are examined so as to fathom how identity, politics and desire are realigned in diasporic space. Vogt-William's reading of the two queer and transgender figures is 'an attempt to articulate the points of connection between diasporic tropes of movement

and the concept of masculinity, while interrogating established heteronormative contexts in these narratives'. Her chapter provides yet another perspective into the performance of diasporic identities.

The diverse trajectories covered in the following chapters are meant to help readers understand better the myriad ways diasporic lives and narratives are being constructed. This volume aims to bring out the multidimensionality of diaspora(s) and their evolving contours, as well as to offer theoretical forays and critical prospects in the field of diaspora studies.

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