

Unit 3

Diasporic Communities of the World

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Learning Objectives

The main objectives of this unit is to give:

- a comparative scenario of the different diasporas of the world;
- present a scenario whereby some generalities can be drawn about diasporas;
- understand specific situations and histories which make up individual diasporas; and
- be able to use some of the concept of diaspora studies to the understanding of different diasporas.

3.1 Introduction

People and communities have been migrating from place to place throughout history. The reasons for migration and movement have been many, from forced exile to seeking a better life through voluntary migration. While the immigrants adapt to the new place, to new circumstances, they also carry with them their culture, their way of life and memories and nostalgia for the old.

As mentioned in earlier, units the term Diaspora with the capital D was reserved for such movement of people especially the Jewish Diaspora. The Jewish community was forced to disperse throughout history for a variety of reasons. This initial reference to the Jewish Diaspora, is now extended to the Jewish community living outside the present state of Israel. The initial association of the term diaspora has now extended to all communities that are scattered through the globe. The term diaspora, without capitalization, thus, refers to the scattering of people, their language and culture from its original locale.

In this unit we will discuss the various diasporic communities and their context to give you an idea of the form and experience of diaspora defined as it is by specific experience and history. While there are many communities that have migrated over the past, some diasporas are known for their geographical spread, number, presence and influence. We are going to present a sampling of three diasporic communities, briefly discussing their specific situations. Since we are going to discuss the experience of Indian diasporas extensively we will not cover it in this unit.

We will start with the Jewish community, then take up the Chinese diaspora, and finally the African diaspora. We will briefly analyse the specific situations of these diasporas that will yield some broad generalizations. The choice of these three diasporas is in no way a comprehensive coverage, for there are numerous diasporas that are well worth an analyses but in order we to get a comprehensive, comparative picture we have chosen these three diasporas as broadly representing certain types of diasporas, to fully grasp the comparative situations of these communities. Let us first understand some basic features of diasporas and some categories through which we would like to analyse in the following section.

3.2 Understanding Diaspora

The reasons for migration of people from their settlement of origin-homeland are many. Sometimes it is forced, sometimes voluntary. Though we can make broad references to the possible reasons for people to migrate, the situations of migration are often very complicated. What may seem voluntary may actually be force of circumstances, like poverty, bad economy at home, in combination with certain pull factors which work to motivate migrants to look for greener pastures. While it is difficult to categorise migrants easily, in *Global Diasporas*, Cohen adopts a historical approach and identifies five different categories of diasporas, based on the forces underlying the original population dispersion: as victim (for example African-American, Jewish and Armenian), imperial (British), labor (Indian), trade (Chinese) and cultural (Caribbean). In some of these cases, such as that of the Chinese or we might take the example of the Senegalese vendors in the streets of Paris, Milan or New York City, there have been considerable population movements on a voluntary basis, not as the result of a defining traumatic event.

You will probably realize that the reasons are far more complicated when we talk about some of the diasporas in this unit. What is evident in our contemporary situation is that whatever be the reasons for migration, the level of mobility among people has increased tremendously . This increase in migration and consequent diasporic community presence in their host country has been attributed to globalisation and the increasing connectivity in the present world, whether through transportation, global communication network and globalisation of economy or media.

While there is increasing migration it is important to note that not all people who migrate can be classified as diasporic communities. Gabriel Sheffer in his book *Diaspora Politics* argues that a crucial point in trying to separate the transient migrant such as tourist asylum seekers, migrant guest worker, who live for a substantial time, from those who are part of a diasporic community. He, therefore, says that the question that needs to be posed is “why their (diasporas) members decide not only to maintain and nurture their ethno-national identities but also to be identified as such and to organize and act within the framework of diaspora organizations and to preserve contacts with their homeland and other communities of their homeland”(Sheffer,2003:17). It is obvious that many multiple -cultural, social

and economic-factors explain why, how and to what extent communities with a perceived sense of identity become significant collective forces, both with reference to their homeland and to host countries.

Steven Vertovec (1999) identifies three broad meanings of the term ‘diaspora’ as it has been increasingly used by many disciplines and by many scholars.

These meanings include: 'diasporas as social forms', 'diaspora as types of consciousness', and 'diaspora as modes of cultural production'. These aspects that Vertovec points out help is in locating the meaning of diaspora and how these communities express these aspects as we can see from some of the examples we have in the following box which have been brought out very succinctly in the magazine *The Economist*.

Box 3.1: The Influencing Diaspora

Why does Macedonia have no embassy in Australia? Why might a mountain in northern Greece soon be disfigured by an image of Alexander the Great 73 metres (nearly 240 feet) high? Who paid for the bloody war between Ethiopia and Eritrea? How did Croatia succeed in winning early international recognition as an independent country?

The short answer to each of these questions is a diaspora—a community of people living outside their country of origin. Macedonia has no embassy in Australia because Greeks think the former Yugoslav republic that calls itself Macedonia has purloined the name from them, and the Greek vote counts for a lot in Australia. So, as a sop to local Greeks outraged by its decision to recognise the upstart Macedonia, the Australian government has not yet allowed Macedonia to open an embassy in Canberra. The case of the missing embassy is an extreme, but typical, example of how diasporas have long exerted their influence: they have lobbied in their adopted countries for policies favourable to the homeland.

But now something new is taking place: diasporas are increasingly exerting influence on the politics of the countries they have physically, but not emotionally, abandoned. An example of this trend is the case of the monumental Alexander. The Greek diaspora is so proud of Alexander the Great, whose Macedonian kingdom encompassed what are now parts of northern Greece, and so keen to establish him as Greek, that it wants to carve his effigy on a cliff face on Mount Kerdyllion. The Greek authorities in Athens are horrified, but the Alexander the Great Foundation, based in Chicago, is eager to get chipping, and says its members will cover the \$45m cost. Grotesque as it may consider the scheme—the monument would be four times the size of the American presidents carved on Mount Rushmore—the Greek government may yield. It is to rich Greek-Americans that it turns when it wants to promote its interests in America.

Similarly, it was to its citizens abroad that Eritrea looked when it decided to wage a pointless border war between 1998 and 2000. Small, poor and just six years old, the country was in no position to fight its much bigger neighbour, Ethiopia. But of Eritrea's 3.8m people, about 333,000 were émigrés and, astonishingly, the government was able to tax their personal income at 2% a year. This helped to finance, and thus to perpetuate, a terrible war.

Croats abroad also did their bit for their country, both before and after independence in 1991. In the early 1990s, not long after European communism had collapsed but before the Yugoslav federation had begun to disintegrate, the cry went up in Croatia for Croats of the diaspora to come home. Some did, returning to fight in the war that broke out in 1991. Other Croats abroad raised money: as much as \$30m had been mustered by 1991. Meanwhile, Croat exiles were lobbying hard in Germany, which in turn bounced the European Union into early recognition of the new state. *Fiercely nationalist exiles forked out at least \$4m for the 1990 election campaign of Franjo Tudjman, Croatia's arch-nationalist president, and in return were awarded*

representation in parliament in 1992, by which time the country had won its independence. Twelve out of the 120 seats were allotted to diaspora Croats, who cast their votes in consulates abroad, or in community centres, clubs and churches designated by the authorities in Zagreb. By contrast, only seven seats were set aside for Croatia's ethnic minorities. (Source: *The Economist*, Jan 2nd 2003)

Scholars have pointed out that an important diasporic element is the affinity and nostalgia and longing for home, expressed both literally, culturally and metaphorically. Often enough this need for home and connection to it is considered an important ingredient for considering a community a diaspora. But not all communities are homogenous enough to have a very strong sense of consciousness as *a community* to begin with and yet still have a sense of affiliation, however tenuous to a sense of belonging to geographical space that need not necessarily be a nation. Thus we have the Africans who are too diverse and have differing experiences but who are still treated as diaspora that is worthy of analyses.

Let us now look at some of the diasporic experience to see how we can better understand the various concepts that we have discussed in our unit one, and the various theories and approaches that have been employed by scholars to understand diasporas of the world. As we narrate and analyse some of these diasporas, we strongly encourage you to relate the discussions and concepts from our previous two units to these situations.

3.3 Diasporas of the World

In recent times there has been large movement of people, more than ever in history. Increasing connectivity in the globe has facilitated the movement. The speedy transportation and revolutions in communication technology have made it possible for people to form networks and alliances with kin groups and friends who then help facilitate the migration of people. The socio-economic conditions and oppressive political systems, genocide and war have also added to the increase in migration of people who are looking for a better life outside their homelands.

While this century and the previous ones have witnessed massive migratory trends, it is not however that migration of people is new. People have always moved from one place to another throughout history. Some have painstakingly preserved the culture they carried with them in their host countries, while others have got assimilated to some extent or totally. Thus, for instance, the Jewish diaspora, the Greek diaspora and the Armenian diaspora go back to antiquity, and are the archetypical diaspora who have preserved their distinct identity. There were many other diasporas from ancient times like the Phoenicians, Assyrians Akkadians, Amorites, Phrygians, to name a few. Many of these established elaborate networks that persisted for long and which helped preserve their diasporic identities. But they gradually got assimilated into their host countries in totality or peripherally and they are not heard of in the contemporary world except for an occasional expression from the Assyrians.

Classifying Diasporas

As diasporas are on the increase there has been a need to understand some of these diasporas. Some, like Cohen, have tried to categorise them in terms

of the forces underlying the original dispersion (see previous section). Gabriel Shaffer in his book *Diaspora Politics* identifies diasporas in terms of their basic identity or linkage or non-linkage with the nation state. He further makes a distinction between large groups of people who are united in terms of their religion or affiliation against those who are united in terms of primordial affiliation such as ethnicity and also nation: he calls then ethno-national diasporas. Let see what Shaffer means by these distinctions.

According to him the state linked diasporas are those “that are in host countries but are connected to societies of their own ethnic origin that constitute a majority in their own in established states.” By stateless diasporas he means those groups of dispersed people “who have been unable to establish their own independent state” He includes in these categories groups such as the Palestenians, the Kurds, the Basques, the Sikhs, the Tibetans and many other such groups. He also includes such groups that are complex for they did not ever have distinct connection to a specific geographical place; these groups are the Gypsies, the black diaspora in Europe, South America and Latin America and in a sense also the African Americans. Shaffer adds: “These are borderline cases, because it is difficult for the majority of each of these diasporas to unequivocally define where their homeland is. Similarly under the current circumstances, these entities have neither the wish nor the power or resources to achieve the goal of establishing a nation state (Shaffer, 2003:74).

Shaffer makes another distinction in terms of the relative age of these diasporas. “Here distinction must be made among historical (or classical) diasporas, modern (or recent) diasporas and incipient diasporas(i.e., diasporas in the making, groups of migrants who are in the initial stages of forming organized diasporas)

According to Shaffer historical diasporas such as Jews, Greeks, Armenians and Chinese “emerged in antiquity or during the middle ages and now they have become linked to nation-states that were created in much later periods. In the following table Shaffer gives some estimated numbers of various diasporas whose dispersal can be traced back to many centuries ago. Following this table (Table 2.1) we have another table (2.2), which indicates the figures for what Shaffer calls modern diasporas: those diasporas which were established in the 17th century and who have fully fledged state linked, diasporas such as the Italian Polish, Irish etc. The third table (2.3) shows figures and host countries for emerging diasporas or the incipient diasporas, who are diasporas which have been dormant but have revived. They have become organized in their host countries and in their old homelands. Examples include notable segments of Polish, Croatian, Slovenian, Ukrainian and some Scandinavian groups in the U.S.A. and Australia.

It should however be noted that these are estimates only and not actual figures of diasporas. There are many difficulties in profiling different diasporas of the world and in gathering exact figures. To mention a few: the confusion between settlers and sojourners, migrants and diasporans and those who decided to join diasporic organizations by choice. Many times the confusion arises as each nation state has its own criteria for listing a group as such and such. Some have religious criteria, some ethnic and some others linguist. We do want you to get a broad picture of the different diasporas. So we present the following tables and categories that Gabriel Shaffer has come up with.

Diaspora	Number	Main host countries and areas
Armenian	5,500,000	Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Germany, France, US, Canada, Australia, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine and central Asian States
Chinese	35,000,000	Burma, Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan Japan, Thailand, US, Canada, Australia, Peru, South America, and Europe
German	2,500,000	US, Australia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe
Greek	4,000,000	Albania, Cyprus, Turkey, US, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Ethiopia, Germany Western Europe, Middle East
Indian	9,000,000	Fiji, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mauritius, Nepal, Burma, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, South Africa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Tobago, US, UK, Yemen, United Arab Emirates.
Jewish	8,000,000	US, Canada, South Africa, UK, France, Australia, Former Soviet Union, Latin America eastern Europe

Table 3.1: Modern Diasporas (Estimated Numbers in Main Host Countries)

Diaspora	Numbers	Main Host Countries and Areas
African-American	25,000,000	U.S.
Black Atlantic	1,500,000	U.S., Canada, U.K
Hungarian	4,500,000	Czechoslovakia, Romania, U.S., Canada, former Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia, former Soviet republics
Iranian	3,500,000	Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, U.K., Germany, U.S., Canada, Australia, Central America, South America, western Europe
Irish	10,000,000	U.S., U.K.
Italian	8,000,000	Britain, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, U.S., France, Australia, western Europe
Japanese	3,000,000	U.S., Hawaii, Brazil, Peru, Canada
Kurdish	14,000,000	Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Germany, France, other western European Countries

Lebanese	2,500,000	Egypt, Syria, Persian Gulf States, (Christian) Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, U.S., Australia, Canada, France, western Africa
Polish	4,500,000	U.S., Canada, western Europe former Soviet republics
Turkish	3,500,000	Germany, Bulgaria, Holland, Cyprus, Greece, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, U.S., Austria

**Table 3.2: Incipient Diasporas
(Estimated Numbers and Main Host Countries)**

Diaspora	Numbers	Main Host Countries and Areas
Albanian	1,000,000	Greece, Germany, Denmark, Swen, Norway, Hollan, Italy, U.S., former Yougoslavia
Algerian	1,500,000	France, Germany, Tunisia, Morocco
Bulgarian	500,000	U.S., various states in western Europe, Former Soviet republics
Colombian	250,000	U.S. Israel
Croatian	350,000	U.S, Canada, Australia
Cuban	750,000	U.S
Czech	2,500,000	U.S, various western European states Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, U.S., Canada Persian Gulf states, western European states
Egyptian	1,000,000	Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, U.S., Canada, Persian Gulf states
Filipino	2,000,000	U.S. Canada, Persian Gulf states, western European states
Israeli	750,000	U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia
Haitian	750,000	U.S. Canada, Bahamas
Jamaican	300,000	U.S.
Korean	3,500,000	China, Japan, U.S, Australia, former Soviet republics
Latvian	120,000	U.S., Canada, Australia
Lithuanian	850,000	U.S, Canada, Australia
Malayan	5,000,000	India, Thailand, Singapore
Mexican	20,000,000	U.S., Canada
Moroccan	1,500,000	France, Germany, Holland, Spain, Belgium, Denmark
Pakistani	750,000	United Kingdom, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Persian Gulf states
Portuguese	2,000,000	France Canada, U.S. U.K.
Puerto Rican	600,000	U.S.
Russian	25,000,000	US., Australia, western Europe, former Soviet Republics

Serbian	130,000	U.S., Canada, Australia
Slovak	1,500,000	Hungary, U.S, Canada, former Yugoslavia
Slovenian	200,000	U.S., Canada
Spanish	1,000,000	France, Germany, Switzerland, U.S., U.K., Canada
Syrian	750,000	Argentina, Brazil, U.S.
Tamil	3,200,000	Sri Lanka, U.S., Canada, Australia, western Europe
Ukrainian	1,800,000	Poland, Estonia, U.S., Canada, Australia
Vietnamese	1,000,000	Kampuchea, Japan, U.S., Canada

Reflection and Action 3.1

Do you think the Indian diaspora is highly influential in securing a foothold for themselves in their host country and also in influencing politics back home in India? Write your answer with substantive examples.

3.4 The Jewish Diaspora

The word Diaspora with the capital 'D' was associated with the Jewish community, as we mentioned earlier. "As late as 1975, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defined the term diaspora as 'the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile', as the 'area outside Palestine settled by Jews' and as 'the Jews living outside Palestine or modern Israel' until its 1993 edition. The term 'diaspora' being equated with the Jewish community is not very surprising because they are one of the oldest communities to have dispersed, endured and throughout their turbulent history they have held on to the notion of homeland. We will give here a brief survey of Jewish dispersal through history to understand why they are the archetypal diasporic community.

Jewish Dispersal in Ancient Times

Following Shaffer, we will not discuss whether there is historical validity to stories of Jewish diaspora but instead look for a narrative that fits the socio-psychological anchoring, whether through parables or myths, for a Jewish identity and the situation of the diaspora. Shaffer writes that despite the tribal origins of the Jewish population, the Jewish population set about a nation-building process which brought in a solidarity and coalescence of Jewish identity. He writes: In their emerging myth which became significant elements in the collective national memory and later were included in the Bible, the initial conquest and settlement in Eretz Israel were kept closely linked to the nation's founding fathers; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The strong attachment to the new homeland was extremely important because that was the locus of both the earliest process of nation building and gradual development of the Jewish monotheistic creed and formal religion. Eventually the national and religious elements became inextricably intertwined and suffused.

Let us keep this as our background and quickly go through a succession of Jewish exiles which make up the diaspora. In pure historical terms one of the earliest exiles is set at the time of the Assyrian invasion of northern

Israel, in 720 BCE. After the Assyrian conquest of the kingdom the elites and Jewish community were expelled to the peripheries of the kingdom. The Babylonian conquest in 586 BCE led to further dispersal and scattering of Jews. Partly because of the need for skilled labour and artisans in the Babylonian empire and partly because of the moderate religious, social and political view of Babylonia, the Jews managed to prosper reasonably. As more and more Jews diversified in terms of occupation and even through settlements they established networks among themselves and networks back home. As result of these, Babylon became the center of Jewish prosperity as well as cultural-religious activity (Cohen, 1997:4).

Around 330 BCE, all of Asia Minor and Major part of the Middle East came under Hellenic rule with Alexander conquering territories. Scholars feel that the Greek occupation brought the dispersed Jews together through stronger networks that were established in the Hellenic empire. The Roman Empire conquered Judea and completely destroyed the temples of Jerusalem. And especially after the Jewish revolt between 66-70 BCE, they come down very hard on Judea. When Judea became a Roman province, "the settlement of several Grecian and Roman colonies in Judea indicated the express intention of the Roman government to prevent the political regeneration of the Jewish nation." Nevertheless, forty years later, the Jews put forth efforts to recover their former freedom but failed. With this the Jews no longer had a reason to cling to a soil where the recollection of their past grandeur only helped to render more bitter the spectacle of their present humiliation.

Jewish Diaspora in Medieval and Contemporary Times

The destruction of Judea had a decisive influence on the dispersal of the Jewish community. They soon moved away from the traditional areas into Europe. They were spread far and wide in the entire Roman Empire, into Spain and in France. With the coming of Christianity, Jews faced further persecution that again prompted further dispersal into Northern and Eastern Europe.

In the 9th century A.D. the Roman Empire had managed to draw all its provinces under a common canonical law. Restrictions were imposed on interactions with Jews. The Church ordained rules for believers and for their treatment of non-believers. Intercourse with Jews was almost entirely forbidden to believers, and thereby a chasm was created between the adherents of the two religions, which could not be bridged. This chasm turned the Jews into organizing in ghettos. The Crusades in the middle ages added to the insecurity of the Jews.

In the First Crusade (1096), flourishing communities on the Rhine and the Danube were utterly destroyed; see German Crusade, 1096. In the Second Crusade (1147), the Jews in France suffered especially. Philip Augustus treated them with exceptional severity. In his days the Third Crusade took place (1188); and the preparations for it proved to be momentous for the English Jews. After unspeakable trials, Jews were banished from England in 1290; and 365 years passed before they were allowed to settle again in the British isles. The Jews were also subjected to attacks by the Shepherd Crusades of 1251 and 1320 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jews_in_the_Middle_Ages). Everywhere in the Christian Occident Jews were persecuted. The Jews, who were driven out of England in 1290, out of France in 1394, and out of numerous districts of Germany, Italy, and the Balkan peninsula between 1350

and 1450, were scattered in all directions, and fled preferably to the new Slavic kingdoms, where for the time being other religions were still tolerated. Here they found a sure refuge under benevolent rulers and acquired a certain prosperity, in the enjoyment of which the study of the Talmud was followed with renewed vigor. Together with their faith, they took with them the German language and customs, which they have cultivated in a Slavic environment with unexampled faithfulness up to the present time.

During the Renaissance and Enlightenment period there was more opening up of the Jewish community and greater participation in secular life. There was movement to come out of the ghettos, both literally and metaphorically. The movement is called Haskalah.

Box 3.2: Jewish Enlightenment

Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment, was a movement among European Jews in the late 18th century that advocated adopting enlightenment values, pressing for better integration into European society, and increasing education in secular studies, Hebrew, and Jewish history. Haskalah in this sense marked the beginning of the wider engagement of:

European Jews with the secular world, resulting, ultimately, in the first Jewish political movements and the struggle for Jewish emancipation. Haskalah also resulted in a revival of Jewish secular identity, with an emphasis on Jewish history and Jewish identity. The result was engagement of the Jews in a variety of ways with the countries in which they lived, including the struggle for Jewish emancipation and the birth of new Jewish political movements, and ultimately the development of Zionism in the face of the persecutions of the late 1800s. (source: [http : //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haskalah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haskalah))

The changes caused by the Haskalah movement coincided with rising revolutionary movements throughout Europe. Despite these movements, only France, Britain, and the Netherlands had granted the Jews in their countries equal rights with gentiles after the French Revolution in 1796. Elsewhere in Europe, especially where Jews were most concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe, Jews were not granted equal rights. It was in the revolutionary atmosphere of the mid-19th century that many movements would take place. While at one level Jews were trying to come out of their Ghetto existence, they were forced to go back to Ghettos during the Nazi occupation of 1939–45. Nazi Germany was one of the worst in the history of persecution of Jews. The genocide of Jews was state sponsored pogrom. It is estimated that about 12 million Jews were exterminated during this time. The ones who survived somehow managed to escape to the U.S.A. or South America, and many to their land of hope, Zion. By 1944 there was a huge Jewish population in Palestine, which was administered as a British province. After the holocaust the Zionist movement was the movement among the diaspora which was responsible for creation of the state of Israel. The Jewish diaspora and those who stayed continued to see the land as their spiritual home and as the Promised Land; there is no evidence of any interruption of the Jewish presence there for the last three millennia. For generations, the universal theme carried mostly religious overtones due to the belief that the Jewish people would return to Zion. The Zionist movement is noteworthy for its pan-Jewish integrating element. The aim of the Zionist movement was: the unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of their ancestral and Biblical

homeland in Israel. The movement believed in the ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, the Land of Israel, and in the preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish and Hebrew studies and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values. It fought for the protection of Jewish rights everywhere. Zionism, or the idea of a restored national homeland and common identity for the Jews, had already started to take shape by the mid-1800s.

Following World War II, the British announced their intention to withdraw from the British mandate of Palestine. The United Nations General Assembly proposed the partition of Palestine into two states, an Arab state and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem to be under United Nations administration. Most Jews in Palestine accepted the proposal, while most of the Arabs in Palestine rejected it. The Arabs totally rejected the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine (however, they were not under any legal obligation to accept the plan as General Assembly resolutions are not binding).

Violence between Arab and Jewish communities erupted almost immediately. Towards the end of the British mandate, the Jews planned to declare a separate state, a development the Arabs were determined to prevent. On May 14, 1948, the last British forces withdrew from Palestine, and the Jews, led by David Ben-Gurion, declared the creation of the State of Israel, in accordance with the 1947 UN Partition Plan.

The Arab-Israel conflict is an ongoing conflict today. We strongly encourage you to follow up this conflict in detail. We would not like to go into the details at this stage. We would stop here and look at another major diaspora of the world, namely the Chinese diaspora.

Reflection and Action 3.2

In what way does the present Arab-Israeli conflict reflect the long history of Jewish diaspora and their exiled state?

3.5 The Chinese Diaspora

The Chinese diaspora is one of the largest diasporas in the world. In sheer numbers and spread they surpass all other communities who have migrated from their original locale or homeland. There are an estimated 33 million Chinese who have migrated from mainland China, which now includes Hong Kong and Macau, and from Taiwan. Like the Greeks, Jews and Armenians, the Chinese too can be considered diaspora with historical roots going back to the medieval times. Many diasporas as we mentioned have a very strong connection to their homeland and aid in the strengthening of the nation-state. Though the Chinese diaspora is connected to the nation-state of the People's Republic of China their connection to the nation and state is far more indirect than of the Jews with Israel. Let us examine the case of Chinese diaspora in the sections below.

Chinese Diaspora through the Past

The Chinese people have a long history of migration overseas. The most noticeable migration happened during the Ming dynasty. Most of the Overseas Chinese (OC) were Han Chinese.

Box 3.3: Han Chinese

The term “Han Chinese” is used to distinguish the majority from the various minorities in and around China. The name comes from the Han Dynasty which succeeded the short-lived Qin Dynasty that reunited China. It was during the Qin Dynasty and the Han Dynasty that the various tribes of China began to feel that they belonged to the same ethnic group, compared with “barbarians” around them. In addition, the Han Dynasty is considered a high point in Chinese civilization, able to project its power far into Central and Northeast Asia. There are many subgroups within this overarching notion of Han identity however. The Han Chinese are the largest ethnic group in mainland China, 92% of Chinese are Hans. They are also the single largest ethnic group in the world—about 19% of the entire human population of the globe.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_Chinese

During the Ming Dynasty, Heng He, an envoy sent the Chinese to trade overseas through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Many of them never returned. The next wave of migration seems to have happened during the Yuan Dynasty, where the rulers were interested in setting up trade colonies. By the 14th century, there were Chinese settlements in Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, and Singapore. In the 15th century, the Chinese established colonies in Thailand and nearly hundred years after that in the Philippines.

Chinese Dispersion during 17th century was far more widespread than in the previous period. The colonial period saw a demand for labour in the Western world which took Chinese to these countries. The consolidation of colonies in Asia by the French and English saw increase in migration. “Some 6.3 million Chinese were estimated to have left Hong Kong alone between 1868 and 1939, and large numbers also left Xiamen (Amoy) and Shantou (Swatow). It was a movement dominated by men going overseas to work as indentured laborers, the infamous coolie trade, although others traveled more independently to seek their fortunes in the gold fields of Australia and the west coasts of North America and New Zealand. Some five million of the 6.3 million who left through Hong Kong were men. The majority moved to the economies in Southeast Asia that were being opened up by British and French colonial interests”(Skeldon, 2004)

(Source: www.migrationinformation.org).

Many who went abroad went as sojourners-people who went in the hope of making it rich, returning, marrying and settling down. Though many could not return for whatever reason, the fact that these émigrés went as sojourners, helped maintain some contact with the homeland and kindle the longing and nostalgia for home and added to the circular nature of the migration pattern, unlike people who migrated for reasons of settling as did the Europeans to the New World and to Australia. The fact that many could not get assimilated into their host country and the discrimination they faced racially and culturally further honed their sense of diasporic identity. Except for Thailand and the Philippines, where they are fairly integrated, most societies including South Asian countries did not want the Chinese to be part of them. They feared their business acumen; you find those fears even now in countries like Malaysia for instance.

“The marginalization of most Chinese extended to their virtual exclusion from entry into the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand from

the 1880s, because of racist legislation that was not rescinded until after World War II. Migration from China from the late 19th century until the late 1940s was therefore, with some notable periods of interruption, directed primarily towards the then European colonies of Southeast Asia. Male dominance, sojourner mentality, exclusion, and marginality gave this early Chinese migration an “exceptional” character, one that was important for the migrations that were to come later”(ibid).

Migration after World War II

After the formation of the Republic of China, migration was strictly restricted except as students to the Soviet Union or as specialist workers to developing countries in Africa. Most of the migration was internal. A million people migrated to the then British colony of Hong Kong (almost half a million entered Hong Kong between 1977 and 1982, for example). And another million fled to Taiwan.

Most of the migration came from the peripheral Chinese world from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia. Most of these early migrants were unskilled workers heading to Western Europe especially to Britain. But with America, Australia and New Zealand opening up in the 1960s and 70s there was a different kind of migration, of skilled, educated professionals and their families. The policies in host countries, which went past their earlier racist notion, was one of the chief reasons for the spurt in migration. Also, the Chinese nation, especially after the reforms of 1979, stopped its inward looking policies of earlier decades and made efforts to avail of every opportunity that came its way. Apart from the more permanent settlers they are guest workers and students who travel abroad. Chinese students are among the leading student population in Western countries especially in Canada, the U.S.A. and Japan. “From 215 foreign students from China in Canada in 1980, the number increased to 11,138 in 2001. In the United States in 2002-2003, there were some 64,757 students from China in degree-granting institutions. Students from China have also been going to Japan for a considerable time, accounting for about half of the 64,000 foreign students in that country in 2000”.

These diasporic communities were varied in their context and their sense of identity was similarly varied.

Identity: Assimilation and Relationship with Home

Overseas Chinese vary widely as to their degree of assimilation, their interactions with the surrounding communities (see Chinatown), and their relationship with China. In Thailand, overseas Chinese have largely intermarried and assimilated with the native community. In Myanmar, the Chinese rarely intermarry (even amongst different Chinese linguistic groups), but have largely adopted the Burmese culture whilst maintaining Chinese culture affinities. Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar are among the countries that do not allow birth names to be registered in Chinese. In Vietnam, ethnic Chinese are required to have Vietnamized spellings of their names. For example, Hu Jintao would become “Ho Cam Đào”.

Very often, there is no distinct number of the Chinese population in these countries. On the other hand, in Malaysia and Singapore, overseas Chinese have maintained a distinct communal identity, though the rate and state of being assimilated to the local, in this case a multicultural society, is currently

en par with that of other Chinese communities (see Peranakan). In the Philippines, many younger Overseas Chinese are well assimilated, whereas the older ones tend to be considered as “foreigners”. More recent overseas Chinese immigrants have been despised by many Filipinos due to incidents of some selling illegal drugs, as well as being high profile smugglers. Chinese have also brought a cultural influence to some other countries such as Vietnam, where many customs have been adopted by native Vietnamese.

The relationship of the home with the émigrés in mainland China and in Taiwan has been evolving and it is very complex. Earlier part of communist nation building expected Chinese to have one singular loyalty, that is to China. The émigrés were looked at with suspicion as being capitalist infiltrators. After Deng Xiaoping’s reforms the Chinese diaspora is courted by the state to help in the economic development process of China. Thus a lot of facilities and special provisions are provided for them.

While the above two varieties of diasporas are linked to the idea of home which was both a promise (for a long time for the Jewish community) and reality, as empires and nation state existed for the Chinese, the African experience is different. Let us briefly look in the African diaspora in our next section.

Reflection and Action 3.3

Do you think the Chinese diaspora is similar to the Indian diaspora and if so, in what way?

3.6 The African Diaspora

The African diaspora or Afro diaspora is the diaspora created by the movements and culture of Africans and their descendants throughout the world, to places such as the Americas (including the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America), Europe and Asia. The majority of the African diaspora is descended from people taken into slavery, with the largest population living in the United States. In recent years they include a rising number of voluntary emigrants and asylum-seekers as well.

More broadly, the African diaspora comprises the indigenous peoples of Africa and their descendants, wherever they are in the world. Pan-Africanists often also consider other Negroid (or “Africoid”) peoples as diasporic “African peoples.” These groups include Negritos of the Andamanese islands, Philippines and the Malay Peninsula (Orang Ash), New Guinea, certain peoples of the Indian subcontinent, and the aboriginal peoples of Melanesia and Micronesia.

The African Union has defined the African diaspora as “of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union.” Its constitutive act declares that it shall “invite and encourage the full participation of the African diaspora as an important part of our Continent, in the building of the African Union.” St Claire Drake (1996) feels that this feeling of Pan Africanism is an important criterion for recognizing it as diaspora. However pertinent questions need to be asked pertaining to identifying the major characteristics of the African diaspora. Do people of the diaspora share an emotional bond? Are they aware of the alienation that may accompany the voluntary or involuntary

leaving of one's homeland? How prevalent is the sense of return to the homeland? Once again, why do some return and others do not? Then there is always the important issue of identity. Moving from one's traditional society and culture to that of a host area conjure up all types of issues related to identity. For example, a West African taken from his home and enslaved in Jamaica for several years is then transported to a household in Britain. Who is this person? Is he African, Jamaican, or English? One cannot properly understand the status, condition, or mindset of this individual without recognizing the origins and journeys around the triangle. To be sure, this person's varied experiences shaped his or her sense of self and worldview. Africa is not a homogenous continent. Therefore, the experiences of peoples of the diaspora should not be homogenized. Linkages and connections within the diaspora may be identified but human experiences are usually different.

3.7 Conclusion

We have tried to look at some of the diasporas of the world in this unit. We have tried to introduce to you the tumultuous history of the Jewish Diaspora, one of the oldest diasporas in the world. We have seen how the Jewish Diaspora and the identity stemming from a nation state are so intrinsically tied up. Whereas the Chinese diaspora is a little different, ethnicity ties them together besides the identity of belonging to a nation. In the case of the African diaspora there are many nuanced aspects that hold a very disparate and varied sections of people who have ancestry and perhaps a similar history holding together. In our previous two units we have tried to grapple with some of the concepts and perspectives. These perspectives and the concepts, as you may be aware, are equally applicable to some of the diasporas we have talked about in this unit.

3.8 Further Reading

Brah, Avtar 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London & New York: Routledge

Cohen, R 1997. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, Washington University Press: Washington