



## Diaspora

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### What is it?

The term *diaspora* comes from the Greek and means dispersion or scattering. It was first used in a biblical reference to the Jews leaving Babylonia; thus diasporas are communities dispersed from their original home. In the original use, diasporic groups (i.e., Jews and Armenians) were forced out of their homelands, and they held onto the vision and memory of home, and nurtured desires to return. Such groups coalesced around a political cause for the nation and maintained a separate identity in the place of residence. These ideal characteristics of diaspora no longer hold in every case. Diasporic groups are likely to become embedded in their new homes and engage in local politics. Their links to the homeland are sentimental and most do not desire to return but instead maintain degrees of diasporic consciousness of home as roots and memory. Diasporas are also a hybrid melding of cultures as is the case with the Black Atlantic, an African diaspora formed of African, American, Caribbean and British cultures in a context of colonial and postcolonial struggles. But the definition of diaspora is a matter of contention among scholars. Some refer to any scattering, including voluntary migration, as a diaspora. Others argue that such an approach removes specificity and analytical utility from the term.

### Who uses the concept?

Anthropologists, political scientists, historians and intercultural communication scholars analyze forms of diasporic identifications, relations between diaspora groups and home countries, diasporic memories, and media use. Recent communication studies demonstrated involvement of diasporic groups in the Arab Spring through social media.

Scholars also examine diasporic entertainment media such as film, music, and online games. Old and new media enable negotiations of national identity, cultural empowerment, community building across distances, and enactments of memory.

### Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Diasporic groups live among other groups and connect across vast physical distances with groups that might share their descent but have different local cultural experiences and identity. Intercultural dialogue is thus at the center of diasporic identification and politics.

### What work remains?

The most promising work on diaspora examines the use of new media and its effects on maintaining connections between physically separated group members. We also still need to know how the dynamically changing globalization structures, such as state integration, capitalism, and growing nationalism, shape diasporic identity, belonging, and politics of descent.

### Resources

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