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Source: *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future (Aug., 1994), pp. 302-338

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of the [American Anthropological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365>

Accessed: 28/07/2013 09:27

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Diasporas

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This essay asks what is at stake, politically and intellectually, in contemporary invocations of diaspora. It discusses problems of defining a traveling term, in changing global conditions. How do diaspora discourses represent experiences of displacement, of constructing homes away from home? What experiences do they reject, replace, or marginalize? How do these discourses attain comparative scope while remaining rooted/routed in specific, discrepant histories? The essay also explores the political ambivalence, the utopic/dystopic tension, of diaspora visions that are always entangled in powerful global histories. It argues that contemporary diasporic practices cannot be reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or of global capitalism. While defined and constrained by these structures, they also exceed and criticize them: old and new diasporas offer resources for emergent “postcolonialisms.” The essay focuses on recent articulations of diasporism from contemporary black Britain and from anti-Zionist Judaism: quests for nonexclusive practices of community, politics, and cultural difference.

A few caveats are in order. This essay has the strengths and weaknesses of a survey: one sees the tips of many icebergs. Moreover it attempts to map the terrain and define the stakes of diaspora studies in polemical and sometimes utopian ways. There is sometimes a slippage in the text between invocations of diaspora theories, diasporic discourses, and distinct historical experiences of diaspora. These are not, of course, equivalent. But in practice it has not always been possible to keep them clearly separate, especially since I am discussing a kind of “theorizing” that is always embedded in particular maps and histories. While the essay strives for comparative scope, it retains a certain North American bias. For example, it sometimes assumes a pluralist state based on ideologies (and uneven accomplishments) of assimilation. While nation-states must always, to a degree, integrate diversity, they need not do so on these terms. Words such as *minority*, *immigrant*, and *ethnic* will thus have a distinctly local flavor for some readers. Local, but translatable. I have begun to account for gender bias and class diversity in my topic. More needs to be done here, as well as in other

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domains of diasporic complexity where currently I lack competence or sensitivity.

Tracking Diaspora

An unruly crowd of descriptive/interpretive terms now jostle and converse in an effort to characterize the contact zones of nations, cultures, and regions: terms such as *border*, *travel*, *creolization*, *transculturation*, *hybridity*, and *diaspora* (as well as the looser *diasporic*). Important new journals, such as *Public Culture* and *Diaspora* (or the revived *Transition*), are devoted to the history and current production of transnational cultures. In his editorial preface to the first issue of *Diaspora*, Khachig Tölölian writes, "Diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment." But he adds that diaspora will not be privileged in the new "Journal of Transnational Studies" and that "the term that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community" (Tölölian 1991:4–5). This is the domain of shared and discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories, that we need to sort out and specify as we work our way into a comparative, intercultural studies.

It is now widely understood that the old localizing strategies—by bounded *community*, by organic *culture*, by *region*, by *center* and *periphery*—may obscure as much as they reveal. Roger Rouse makes this point forcefully in his contribution to *Diaspora*'s inaugural issue. Drawing on research in the linked Mexican communities of Aguililla (Michoacán) and Redwood City (California), he argues as follows:

It has become inadequate to see Aguilillan migration as a movement between distinct communities, understood as the loci of distinct sets of social relationships. Today, Aguilillans find that their most important kin and friends are as likely to be living hundreds or thousands of miles away as immediately around them. More significantly, they are often able to maintain these spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them to their neighbors. In this regard, growing access to the telephone has been particularly significant, allowing people not just to keep in touch periodically but to contribute to decision-making and participate in familial events from a considerable distance. [Rouse 1991:13]

Separate places become effectively a single community "through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information" (Rouse 1991:14). "Transnational migrant circuits," as Rouse calls them, exemplify the kinds of complex cultural formations that current anthropology and intercultural studies describe and theorize.¹

Aguilillans moving between California and Michoacán are not in diaspora; there may be, however, diasporic dimensions to their practices and cultures of displacement, particularly for those who stay long periods, or permanently, in Redwood City. Overall, bi-locale Aguilillans inhabit a *border*, a site of regulated and subversive crossing. Rouse appeals to this transnational paradigm

throughout, giving it explicit allegorical force by featuring a photo of the famous wedding of Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Emily Hicks, staged by the Border Arts Workshop of San Diego-Tijuana at the point where the U.S./Mexico *frontera* crumbles into the Pacific. Border theorists have recently argued for the critical centrality of formerly marginal histories and cultures of crossing (Anzaldúa 1987; Calderon and Saldívar 1991; Flores and Yudice 1990; Hicks 1991; Rosaldo 1989). These approaches share a good deal with diaspora paradigms. But borderlands are distinct in that they presuppose a territory defined by a geopolitical line: two sides arbitrarily separated and policed, but also joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication. Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-locale diaspora cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary. It is worth holding onto the historical and geographical specificity of the two paradigms, while recognizing that the concrete predicaments denoted by the terms *border* and *diaspora* bleed into one another. As we will see below, diasporic forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations. And dispersed peoples, once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labor migration. Airplanes, telephones, tape cassettes, camcorders, and mobile job markets reduce distances and facilitate two-way traffic, legal and illegal, between the world's places.

This overlap of border and diaspora experiences in late-20th-century everyday life suggests the difficulty of maintaining exclusivist paradigms in our attempts to account for transnational identity formations. When I speak of the need to sort out paradigms and maintain historical specificity, I do not mean the imposition of strict meanings and authenticity tests. (The quintessential borderland is El Paso/Juárez. Or is it Tijuana/San Diego? Can *la ligna* be displaced to Redwood City, or to Mexican American neighborhoods of Chicago?) William Safran's essay in the first issue of *Diaspora*, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" (1991), seems, at times, to be engaged in such an operation. His undertaking and the problems it encounters may help us to see what is involved in identifying the range of phenomena we are prepared to call *diasporic*.

Safran discusses a variety of collective experiences in terms of their similarity and difference from a defining model. He defines diasporas as follows: "expatriate minority communities" (1) that are dispersed from an original "center" to at least two "peripheral" places; (2) that maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; (3) that "believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host country"; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) of which the group's

consciousness and solidarity are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991:83–84). These, then, are the main features of diaspora: a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship.

“In terms of that definition,” Safran writes, “we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them fully conforms to the ‘ideal type’ of the Jewish diaspora” (1991:84). Perhaps a hesitation is expressed by the single quotes surrounding “ideal type,” a sense of the danger in constructing a definition, here at the outset of an important comparative project, that identifies the diasporic phenomenon too closely with one group. Indeed, large segments of Jewish historical experience do not meet the test of Safran’s last three criteria: a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland. Safran himself later notes that the notion of return for Jews is often an eschatological or utopian projection in response to a present dystopia. And there is little room in his definition for the principled *ambivalence* about physical return and attachment to land which has characterized much Jewish diasporic consciousness, from biblical times on. Jewish anti-Zionist critiques of teleologies of return are also excluded. (These strong “diasporist” critiques will be discussed below.)

It is certainly debatable whether the cosmopolitan Jewish societies of the 11th- to 13th-century Mediterranean (and Indian Ocean), the *geniza world* documented by the great historian of transnational cultures, S. D. Goitein, was oriented as a community, or collection of communities, primarily through attachments to a lost homeland (Goitein 1967–93). This sprawling social world was linked through cultural forms, kinship relations, business circuits, and travel trajectories as well as through loyalty to the religious centers of the diaspora (in Babylon, Palestine, and Egypt). The attachment to specific cities (sometimes superseding ties of religion and ethnicity) characteristic of Goitein’s medieval world casts doubt on any definition that would “center” the Jewish diaspora in a single land. Among Sephardim after 1492, the longing for “home” could be focused on a city in Spain at the same time as on the Holy Land. Indeed, as Jonathan Boyarin has pointed out, Jewish experience often entails “multiple experiences of rediasporization, which do not necessarily *succeed* each other in historical memory but echo back and forth” (Jonathan Boyarin, personal communication, October 3, 1993).

As a multiply-centered diaspora network, the medieval Jewish Mediterranean may be juxtaposed with the modern *black Atlantic* described by Paul Gilroy, whose work will be discussed below. While the economic and political bases of the two networks may differ—the former commercially self-sustaining, the latter caught up in colonial/neocolonial forces—the cultural forms sustaining and connecting the two scattered “peoples” are comparable within the range of diasporic phenomena. In Safran’s prefiguration of a comparative field—es-

pecially in his “centered” diaspora model, oriented by continuous cultural connections to a source and by a teleology of “return”—African American/ Caribbean/British cultures do not qualify. These histories of displacement fall into a category of quasi diasporas, showing only some diasporic features or moments. Similarly, the South Asian diaspora—which, as Amitav Ghosh has argued (1989), is not so much oriented to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations—falls outside the strict definition.

Safran is right to focus attention on defining *diaspora*. What is the range of experiences covered by the term? Where does it begin to lose definition? His comparative approach is certainly the best way to specify a complex discursive and historical field. Moreover his juxtapositions are often very enlightening, and he does not, in practice, strictly enforce his definitional checklist. But we should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like *diaspora* by recourse to an “ideal type,” with the consequence that groups become identified as more or less diasporic, having only two, or three, or four of the basic six features. Even the “pure” forms, I’ve suggested, are ambivalent, even embattled, over basic features. Moreover at different times in their history, societies may wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities—obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections—in their host countries and transnationally.

We should be able to recognize the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of diaspora without making that history a definitive model. Jewish (and Greek and Armenian) diasporas can be taken as nonnormative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions. For better or worse, diaspora discourse is being widely appropriated. It is loose in the world, for reasons having to do with decolonization, increased immigration, global communications, and transport—a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling, and traveling within and across nations. A more polythetic definition (Needham 1975) than Safran’s might retain his six features, along with others. I have already stressed, for example, that the transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland—at least not to the degree that Safran implies. Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin.

Whatever the working list of diasporic features, no society can be expected to qualify on all counts, throughout its history. And the discourse of diaspora will necessarily be modified as it is translated and adopted. For example, the Chinese diaspora is now being explicitly discussed.² How will this history, this articulation of travels, homes, memories, and transnational connections, appropriate and shift diaspora discourse? Different diasporic maps of displacement and connection can be compared on the basis of family resemblance, of shared elements, no subset of which is defined as essential to the discourse. A

polythetic field would seem most conducive to tracking (rather than policing) the contemporary range of diasporic forms.

Diaspora's Borders

A different approach would be to specify the discursive field diacritically. Rather than locating essential features, we might focus on diaspora's borders, on what it defines itself against. And, we might ask, what articulations of identity are currently being replaced by diaspora claims? It is important to stress that the relational positioning at issue here is not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tension. Diasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by "tribal" peoples.

The nation-state, as common territory and time, is traversed and, to varying degrees, subverted by diasporic attachments. Diasporic populations do not come from elsewhere in the same way that "immigrants" do. In assimilationist national ideologies such as those of the United States, immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place. Such narratives are designed to integrate immigrants, not people in diasporas. Whether the national narrative is one of common origins or of gathered populations, it cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere. Peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be "cured" by merging into a new national community. This is especially true when they are the victims of ongoing, structural prejudice. Positive articulations of diaspora identity reach outside the normative territory and temporality (myth/history) of the nation-state.³

But are diaspora cultures consistently antinationalist? What about their own national aspirations? Resistance to assimilation can take the form of reclaiming another nation that has been lost, elsewhere in space and time, but powerful as a political formation here and now. There are, of course, antinationalist nationalisms, and I do not want to suggest that diasporic cultural politics are somehow innocent of nationalist aims or chauvinist agendas. Indeed, some of the most violent articulations of purity and racial exclusivism come from diaspora populations. But such discourses are usually weapons of the (relatively) weak. It is important to distinguish nationalist critical longing and nostalgic or eschatological visions, from actual nation building—with the help of armies, schools, police, and mass media. Nation and nation-state are not identical.⁴ A certain prescriptive antinationalism, now intensely focused by the Bosnian horror, need not blind us to differences between dominant and subaltern claims. Diasporas have rarely founded nation-states: Israel is the prime example. And such "homecomings" are, by definition, the negation of diaspora.

Whatever their ideologies of purity, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms. Diaspora is

different from travel (though it works through travel practices) in that it is not temporary. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (and in this it is different from exile, with its frequently individualistic focus). Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres (1987), forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. Diaspora cultures are not separatist, though they may have separatist or irredentist moments. The history of Jewish diaspora communities shows selective accommodation with the political, cultural, commercial, and everyday life forms of “host” societies. And the black diaspora culture currently being articulated in postcolonial Britain is concerned to struggle for different ways to be “British”—ways to stay and be different, to be British *and something else* complexly related to Africa and the Americas, to shared histories of enslavement, racist subordination, cultural survival, hybridization, resistance, and political rebellion. Thus the term *diaspora* is a signifier, not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement. The simultaneous strategies of community maintenance and interaction combine the discourses and skills of what Vijay Mishra has termed *diasporas of exclusivism* and *diasporas of the border* (1994).

The specific cosmopolitanisms articulated by diaspora discourses are in constitutive tension with nation-state/assimilationist ideologies. They are also in tension with indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims. These challenge the hegemony of modern nation-states in a different way. Tribal or “Fourth World” assertions of sovereignty and “first nationhood” do not feature histories of travel and settlement, though these may be part of the indigenous historical experience. They stress continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and often a “natural” connection to the land. Diaspora cultures, constituted by displacement, may resist such appeals on political principle—as in anti-Zionist Jewish writing, or in black injunctions to “stand” and “chant down Babylon.” And they may be structured around a tension between return and deferral: “religion of the land”/“religion of the book” in Jewish tradition; or “roots”/“cut ’n’ mix” aesthetics in black vernacular cultures.

Diaspora exists in practical, and at times principled, tension with nativist identity formations. The essay by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin that I will discuss below makes a diasporist critique of autochthonous (“natural”) but not indigenous (“historical”) formulations. When claims to “natural” or “original” identity with the land are joined to an irredentist project and the coercive power of an exclusivist state, the results can be profoundly ambivalent and violent, as in the Jewish state of Israel. Indeed, claims of a primary link with “the homeland” usually must override conflicting rights and the history of others in the land. Even ancient homelands have seldom been pure or discrete. Moreover, what are the historical and/or indigenous rights of *relative* newcomers—fourth-generation Indians in Fiji, or even Mexicans in the southwestern United States

since the 16th century? How long does it take to become “indigenous”? Lines too strictly drawn between “original” inhabitants (who often themselves replaced prior populations) and subsequent immigrants risk ahistoricism. With all these qualifications, however, it is clear that the claims to political legitimacy made by peoples who have inhabited a territory since before recorded history and those who arrived by steamboat or airplane will be founded on very different principles.

Diasporist and autochthonist histories, the aspirations of migrants and natives, do come into direct political antagonism; the clearest current example is Fiji. But when, as is often the case, both function as “minority” claims against a hegemonic/assimilationist state, the antagonism may be muted. Indeed there are significant areas of overlap. “Tribal” predicaments, in certain historical circumstances, are diasporic. For example, inasmuch as diasporas are dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement, adaptation, and so forth, the kinds of transnational alliances currently being forged by Fourth World peoples contain diasporic elements. United by similar claims to “firstness” on the land and by common histories of decimation and marginality, these alliances often deploy diasporist visions of return to an original place—a land commonly articulated in visions of nature, divinity, mother earth, and the ancestors.

Dispersed tribal peoples, those who have been dispossessed of their lands or who must leave reduced reserves to find work, may claim *diasporic* identities. Inasmuch as their distinctive sense of themselves is oriented toward a lost or alienated home defined as aboriginal (and thus “outside” the surrounding nation-state), we can speak of a diasporic dimension of contemporary tribal life. Indeed, recognition of this dimension has been important in disputes about tribal membership. The category tribe, which was developed in U.S. law to distinguish settled Indians from roving, dangerous “bands,” places a premium on localism and rootedness. Tribes with too many members living away from the homeland may have difficulty asserting their political/cultural status. This was the case for the Mashpee who, in 1978, failed to establish continuous “tribal” identity in court (Clifford 1988:277–346).

Thus, when it becomes important to assert the existence of a dispersed people, the language of diaspora comes into play, as a moment or dimension of tribal life.⁵ All communities, even the most locally rooted, maintain structured travel circuits, linking members “at home” and “away.” Under changing conditions of mass communication, globalization, post- and neocolonialism, these circuits are selectively restructured and rerouted according to *internal and external* dynamics. Within the diverse array of contemporary diasporic cultural forms, tribal displacements and networks are distinctive. For in claiming both autochthony and a specific, transregional worldliness, new tribal forms bypass an opposition between rootedness and displacement—an opposition underlying many visions of modernization seen as the inevitable destruction of autochthonous attachments by global forces. Tribal groups have, of course, never been simply “local”: they have always been rooted and routed in particu-

lar landscapes, regional and interregional networks.⁶ What may be distinctively *modern*, however, is the relentless assault on indigenous sovereignty by colonial powers, transnational capital, and emerging nation-states. If tribal groups survive, it is now frequently in artificially reduced and displaced conditions, with segments of their populations living in cities away from the land, temporarily or even permanently. In these conditions, the older forms of tribal cosmopolitanism (practices of travel, spiritual quest, trade, exploration, warfare, labor migrancy, visiting, and political alliance) are supplemented by more properly diasporic forms (practices of long-term dwelling away from home). The permanence of this dwelling, the frequency of returns or visits to homelands, and the degree of estrangement between urban and landed populations vary considerably. But the specificity of tribal diasporas, increasingly crucial *dimensions* of collective life, lies in the relative proximity and frequency of connection with land-based communities claiming autochthonous status.

I have been using the term *tribal* loosely to designate peoples who claim natural or *first-nation* sovereignty. They occupy the autochthonous end of a spectrum of indigenous attachments: peoples who deeply “belong” in a place by dint of continuous occupancy over an extended period. (Precisely how long it takes to *become* indigenous is always a political question.) Tribal cultures are not diasporas; their sense of rootedness in the land is precisely what diasporic peoples have lost. And yet, as we have seen, the tribal-diasporic opposition is not absolute. Like *diaspora*’s other defining border with hegemonic nationalism, the opposition is a zone of relational contrast, including similarity and entangled difference. In the late 20th century, all or most communities have diasporic dimensions (moments, tactics, practices, articulations). Some are more diasporic than others. I have suggested that it is not possible to define diaspora sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to privative oppositions. But it is possible to perceive a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement. The currency of these responses is inescapable.

The Currency of Diaspora Discourses

The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home. This sense of connection must be strong enough to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating, and distancing. Many minority groups that have not previously identified in this way are now reclaiming diasporic origins and affiliations. What is the currency, the value and the contemporaneity, of diaspora discourse?

Association with another nation, region, continent, or world-historical force (such as Islam) gives added weight to claims against an oppressive national hegemony. Like tribal assertions of sovereignty, diasporic identifications reach beyond mere ethnic status within the composite, liberal state. The phrase *diasporic community* conveys a stronger sense of difference than, say, *ethnic neighborhood* did in the language of pluralist nationalism. This strong difference, this sense of being a “people” with historical roots and destinies outside

the time/space of the host nation, is not separatist. (Rather, separatist desires are just one of its moments.) Whatever their eschatological longings, diaspora communities are “not-here” to stay. Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place. If we think of displaced populations in almost any large city, the transnational urban swirl recently analyzed by Ulf Hannerz (1992), the role for mediating cultures of this kind will be apparent.

Diasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse.⁷ Transnational connections break the binary relation of *minority* communities with *majority* societies—a dependency that structures projects of both assimilation and resistance. And it gives a strengthened spatial/historical content to older mediating concepts such as W. E. B. Du Bois’s *double consciousness*. Moreover, diasporas are not exactly immigrant communities. The latter could be seen as temporary, a site where the canonical three generations struggled through a hard transition to ethnic American status. But the “immigrant” process never worked very well for Africans, enslaved or free, in the New World. And the so-called new immigrations of non-European peoples of color similarly disrupt linear assimilation narratives (see especially Schiller et al. 1992).⁸ While there is a range of acceptance and alienation associated with ethnic and class variations, the masses of these new arrivals are kept in subordinate positions by established structures of racial exclusion. Moreover, their immigration often has a less all-or-nothing quality, given transport and communications technologies that facilitate multi-locale communities. (On the role of television, see Naficy 1991.) Large sections of New York City, it is sometimes said, are “parts of the Caribbean,” and vice versa (Sutton and Chaney 1987). Diasporist discourses reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity.⁹

Diaspora consciousness is thus constituted both negatively and positively. It is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion. The barriers facing racialized sojourners are often reinforced by socioeconomic constraints, particularly—in North America—the development of a post-Fordist, nonunion, low-wage sector offering very limited opportunities for advancement. This regime of *flexible accumulation* requires massive transnational flows of capital and labor—depending on, and producing, diasporic populations. Casualization of labor and the revival of outwork production have increased the proportion of women in the workforce, many of them recent immigrants to industrial centers (Cohen 1987; Harvey 1989; Mitter 1986; Potts 1990; Sassen-Koob 1982). These developments have produced an increasingly familiar mobility “hourglass”—masses of exploited labor at the bottom and a very narrow passage to a large, relatively affluent middle and upper class (Rouse 1991:13). New immigrants confronting this situation, like the Aguilillans in Redwood City, may establish transregional identities, maintained through travel and telephone circuits, that do not stake everything on an increasingly risky future in a single nation. It is worth adding that a negative experience of ra-

cial and economic marginalization can also lead to new coalitions: one thinks of Maghrebi diasporic consciousness uniting Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians living in France, where a common history of colonial and neocolonial exploitation contributes to new solidarities. And the moment in 1970s Britain when the exclusionist term *black* was appropriated to form antiracial alliances between immigrant South Asians, Afro-Caribbeans, and Africans provides another example of a negative articulation of diaspora networks.

Diaspora consciousness is produced positively through identification with world historical cultural/political forces, such as “Africa” or “China.” The process may not be as much about being African or Chinese, as about being American or British, or wherever one has settled, differently. It is also about feeling global. Islam, like Judaism in a predominantly Christian culture, can offer a sense of attachment elsewhere, to a different temporality and vision, a discrepant modernity. I’ll have more to say below about positive, indeed utopic, diasporism in the current transnational moment. Suffice it to say that diasporic consciousness “makes the best of a bad situation.” Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension.

The currency of diaspora discourses extends to a wide range of populations and historical predicaments. People caught up in transnational movements of capital improvise what Aihwa Ong has termed *flexible citizenship* with striking differences of power and privilege. The range extends from binational citizens in Aguililla/Redwood City or Haiti/Brooklyn to the Chinese investor “based” in San Francisco who claims, “I can live anywhere in the world, but it must be near an airport” (Ong 1993:41). This pseudouniversal cosmopolitan bravado stretches the limit of the term *diaspora*. But to the extent that the investor, in fact, identifies and is identified as *Chinese*, maintaining significant connections elsewhere, the term is appropriate. Ong says of this category of Chinese immigrants: “Their subjectivity is at once deterritorialized in relation to a particular country, though highly localized in relation to family” (Ong 1993:771–772). Since family is rarely in one place, where exactly do they “live”?

What is the political significance of this particular crossing-up of national identities by a traveler in the circuits of Pacific Rim capitalism? In light of bloody nationalist struggles throughout the world, the investor’s transnational diasporism may appear progressive. Seen in connection with exploitative, “flexible” labor regimes in the new Asian and Pacific economies, his mobility may evoke a less positive response. The political and critical valance of diasporic subversions is never guaranteed. Much more could be said about class differences among diasporic populations. In distinguishing, for example, affluent Asian business families living in North America from creative writers, academic theorists, and destitute “boat people” or Khmers fleeing genocide, it will be apparent that degrees of diasporic alienation, the mix of coercion and free-

dom in cultural (dis)identifications, and the pain of loss and displacement are highly relative.

Diaspora experiences and discourses are entangled, never clear of commodification. (Nor is commodification their only outcome.) Diasporism can be taken up by a range of multicultural pluralisms, some with quasi-official status. For example, the Los Angeles Festival of 1991, orchestrated on a grand scale by Peter Sellars, celebrated the lumpy U.S. melting pot by giving the bewildering diversity of Los Angeles a global reach. The festival connected Thai neighborhoods with imported dancers from Thailand. The same was done for Pacific islanders and various Pacific Rim peoples.¹⁰ Transnational ethnicities were collected and displayed in avant-garde juxtaposition, ostensibly to consecrate a non-Eurocentric art/culture environment. Los Angeles, successful host to the Olympics, could be a true “world city.” The festival was well funded by Japanese and American corporate sponsors, and for the most part it delivered a nonthreatening, aestheticized transnationalism. The low-wage sweatshops where many members of the celebrated populations work were not featured as sites for either “art” or “culture” in this festival of diasporas.¹¹

Reacting to trends in the U.S. academy, bell hooks has pointed out that international or postcolonial issues are often more comfortably dealt with than antagonisms closer to home, differences structured by race and class (hooks 1989, 1990; see also Spivak 1989). Adapting her concern to the present context, we see that theories and discourses that diasporize or internationalize “minorities” can deflect attention from long-standing, structured inequalities of class and race. It is as if the problem were multinationalism—issues of translation, education, and tolerance—rather than of economic exploitation and racism. While clearly necessary, making *cultural* room for Salvadorans, Samoans, Sikhs, Haitians, Khmers, and so forth, does not, of itself, produce a living wage, decent housing, or health care. Moreover, at the level of everyday social practice cultural differences are persistently racialized, classed, and gendered. Diaspora theories need to account for these concrete, cross-cutting structures.

Diasporic experiences are always gendered. But there is a tendency for theoretical accounts of diasporas and diaspora cultures to hide this fact, to talk of travel and displacement in unmarked ways, thus normalizing male experiences. Janet Wolff’s recent analysis of gender in theories of travel is relevant here (Wolff 1993). When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate. Specific diaspora histories, coterritories, community practices, dominations, and contact relations may then be generalized into gendered postmodern globalisms, abstract nomadologies.

Retaining focus on specific histories of displacement and dwelling keeps the ambivalent politics of diaspora in view. Women’s experiences are particularly revealing. Do diaspora experiences reinforce or loosen gender subordination? On the one hand, maintaining connections with homelands, with kinship networks, and with religious and cultural traditions may renew patriarchal struc-

tures. On the other, new roles and demands, new political spaces, are opened by diaspora interactions. Increasingly, for example, women migrate north from Mexico and from parts of the Caribbean, independently or quasi-independently of men. While they often do so in desperation, under strong economic or social compulsion, they may find their new diaspora predicaments conducive to a positive renegotiation of gender relations. With men cut off from traditional roles and supports, with women earning an independent, if often exploitative, income, new areas of relative independence and control can emerge. Life for women in diasporic situations can be doubly painful—struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work, and with the claims of old and new patriarchies. Despite these hardships, they may refuse the option of return when it presents itself, especially when the terms are dictated by men.

At the same time, women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a “home” culture and a tradition—selectively. Fundamental values of propriety and religion, speech and social patterns, and food, body, and dress protocols are preserved and adapted in a network of ongoing connections outside the host country. But like Maxine Hong Kingston redeeming the woman warrior myth from all the stories transmitted to her from China (1976), women sustaining and reconnecting diaspora ties do so critically, as strategies for survival in a new context. And like the Barbadian women portrayed in Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1981)—who work hard to make a home in New York while keeping a basic “aloofness” from “this man’s country”—diaspora women are caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts, and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways.¹² The lived experiences of diasporic women thus involve painful difficulty in mediating discrepant worlds. *Community* can be a site both of support and oppression. A couple of quotations from Rahila Gupta offer a glimpse of a South Asian (“black British”) woman’s predicament:

Young women are . . . beginning to question aspects of Asian culture, but there is not a sufficiently developed network of Black women’s support groups (although much valuable work has been done in this area) to enable them to operate without the support of community and family. This is a contradiction in which many women are caught: between the supportive and the oppressive aspects of the Asian community. . . .

Patriarchal oppression was a reality of our lives before we came to Britain, and the fact that the family and community acted as sites of resistance to racist oppression has delayed and distorted our coming together as women to fight this patriarchal oppression. [Gupta 1988:27, 29]

The book from which these quotations are taken, *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women* (Grewal 1988), maps a complex, overlapping field of articulations and disarticulations in contemporary Britain, what Avtar Brah has called a *diasporic space* (n.d.).¹³ The anthology presents common experiences of postcolonial displacement, racialization, and political struggle, as well as sharp differences of generation, of region, of sexuality, of

culture, and of religion. A possible coalition of diverse “black British” and “Third World” women requires constant negotiation and attention to discrepant histories.

Do diasporic affiliations inhibit or enhance coalitions? Yes and no. Many Caribbeans in New York, for example, have maintained a sense of connection with their home islands, a distinct sense of cultural, and sometimes class, identity that sets them apart from African Americans, people with whom they share material conditions of racial and class subordination. Scarce resources and the mechanisms of a hierarchical social system reinforce this response. It is not inevitable. On the one hand, feelings of diasporic identity can encourage antagonism, a sense of superiority to other minorities and migrant populations.¹⁴ On the other, shared histories of colonization, displacement, and racialization can form the basis for coalitions, as in the anti-Thatcherite alliances of “black” Britain which mobilized Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and South Asians in the 1970s. But such alliances fall apart and recombine when other diasporic allegiances come into focus, a loyalty to Islam in the Salman Rushdie dispute, for example. There is no guarantee of *postcolonial* solidarity. Interdiaspora politics proceeds by tactics of collective articulation *and* disarticulation. As Avtar Brah has written concerning the debates of the late 1980s surrounding terms for diasporic community in Britain, “the usage of ‘black,’ ‘Indian’ or ‘Asian’ is determined not so much by the nature of its referent as by its semiotic function within different discourses. These various meanings signal differing political strategies and outcomes. They mobilize different sets of cultural and political identities, and set limits to where the boundaries of a ‘community’ are established” (Brah 1992:130–131).

The Black Atlantic

Diaspora communities, constituted by displacement, are sustained in hybrid historical conjunctures. With varying degrees of urgency, they negotiate and resist the social realities of poverty, violence, policing, racism, and political and economic inequality. They articulate alternate public spheres, interpretive communities where critical alternatives (both traditional and emergent) can be expressed. The work of Paul Gilroy sketches a complex map/history of one of the principal components of diasporic Britain: the Afro-Caribbean/British/American *black Atlantic*.

In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), Gilroy shows how the diaspora culture of black settler communities in Britain articulates a specific set of local and global attachments. On one level, diaspora culture's expressive forms (particularly music) function in the defence of particular neighborhoods against policing and various forms of racist violence. On another level, they offer a wider “critique of capitalism” and a network of transnational connections. In Gilroy's account, the black diaspora is a cosmopolitan, Atlantic phenomenon, embroiled in and transcending national antagonisms such as Thatcherite England's “cultural politics of race and nation.” It reinvents earlier strands of pan-Africanism, but with a postcolonial twist and a 1990s British-European tilt. St.

Clair Drake has distinguished *traditional* from *continental* pan-Africanist movements (1982:353–359). The former had its origins in the Americas, and it emerged strongly in the late 19th century through the work of black churches, colleges, and the political movements associated with Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois. It was a transatlantic phenomenon. With the postwar emergence of African states, African nationalist leaders moved to the forefront, and pan-Africanism's center of gravity moved to continental Africa. The allied political visions of Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore would lead the way. Writing in the 1980s and 1990s in the wake of this vision's defeat, Gilroy returns the "black" cultural tradition to a historically decentered, or multiply-centered, Atlantic space. In the process, he breaks the primary connection of black America with Africa, introducing a third paradigmatic experience: the migrations and resettlings of black British populations in the period of European colonial decline.

Gilroy's brilliantly argued and provocative new book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993a), projects in historical depth a diverse black diaspora culture that cannot be reduced to any national or ethnically based tradition. This map/narrative foregrounds histories of crossing, migration, exploration, interconnection, and travel—forced and voluntary. A collection of linked essays on black intellectual history, *Black Atlantic* rereads canonical figures in a transoceanic perspective, questioning their inscription in an ethnically or racially defined tradition: Du Bois in Germany; Frederick Douglass as ship caulker and participant in a maritime political culture; Richard Wright in Paris, connecting with the anticolonial *Présence Africaine* movement. Transnational culture-making by musicians is also given prominence, from the 19th-century Fisk University Jubilee Singers to contemporary reggae, hip-hop, and rap. Gilroy is preoccupied with ships, phonograph records, sound systems, and all technologies that cross, and bring across, cultural forms. The diaspora cultures he charts are thoroughly modern—with a difference.

Gilroy tracks moving vinyl, locally scratched and dubbed. But he roots—or routes—music in a wider transcultural and subaltern history of the Atlantic. Drawing on recent historical research by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker that uncovers a multiracial radical political culture spanning the 18th-century Atlantic (1990), Gilroy's account questions "national, nationalistic, and ethnically absolutist paradigms" (Gilroy 1992a:193), both on the Right and the Left. He counters reactionary discourses such as those of Enoch Powell (and a growing chorus) that invoke a "pure" national space recently invaded by threatening aliens, that assume the entanglement of Britain in black history to be a postwar, post-British Empire phenomenon (see also Shyllon 1982). He also supplements E. P. Thompson's "the making of the *English* working class" with the making of the *Atlantic* working class (a multiracial group), and challenges recent arguments from within the British labor movement for a popular *left nationalism* to counter Thatcherism. Finally, Gilroy's black Atlantic decenters African *American* narratives, bringing the Caribbean, Britain, and Europe into the picture.

"The history of the black Atlantic," he writes, "... continually crisscrossed by the movement of black people—not only as commodities—but engaged in

various struggles toward emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship, is a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity, and historical memory" (Gilroy 1992a:193). Gilroy brings into view "countercultures of modernity," bringing *black* not only into the Union Jack but also into debates over the tradition of Enlightenment rationality. This *black* element is both negative (the long history of slavery, the legacy of scientific racism, and the complicity of rationality and terror in distinctively modern forms of domination) and positive (a long struggle for political and social emancipation, and critical visions of equality and difference that have been generated in the black diaspora).

If there is a utopian agenda in Gilroy's transnational counterhistory, it is counterbalanced by the antagonistic violence, displacement, and loss that are *constitutive* of the cultures he celebrates: the middle passage, plantation slavery, old and new racist systems of dominance, and economic constraints on travel and labor migration. In *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, the long fifth chapter on music and expressive culture ("Diaspora, Utopia, and the Critique of Capitalism") follows and depends for its effect upon four chapters that establish the discursive, political power of racist structures in postwar Britain. Some version of this utopic/dystopic tension is present in all diaspora cultures.¹⁵ They begin with uprooting and loss. They are familiar with exile, with the "outsider's" exposed terror—of police, lynch mob, and pogrom. At the same time, diaspora cultures work to maintain community, selectively preserving and recovering traditions, "customizing" and "versioning" them in novel, hybrid, and often antagonistic situations.

Experiences of unsettlement, loss, and recurring terror produce discrepant temporalities—broken histories that trouble the linear, progressivist narratives of nation-states and global modernization. Homi Bhabha has argued that the homogeneous time of the nation's imagined community can never efface discontinuities and equivocations springing from minority and diasporic temporalities (1990). He points to antiprogressive processes of repetition (memories of slavery, immigration, and colonization, renewed in current contexts of policing and normative education), of supplementarity (the experience of being "belated," extra, out of synch), and of excentricity (a leaking of the national time/space into constitutive outsiders: "The trouble with the English," Rushdie writes in *The Satanic Verses*, "is that their history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means." [1989]). Diasporic *postcolonials*, in Bhabha's vision, live and narrate these historical realities as discrepant, critical modernities. He invokes the "scattered" populations gathering in the global cities, the *diaspora* where new imaginings and politics of community emerge.¹⁶

Gilroy probes the specific "diaspora temporality and historicity, memory and narrativity that are the articulating principles of the black political counter-cultures that grew inside modernity in a distinctive relationship of antagonistic indebtedness" (1993a:266). Arguing against both modernist linear progressivism and current projections of a continuous connection with Africanity, he uncovers a "syncopated temporality—a different rhythm of living and being" (Gilroy 1993a:281). Gilroy cites Ralph Ellison:

Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. [Gilroy 1993a:281]

Ellison (via Gilroy) offers a black version of Walter Benjamin's counter-memory, a politics of interrupting historical continuities to grasp the *monads* (Ellison's "nodes"?) or *fissures* in which time stops and prophetically restarts (Benjamin 1968). In syncopated time, effaced stories are recovered, different futures imagined.

In diaspora experience, the copresence of "here" and "there" is articulated with an antiteleological (sometimes messianic) temporality. Linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning. For black Atlantic diaspora consciousness the recurring break where time stops and restarts is the *middle passage*. Enslavement and its aftermaths—displaced, repeated structures of racialization and exploitation—constitute a pattern of black experiences inextricably woven in the fabric of hegemonic modernity. These experiences form counterhistories, off-the-beat cultural critiques that Gilroy works to redeem. Afrocentric attempts to recover a direct connection with Africa, often bypassing this constitutive predicament, are both escapist and ahistorical. The "space of death" reopened by memories of slavery and in continuing experiences of racial terror casts a critical shadow on all modernist progressivisms. Gilroy supplements the analyses of Zygmunt Bauman (1989) and Michael Taussig (1986) on the complicity of rationality with racial terror. At crucial moments, the choice of death or the risk of death is the only possibility for people with no future in an oppressive system. Gilroy's reading of Frederick Douglass's struggle with the slave breaker probes such a moment, paired with the story of Margaret Garner whose killing of her children to spare them from slavery is retold in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The resulting sense of rupture, of living a radically different temporality, is expressed in an interview with Morrison quoted extensively in *The Black Atlantic*:

Modern life begins with slavery. . . . From a woman's point of view, in terms of confronting the problems of where the world is now, black women had to deal with post-modern problems in the 19th century and earlier. These things had to be addressed by black people a long time ago: certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability. Certain kinds of madness, deliberately going mad in order, as one of the characters says in the book, "in order not to lose your mind." These strategies for survival made the truly modern person. [Gilroy 1993a:308]

Morrison's "modern person" is the result of struggle with a "pathology." "Slavery broke the world in half," she goes on to say. And not only for Africans: "It broke Europe" (Gilroy 1993a:308). It made Europeans slave masters.

Diaspora cultures are, to varying degrees, produced by regimes of political domination and economic inequality. But these violent processes of displacement do not strip people of their ability to sustain distinctive political communities and cultures of resistance. Obviously the mix of destruction, adaptation, preservation, and creation varies with each historical case and moment. As counterdiscourses of modernity, diaspora cultures cannot claim an oppositional or primary purity. Fundamentally ambivalent, they grapple with the entanglement of subversion and the law, of invention and constraint—the complicity of distopia and utopia. Kobena Mercer works with this constitutive entanglement in a penetrating essay, “Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination.”

There is no escape from the fact that as a diaspora people, blasted out of one history into another by the ‘commercial deportation’ of slavery (George Lamming) and its enforced displacement, our blackness is thoroughly imbricated in Western modes and codes to which we arrived as the disseminated masses of migrant dispersal. What is in question [in recent black British film] is not the expression of some lost origin or some uncontaminated essence in black film-language, but the adoption of a critical ‘voice’ that promotes consciousness of the collision of cultures and histories that constitute our very conditions of existence. [Mercer 1988:56]

There are important differences between Mercer’s and Gilroy’s conceptions of diaspora. Mercer’s version is rigorously antiessentialist, a site of multiple displacements and rearticulations of identity, without privilege to race, cultural tradition, class, gender, or sexuality. Diaspora consciousness is entirely a product of cultures and histories in collision and dialogue. For Mercer, Gilroy’s genealogy of British “blackness” continues to privilege an “African” origin and “vernacular” forms—despite his stress on historical rupture and hybridity and his assault on romantic Afrocentrisms (Mercer 1990).¹⁷ For Gilroy, Mercer represents a “premature pluralism,” a postmodern evasion of the need to give historical specificity and complexity to the term *black*, seen as linked racial formations, counterhistories, and cultures of resistance (Gilroy 1993a:32, 100).

I do not want to oversimplify either position in an important, evolving dialogue that is probably symptomatic of a moment in cultural politics and not finally resolvable. In this context it may be worth noting that, because the signifier *diasporic* denotes a predicament of multiple locations, it slips easily into theoretical discourses informed by poststructuralism and notions of the multiply-positioned subject. Indeed, many of these discourses have been produced by theorists whose histories are, in varying degrees, diasporic. The approach I have been following (in tandem with Gilroy) insists on the routing of diaspora discourses in specific maps/histories. Diasporic subjects are, thus, distinct versions of modern, transnational, intercultural experience. Thus historicized, diaspora cannot become a master trope or “figure” for modern, complex, or positional identities, crosscut and displaced by race, sex, gender, class, and culture.

Gilroy’s specific map/history is certainly open to amendment and critique—for skewing *black Britain* in the direction of an Atlantic world with the Afro-Caribbean at its center, for focusing on practices of travel and cultural pro-

duction that have, with important exceptions, not been open to women, for not giving sufficient attention to crosscutting sexualities in constituting diasporic consciousness. Moreover, his diasporic intervention into black history reflects a specific predicament: what he has called “the peculiarities of the Black English” (Gilroy 1993b:49–62). *The Black Atlantic* decenters, to a degree, a sometimes normative African *American* history. To a degree. The specific experiences of plantation slavery, emancipation, South-North mobility, urbanization, and race/ethnic relations have a regional, and indeed a “national,” focus that cannot be subsumed by an Atlanticist map/history of crossings. While the roots and routes of African *American* cultures clearly intersect with the Caribbean, they have been historically shaped into distinct patterns of struggle and marks of authenticity. They are not transnational or diasporic in the same way or to the same degree. Important comparative questions emerge around different histories of traveling and dwelling—specified by region (for example, “the South” as a site of diasporic longing), by (neo)colonial history, by national entanglement, by class, and by gender. It is important to specify, too, that black South America and the hybrid Hispanic/black cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America are not, for the moment, included in Gilroy’s projection. He writes from a North Atlantic/European location.¹⁸

Gilroy is increasingly explicit about the limitations of his “strictly provisional” undertaking (1993a:xi), presenting it as a reading of “masculinist” diasporism and as a first step open to correction and elaboration. There is no reason why his privileging of the black Atlantic, for the purposes of writing a counterhistory in some depth, should necessarily silence other diasporic counterhistories. With respect to contemporary Britain, one can imagine intersecting histories based, for example, on the effects of the British Empire in South Asia, or on the contributions of Islamic cultures to the making and critique of modernity. Gilroy’s work tactically defines a map/history in ways that may best be seen as “anti-antiessentialist,” the double negative not reducible to a positive. If diaspora is to be something about which one could write a history—and this is Gilroy’s politically pointed goal—it must be something more than the name for a site of multiple displacements and reconstitutions of identity. Like “black England,” the black Atlantic is an historically produced social formation. It denotes a genealogy not based on any direct connection with Africa or foundational appeal to kinship or racial identity.

In the current theoretical climate of prescriptive antiessentialism, diaspora discourses such as Gilroy’s refuse to let go of a “changing same,” something endlessly hybridized and in process but persistently there—memories and practices of collective identity maintained over long stretches of time. Gilroy attempts to conceive the continuity of a “people” without recourse to land, race, or kinship as primary “grounds” of continuity.¹⁹ What, then, is the persistent object of his history? How to circumscribe this “changing same?” The black Atlantic as a counterhistory of modernity is crucially defined by the still-open wound of slavery and racial subordination. It is also a “tradition” of cultural survival and invention out of which Gilroy writes. But before he can invoke the much-

abused term *tradition*—site of a thousand essentialisms—he must redefine it, “wrench it open”:

[Tradition] can be seen to be a process rather than an end, and is used here neither to identify a lost past nor to name a culture of compensation that would restore access to it. Here, too, it does not stand in opposition to modernity nor should it conjure up wholesome, pastoral images of Africa that can be contrasted with the corrosive, aphasic power of the post-slave history of the Americas and the extended Caribbean. Tradition can now become a way of conceptualizing *the fragile communicative relationships across time and space* that are the basis *not of diaspora identities but of diaspora identifications*. Reformulated thus, [tradition] points not to a common content for diaspora cultures but to evasive qualities that make inter-cultural, trans-national diaspora *conversations between them* possible. [Gilroy 1993a:276, emphasis added]

Identifications not identities, acts of relationship rather than pre-given forms: this *tradition* is a network of partially connected histories, a persistently displaced and reinvented time/space of crossings.²⁰

Jewish Connections

Gilroy's history of black Atlantic diversity and conversation, his rejection of “Africa” as privileged source (a kind of Holy Land) while retaining its changing contribution to a counterculture of modernity, echoes the language of contemporary Jewish diasporism, anti-Zionist visions drawn from both Ashkenazic and Sephardic historical experiences. As we shall see, their critique of teleologies of return to a literal Jewish nation in Palestine parallels Gilroy's rejection of Afrocentered diaspora projections. The ongoing entanglement of black and Jewish diaspora visions, often rooted in biblical imagery, is salient here, as are the shared roots of pan-Africanism and Zionism in 19th-century European nationalist ideologies—the influence of von Treitschke on Du Bois, or Blyden's interest in Herder, Mazzini, and Hertzl. Nor should we forget a common history of victimization by scientific and popular racisms/anti-Semitism, a history that tends to be lost in current black-Jewish antagonisms. (For a corrective, see Philip 1993 and West 1993.) Gilroy confronts these sometimes-fraught connections in the last chapter of *The Black Atlantic*. Here I merely suggest a homology between defining aspects of the two diasporas. A full discussion of the differences, tensions, and attractions of the traditions is beyond my present compass.

When understood as a practice of dwelling (differently), as an ambivalent refusal or indefinite deferral of return, and as a positive transnationalism, diaspora finds validation in the historical experiences of both displaced Africans and Jews. In discussing Safran's constitution of a comparative field, I worried about the extent to which diaspora, defined as dispersal, presupposed a center. If this center becomes associated with an actual “national” territory—rather than with a reinvented “tradition,” a “book,” a portable eschatology—it may devalue what I called the lateral axes of diaspora. These decentered, partially overlapping networks of communication, travel, trade, and kinship connect the sev-

eral communities of a transnational “people.” The centering of diasporas around an axis of origin and return overrides the specific local interactions (identifications and “dis-identifications,” both constructive and defensive) necessary for the maintenance of diasporic social forms. The empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*. But *there* is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation.

How is the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here) remembered and rearticulated? In a forcefully argued essay, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin defend an interactive conception of genealogy—kinship not reducible to *race* in its modern definitions—as the matrix for dispersed Jewish populations (1993). They offer sustained polemics against two potent alternatives to diasporism: Pauline universalist humanism (we are all one in the spiritual body of Christ) and autochthonous nationalism (we are all one in the place that belongs, from the beginning, to us alone). The former attains a love for humanity at the price of imperialist inclusion/conversion. The latter gains a feeling of rootedness at the expense of excluding others with old and new claims in the land. Diaspora ideology, for the Boyarins, involves a principled renunciation of both universalism and sovereignty, and an embrace of the arts of exile and coexistence, aptitudes for maintaining distinction as a people in relations of daily converse with others.

Permanent conditions of relative powerlessness and minority status justify and render relatively harmless ethnocentric survival tactics—for example, imposing marks of distinction on the body (circumcision), or restricting charity and community self-help to “our people.” In conditions of permanent historical exile—or what amounts to the same thing, in an exile that can *only* end with the Messiah—ethnocentrism is just one tactic, never an absolute end in itself. Rabbinic diasporist ideologies, developed over 20 centuries of dispersion and drawing on biblical traditions critical of Davidic monarchy and of all claims to authenticity in “the land,” in effect continue the “nomadic” strand of early Judaism. For the Boyarins, this is the mainstream of Jewish historical experience. And they assert unequivocally that the Zionist solution to the “problem” of diaspora, seen only negatively as *galut* (exile), is “the subversion of Jewish culture and not its culmination . . . capturing Judaism in a state” (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:722, 724). Drawing on the scholarship of W. D. Davies (1992) and others, they stress the ambivalence in Jewish tradition, from biblical times to the present, regarding claims for a territorial basis of identity. “Return,” defined as exclusive possession of “the land,” is not the authentic outcome of Jewish history. Against the national/ethnic absolutism of contemporary Zionism, Jonathan Boyarin writes, “we Jews should recognize the strength that comes from a diversity of communal arrangements and concentrations both among Jews and with our several others. We should recognize that the copresence of those others is not a threat, but rather the condition of our lives” (1992:129).

The Boyarins' account of diaspora aspires to be both a model *of* (historical Jewish experience) and a model *for* (contemporary hybrid identities). This aim is apparent in the following passage:

Diasporic cultural identity teaches us that cultures are not preserved by being protected from "mixing" but probably can only continue to exist as a product of such mixing. Cultures, as well as identities, are constantly being remade. While this is true of all cultures, diasporic Jewish culture lays it bare because of the impossibility of a natural association between this people and a particular land—thus the impossibility of seeing Jewish culture as a self-enclosed, bounded phenomenon. The critical force of this dissociation among people, language, culture, and land has been an enormous threat to cultural nativisms and integrisms, a threat that is one of the sources of anti-Semitism and perhaps one of the reasons that Europe has been much more prey to this evil than the Middle East. In other words, diasporic identity is a disaggregated identity. Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one another. When liberal Arabs and some Jews claim that the Jews of the Middle East are Arab Jews, we concur and think that Zionist ideology occludes something very significant when it seeks to obscure this point. The production of an ideology of a pure Jewish cultural essence that has been debased by Diaspora seems neither historically nor ethically correct. "Diasporized," that is disaggregated, identity allows the early medieval scholar Rabbi Sa'adya to be an Egyptian Arab who happens to be Jewish and also a Jew who happens to be an Egyptian Arab. Both of these contradictory propositions must be held together. [Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:721]

The passage expresses a powerful and moving vision, especially for a world riven by absolute oppositions of Arab and Jew. It need not detract unduly from its force to ask whether Rabbi Sa'adya's disaggregated identity would have been restricted, or differently routed, if he were a woman. How did women "mix" cultures? And how have they transmitted, "genealogically," the marks and messages of tradition? How have women embodied diasporic Judaism, and how has Judaism marked, empowered, or constrained their bodies?

The Boyarins, in this essay at least, are silent on such questions. They do briefly invoke feminist issues in the sentences that immediately follow the passage quoted above.

Similarly, we suggest that a diasporized gender identity is possible and positive. Being a woman is some kind of special being, and there are aspects of life and practice that insist on and celebrate that speciality. But this is not simply a fixing or a freezing of all practice and performance of gender identity into one set of parameters. Human beings are divided into men and women for certain purposes, but that does not tell the whole story of their bodily identity. Rather than the dualism of gendered bodies and universal souls—the dualism that the Western tradition offers—we can substitute partially Jewish, partially Greek bodies, bodies that are sometimes gendered and sometimes not. It is this idea that we are calling diasporized identity. [Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:721]

Arguments from antiessentialist feminism are implicitly deployed here, and the figure of "woman" is joined to that of the Jew to evoke a model of identity as

a performed cluster/tension of positionalities.²¹ Would it make the same sense to say that a body was sometimes black, sometimes not, sometimes lesbian, sometimes not, sometimes poor, and so forth? Yes and no. For we approach a level of generality at which the specificities and tensions of diasporist, racialist, class, sex, and gender determinations are erased. Moreover, in this assertion of a common predicament we glimpse the hegemonizing possibilities of diasporist discourse. Skimmed over in the identification of *diasporized* gender identity are a series of historical specifications. "Human beings are divided into men and women for certain purposes." Whose purposes? What are the unequal dividing structures? How do these functional "purposes" appear from different sides of the gender divide? I have already argued that it is important to resist the tendency of diasporic identities to slide into equivalence with disaggregated, positional, performed identities in general. As they necessarily draw from antifoundationalist feminism, postcolonial critique, and various postmodernisms, contemporary diaspora discourses retain a connection with specific bodies, historical experiences of displacement that need to be held in comparative tension and partial translatability.

I have dwelt on one instance of too-quick diasporic equivalence in the Boyarins' essay to identify a persistent risk in "theoretical" comparisons, a risk that haunts my own project. Overall, the Boyarins maintain the specificity of their point of engagement, their *discrepant cosmopolitanism* (Clifford 1992). As observing Ashkenazi Jews, they contest for a tradition, from within. But their theory and practice preclude this "inside" as an ultimate, or even principal, location. Perhaps, as they recognize, in allegorizing diasporism they run the risk of making Jewish experience again the normative model. But in the passage just cited, diaspora is portrayed in terms of an almost postcolonial vision of hybridity. Whose experience, exactly, is being theorized? In dialogue with whom? It is clear that the Boyarins have been reading and reacting to minority and Third World authors. And Paul Gilroy is a close student of Walter Benjamin. Moreover, Asian American diaspora theorists are reading black British cultural studies. Diasporas, and diaspora theorists, cross paths in a mobile space of translations, not equivalences.

The Boyarins do not, in fact, say very much about the specific mechanisms of *genealogy* (or *generation*, as they also call it). Their chief effort is devoted to critical ground-clearing, making space for multifaceted, nonreductive, transmissions of the marks and messages of peoplehood. Against Pauline spirituality, they insist on carnal, socially differentiated bodies. The bodies are gendered male, which is to say they are unmarked by gender—at least in this essay. (Their recent analysis of circumcision marks its subject matter and perspective explicitly as male [Boyarin and Boyarin, in press]. And Daniel Boyarin's *Carnal Israel* [1993b], as well as his work on Saint Paul [1993a], centrally engage feminist issues.) The Boyarins argue persuasively that the multiple social transmissions of genealogy need not be reduced to a "racial" matrix of identity. But in deploying the language of "generation" and "lineage," they risk naturalizing an androcentric kinship system. As in Gilroy's history, which leans toward

the diasporic practices of men, there is considerable room for specification of gendered diaspora experiences.²²

Diasporic Pasts/Futures

The Boyarins ground their valorization of diaspora in two thousand years of rabbinic ideology, as well as in concrete historical experiences of dispersed community. They state:

We propose Diaspora as a theoretical and historical model to replace national self-determination. To be sure, this would be an idealized Diaspora generalized from those situations in Jewish history when the Jews were relatively free from persecution and yet constituted by strong identity—those situations, moreover, within which promethian Jewish creativity was not antithetical, indeed was synergistic with a general cultral activity. [Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:711]

Jewish life in Muslim Spain before the expulsions—a rich, multireligious, multicultural florescence—is one of the historical moments redeemed by this vision. “The same figure, a Nagid, an Ibn Gabirol, or a Maimonides, can be simultaneously the vehicle for the preservation of traditions and of the mixing of cultures” (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993:721). We enter, here, the whole *geniza world* of S. D. Goitein, the 11th-to-13th-century Mediterranean (and beyond) where Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived, traded, borrowed, and conversed in the process of maintaining distinct communities.²³

There are no innocent periods of history, and the *geniza world* had its share of intolerance. Without reducing these centuries to a romanticized multiculturalism, it is possible to recognize an extraordinary cosmopolitan network. As Goitein and his followers have shown, lines of identity were drawn differently, often less absolutely. For long periods and in many places, people of distinct religions, races, cultures, and languages coexisted. Difference was articulated through connection, not separation. In a recent book, *After Jews and Arabs* (1993), which draws generously on Goitein’s research and vision, Ammiel Alcalay portrays a Levantine world characterized by cultural mixing, relative freedom of travel, an absence of ghettos, and multilingualism—the antithesis of current national, racial, and religious separations. A sweeping work of counterhistory and cultural critique, Alcalay’s study begins to make room for women’s histories, specified by class, in its world of intersecting cosmopolitan cultures. In this he builds on Goitein’s awareness of “the chasm between the popular local subculture of women and the worldwide Hebrew book culture of the men” (quoted by Alcalay 1993:138). This “chasm” need not be taken to mean that men were cosmopolitan, and women not: affluent women, at least, traveled (sometimes alone), were involved in business, held property, crossed cultural borders—but in particular ways that Jewish diaspora studies have only begun to recognize and detail.

Alcalay’s history gives “regional” concreteness to a diasporist Jewish history which, in the Boyarins’ version, is not connected to a specific map/history. “Jewish history” is, of course, diverse and contested. In the present Israeli state

a division between Ashkenazic and Sephardic/Mizrahi populations reflects distinct diaspora experiences. As reclaimed in Alcalay's book, the Sephardic strand offers a specific counterhistory of Arab/Jewish coexistence and cross-over. Sephardic/Mizrahi histories may also generate "diasporist" critiques by Arab-Jewish exiles within the Israeli "homeland" (Lavie 1992; Shohat 1988, 1989). Sephardic regional roots and emerging alliances with "Third World" or "Arab" movements can articulate networks that decenter both the diasporist figure of the "wandering Jew" and the overwhelming importance of the Holocaust as defining moment in modern "Jewish history." In Israel, a minority of European Jews have taken a leading role in defining an exclusivist Jewish state—predicated on religious, ethnic, linguistic, and racial subordinations. Sephardic/Mizrahi counterhistories question this state's hegemonic self-definition. Important as these struggles may be, however, one should not overgeneralize from current hierarchical oppositions in Israel. Both Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions are complex, containing nationalist and antinationalist strands. There are strong resources for a *diasporist* anti-Zionism in pre-Holocaust Ashkenazi history. (Indeed, the recent signing of a fragile peace accord between Israel and the PLO makes this vision, these historical resources, seem less anachronistic. If a viable political arrangement for sharing the land of Palestine finally emerges, Jews and Arabs will need to recover diasporist skills for maintaining difference in contact and accommodation.)

Max Weinreich's historical research has shown that the maintenance of Ashkenazic Jewishness (*yidishkeyt*) was not primarily the result of forced, or voluntary, separation in distinct neighborhoods or ghettos. This relatively recent *ghetto myth* supports an ethnic absolutism (as Gilroy might put it) that denies the interactive and adaptive process of historical Jewish identity.

Ashkenazic reality is to be sought between the two poles of absolute identity with and absolute remoteness from the coterritorial non-Jewish communities. To compress it into a formula, what the Jews aimed at was not isolation from Christians but insulation from Christianity. Although, throughout the ages, many Jews must be supposed to have left the fold, the community as a whole did succeed in surviving and developing. On the other hand, the close and continuous ties of the Jews with their neighbors, which used to be severed only for a while during actual outbreaks of persecutions, manifested themselves in customs and folk beliefs; in legends and songs; in literary production, etc. The culture patterns prevalent among Ashkenazic Jews must be classified as Jewish, but very many of them are specifically Ashkenazic. They are mid-course formations as those found wherever cultures meet along frontiers, in border zones or in territories with mixed populations. [Weinreich 1967:2204]

Weinreich's prime specimen of Ashkenazic border culture is Yiddish, the *fusion language* of which he is the preeminent historian. He also lays great stress on the open-ended process of Talmudic interpretation through which laws (*dinim*) and customs (*minhogim*) are continuously adapted and clarified anew in the light of the Torah (which, the Yiddish saying goes, "contains everything"). The defining loyalty here is to an open text, a set of interpretable norms, not to

a “homeland” or a even to an “ancient” tradition. I have been quoting from a summary essay of 1967 in which Weinreich characterizes Ashkenazic diasporic history without any mention of return, Holy Land, or Israel. The distinction of Jew and non-Jew is critical, but processual and nonessentialist: “It turns out that the very existence of a division is much more important than the actual location of the division line. . . . More often than not, it appears, the distance between Jewish and non-Jewish patterns is created not by a difference in the ingredients proper but rather by the way they are interpreted as elements of the given system” (Weinreich 1967:2205). Difference, for Weinreich, is a process of continual renegotiation in new circumstances of dangerous and creative coexistence.²⁴

What is at stake in reclaiming these different Ashkenazic and Sephardic diasporist visions, beyond their evident contribution to a critique of Zionism and other exclusivist nationalisms? An answer is suggested by my own belated route to the geniza world and the company of Goitein admirers: a remarkable ethnography/history/travel hybrid, *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh (1992). An Indian novelist-cum-anthropologist, Ghosh writes of his fieldwork in the Nile Delta and in the process uncovers a deep history of transnational connections between the Mediterranean, Middle East, and South Asia—a history onto which he grafts his own late 20th-century travel from one “Third World” place to another. In the dispersed Cairo geniza archive, he tracks the almost forgotten story of an Indian traveler to Aden, the slave and business agent of a Jewish merchant residing in Mangalore. (The history of this archive is itself an engrossing subplot.) Ghosh’s search for his 12th-century precursor opens a window on the medieval Indian Ocean, a world of extraordinary travel, trade, and coexistence among Arabs, Jews, and South Asians. Like Janet Abu-Lughod’s important overview, *Before European Hegemony* (1989), and the earlier world historical visions of Marshall Hodgson (1993), Ghosh’s account helps us remember/imagine *world systems*, economic and cultural, that preceded the rise of an expansionist Europe. In the late 20th century it is difficult to form concrete pictures of transregional networks not produced by and/or resisting the hegemony of Western technoindustrial society. These histories of alternate cosmopolitanisms and diasporic networks are redeemable (in a Benjaminian sense) as crucial political visions: worlds “after” Jews and Arabs, “after” the West and the “Rest,” and “after” natives and immigrants.

Such visions and counterhistories can support strategies for nontotalizing *globalization from below*. The phrase, paired with *globalization from above*, is proposed by Brecher et al. to name transregional social movements that both resist and use hegemonizing technologies and communications (1993). This constitutive entanglement is, I have argued, characteristic of modern diaspora networks. Entanglement is not necessarily cooptation. Recalling older histories of discrepant cosmopolitan contacts can empower new ways to be “traditional” on a more than local scale. Epeli Hau’ofa’s recent recovery of a long history of Pacific travels in the projection of a new “Oceanian” regionalism (“our sea of islands”) is a case in point (Hau’ofa et al. 1993).

The works I have been discussing maintain a clear, at times crushing, awareness of the obstacles to such futures, the constant pressure of transnational capital and national hegemonies. Yet they express, too, a stubborn hope. They do not merely lament a world that has been lost. Rather, as in diaspora discourses generally, both loss and survival are prefigurative. Of what? We lack a description and are reduced to the merely reactive, stopgap language of “posts.” The term *postcolonial* (like Arjun Appadurai’s *postnational*) makes sense only in an emergent, or utopian, context.²⁵ There are no postcolonial cultures or places: only moments, tactics, discourses, and so forth. *Post-* is always shadowed by *neo-*. Yet *postcolonial* does describe real, if incomplete, ruptures with past structures of domination, sites of current struggle and imagined futures. Perhaps what is at stake in the historical projection of a geniza world or a black Atlantic is “the prehistory of postcolonialism.” Viewed in this perspective, the diaspora discourse and history currently in the air would be about recovering non-Western, or not-only-Western, models for cosmopolitan life, nonaligned transnationalities struggling within and against nation-states, global technologies, and markets—resources for a fraught coexistence.

Notes

Acknowledgments. This paper was conceived in the context of a reading group on diasporas at the University of California, Santa Cruz. My thanks to its participants: Gordon Bigelow, Susan Harding, Galen Joseph, Katie Stewart, Anna Tsing, and especially Avtar Brah. I have received very useful critical readings from Kathleen Biddick, Jonathan Boyarin, Iain Chambers, Paul Gilroy, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Vijay Mishra, and David Schneider.

1. A comparable circuit, joining the Dominican Republic and New York, is treated in depth by Grasmuck and Pessar 1991. See also Brown 1991, Fischer and Abedi 1990, and Marcus and Fischer 1986:94, for multi-locale ethnographic texts.

2. For example, see the recent book by Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (1990). See also Chow 1992, Ong 1993, and Xiaoping Li 1993.

3. The distinction between immigrant and diasporic experiences, heightened for definitional clarity in this paragraph, should not be overdrawn. There are diasporic moments in classic assimilationist histories, early and late, as new arrivals maintain and later generations recover links to a homeland. Diasporic populations regularly “lose” members to the dominant culture.

4. In Jewish anti-Zionism, see, for example, the work of “diaspora nationalist” Simon Dubnow, whose secular vision of “autonomism” projected a cultural/historical/spiritual “national” identity beyond the territorial/political (1931, 1958). In an (un)orthodox vein, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin argue that a rigorous eschatology of “return” at the end of historical time can produce a radical critique of Zionist literalism (1993).

5. In *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600–1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People*, historian Colin Galloway argues that Abenaki survival as a people was accomplished through “diaspora” (1990). The mobile family band, not the settled village, was the basic unit of group life. In response to conquest, many Abenaki bands moved, to Canada and all over the Northeast United States, while some stuck it

out in Vermont. When so many villages disappeared, it *seemed* to outsiders that the group had been fatally decimated. In Galloway's perspective, diasporic communities such as Mashpee—where displaced members of several Cape Cod communities came together—seem less aberrant.

6. Recent interest in the oxymoronic figure of the *traveling native* complicates and historicizes, though it does not eliminate, the tension between tribal and diasporic claims to legitimacy. I am drawing here on the insightful work of Teresia Teaiwa (1993). She evokes a long history of Pacific Islander travels (linked to contemporary practices):

This mobility can be traced along ancient routes of exchange like the *kula* ring which linked the east peninsula of mainland New Guinea with the Trobriand Islands and Louisiade Archipelago; the epic voyages between Hawai'i, Tahiti, and Actearca/New Zealand; the consistent migration and exchange within the Fiji-Tonga-Samoa triangle; and the exchange of navigational knowledge among Carolinian and Mariana Islanders. These, of course, are just a few of the circuits within which Pacific Islanders represented/performed their identities as both dynamic and specific—ways they thought about difference through connection. [Teaiwa 1993:12]

7. In the U.S. academy, "minority" discourse has been theorized as a resistance practice (e.g., JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990). It is often institutionalized in programs defined by ethnicity/race. Diasporic transnationalism complicates and sometimes threatens this structure, particularly when "minorities" have defined themselves in ethnically absolutist, or nationalist, ways. In Britain, the tension between minority and diaspora articulations of identity takes place in a different context: "minority discourse" has been largely an official discourse.

8. The distinction between old and new, European and non-European immigrants, while critical, should not be overdrawn. Immigrants from Ireland and central, southern, and eastern Europe have been racialized. And anti-Semitism remains an often-latent, sometimes-explicit force. But generally speaking, European immigrants have, with time, come to participate as ethnic "whites" in multicultural America. The same cannot be said, overall, of populations of color—although region of origin, shade of skin, culture, and class may attenuate racist exclusion.

9. Edward Said has used the term *contrapuntal* to characterize one of the positive aspects of conditions of exile:

Seeing "the entire world as a foreign land" makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal. . . . For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. [Said 1984:171–172; see also Said 1990:48–50]

These reflections on exile apply to experiences of diaspora, but with the difference that the more individualistic, existential focus of the former is tempered by networks of community, collective practices of displaced dwelling, in the latter.

10. In a far reaching historical critique of Pacific Rim discourse and liberal/neo-liberal "free trade" ideologies, Chris Connery identifies a danger of imagining counter-hegemonic sites of crossing/cosmopolitanism "within the dominant conceptual category of the Ocean, given that it is Capital's favorite myth-element" (Connery, in press). He calls for a careful historicizing of oceanic discourses, a concern that applies to Gilroy's projection of a black Atlantic, discussed below.

11. For diverse accounts and critiques of the Los Angeles Festival, see Getty Center 1991, particularly Lisa Lowe's comments on the depoliticizing effects of post-modern pluralism/multiculturalism on pages 124–128.

12. Of course, men also select and strategize, within their own constraints and privileges. The difference between gendered diaspora predicaments is critical for an emerging comparative perspective. Ganguly's 1992 study of men's and women's memories in the South Asian U.S. diaspora is exemplary; Bottomley provides an excellent treatment of gender and class articulation in a study of Greek migration as cultural process (1992).

13. Chandra Mohanty (1987), Stuart Hall (1988, 1990), Kobena Mercer (1988, 1990), and R. Radakrishnan (1991), among others, discuss this diasporic space of cross-cutting determinations.

14. On tensions between Caribbean and African American populations in New York, see Foner 1987; Diana Velez's analysis of a story by Puerto Rican writer Ana Lydia Vega, "Encancaranublado" (Vega 1987), very acutely evokes the national/cultural/racial/linguistic differences separating Caribbean immigrants, as well as their common lumping together by the U.S. racial order (Velez, in press). Whether this latter repositioning will lead to new alliances or conflicts in the diasporic economy of struggle and scarcity is left open.

15. Here a parallel with border cultures could be developed, highlighting the constitutive, repeated violence of the arbitrary line, the policed border—and the desperate/utopic crossings that ensue. This ambivalence recalls Nestor García Canclini's conflicting, simultaneous images of transnational "border" cultures: the "airport" or the "garage sale," one institutional and disciplinary, the other popular and improvised (1992). The garage sale image is derived from Renato Rosaldo's portrayal of border cultures, from *Culture and Truth* (1989:44).

16. Bhabha tends to equate *diasporic* and *postcolonial* in his discussion. This raises an interesting question that I cannot develop fully here. To what extent are theorizations of postcoloniality projections of specific diasporas? Ella Shohat links articulations of hybridity in the name of a "postcolonial" condition to diasporic Third World intellectuals writing primarily in First World centers (1992). South Asian theorists are strikingly prominent, notably in Britain and North America. Postcoloniality is not much heard from elsewhere—Latin America and Africa, for example, where histories of de-, anti-, and neocolonialism are significantly different. If postcolonial theory can be historicized in relation to South Asian diasporas, it would be useful to distinguish, following Vijay Mishra (1983, 1994), two kinds: the first, a century ago, of indentured laborers to places such as Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, and Malaysia; and the second, postwar "free" migrations to Britain, the United States, Australia, and Canada. The representative writer of the first would be Naipaul; of the second, the moment of "postcolonial" visions, Rushdie. Mishra's ongoing work will help flesh out this historicization in detail. Obviously, the substance of postcolonial theorizing is not entirely reducible to the histories of certain South Asian intellectuals. The key concept of hybridity, for example, rhymes with Latin American theorizations of *mestizaje*, or Caribbean *Créolité*. These are not identical concepts, and they emerge from distinct historical situations; but they overlap and together denote a domain of complex cultural formations produced by, and partially subverting, colonial dichotomies and hierarchies.

17. *The Black Atlantic* guards, more explicitly, against the problems Mercer finds in Gilroy's concept of *populist modernism*, with its implicit culture- and class-based

authenticity test. The book's critical countertradition of modernity spans vernacular, "popular" forms and "high" cultural arguments (explicit and implicit) with Enlightenment philosophy.

18. There is no reason, in principle, why they should not be, given a different focus. Written from a North Atlantic/European perspective, *The Black Atlantic* is pointedly an intervention in the tradition of African American intellectual and cultural history. This tradition has canonically meant African North-American, including those areas of the Caribbean directly connected with the English speaking United States. New Latino/Chicano readings of the Américas as complex border zones question overly linear diaspora narratives. See, for example, José David Saldívar's reading of Ntozake Shange in terms of magical realism and *mestizaje* (1991:87–104).

19. See a similar attempt, in my "Identity in Mashpee," to portray an interactive culture/identity as something persistently, but not continuously, there (Clifford 1988:277–346). The differences concerning land, oral tradition, travel, racialization, and so forth, are of course salient. But the general approach to peoples who have managed to prevail through histories overdetermined by cultural, political, and economic power relations is comparable. See Gilroy 1991 and 1992b for the notion of a *changing same* (derived from Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka). The phrase does not, I think, quite do justice to the tensions and violent discontinuities that are constitutive of the "tradition" he tracks. His most recent formulations struggle against the grain of various organicisms, while asserting a complexly hybrid *historical* continuity. Gilroy is explicitly concerned not to privilege appeals to kinship or "family" (e.g., Gilroy 1992b). Helmreich (1993) asserts the contrary but does not discuss *The Black Atlantic* or a wide range of Gilroy's recent work. Helmreich's suggestive etymological reading of the bias toward male genealogies built into the concept/metaphor *diaspora* applies better to those strongly linear, genealogical visions of diaspora which Gilroy is concerned to question. Despite its general, but not exclusive, emphasis on men, Gilroy's work—I think Helmreich agrees—is not inherently closed to women's experiences or to complex intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Etymology is not destiny. I fully agree with Helmreich's project of "set[ting] in motion to new meanings the term *diaspora*" (Helmreich 1993:248).

20. Gilroy's formulation of the interconnected diversity of historical "black" experiences is not reducible to the image of a tree—root, stem, and branches—proposed by St. Clair Drake (1982:397). This difference distinguishes his diaspora from the "traditional" or "continental" forms evoked by Drake.

21. See Daniel Boyarin 1993a for a historical account of the symmetrical discursive construction of *woman* and *Jew* in Pauline Christian universalism.

22. Another area of specification I am not yet prepared to discuss: diasporic sexualities and/or sexualized diaspora discourses. In Brah's *diasporic space* idea, there is room for developing such analyses. And Mercer's work points the way, along with the productions of Sankofa Film Collective. In commenting on a draft of this essay, Kathleen Biddick reminds me of Sankofa's *Passion of Remembrance* "and the strange place to which the film returns, with the voices and bodies of the man and woman fractured in interesting ways across it" (Biddick, pers. communication, 1993). Diasporic histories may not be necessary conditions for developing performative visions of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, but their liminal spaces, displaced encounters, and tactical affiliations provide apt settings for such visions. In this vein, it would be interesting to historicize Audre Lorde's complex articulation of race, gender, and

sexuality in *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) in terms of New York City neighborhoods as diasporic spaces.

23. *Geniza*, in this context, refers to the “storeroom” of the synagogue at Fustat (Old Cairo) where a rich archive of records—business, personal, and religious in nature—survived from the 10th to the 19th centuries. These documents are the basis for Goitein’s extraordinary vision of transregional, interactive Jewish life in the Middle Ages (see Goitein 1967–93, vol. 1; also Ghosh 1992).

24. In many places Weinreich anticipates current contact perspectives on colonial and neocolonial border zones, processes of *transculturation* and interactive identity formation. Compare, particularly, Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of *contact zone* also derived from ethnolinguistic *contact* or *fusion* languages (1992). See also Dubnow 1931 for a historically grounded Ashkenazi vision of interactive Jewishness that presupposes the permanence of diaspora.

25. In the past few years *postcolonial* and *postcoloniality*—terms often confusing theoretical approaches and historical moments—have been subjected to searching, often skeptical, symptomatic critiques. See especially During 1987, Appiah 1991, Shohat 1992, Chow 1992, Frankenberg and Mani 1993, Miyoshi 1993, Dirlík 1994, and many of the papers in *Social Text* 31/32 (1992). I cannot here engage the many unresolved issues raised by these arguments, except to say that I am persuaded by Frankenberg and Mani’s insistence on a rigorously conjunctural understanding of different ways to be *postcolonial* (1993). Whatever the term’s fate, the sites of complex historical entanglement and agency it provisionally names should not be reduced to epiphenomena of postmodern fragmentation, neocolonial transnationality, or global capitalism. On the connection of postcoloniality with recent diaspora theories, see Frankenberg and Mani 1993:302. Also for our current purposes, Rey Chow’s identification of three possible temporalities connected to the prefix *post-* is relevant, particularly the third: (1) “having gone through”; (2) “after”; (3) “a notion of time that is not linear but constant, marked by events that may be technically finished but that can only be fully understood with consideration of the devastation they left behind” (1992:152).

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