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Who Wants To Be Diasporic?

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WHO WANTS TO BE DIASPORIC?¹

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The imagination of a transnational diaspora

I started my undergraduate career as a Southeast Asianist, so even though I have moved well away from it and do not claim to know anything about its current developments, I must admit that certain of its recurrent trends look very much like a return of the repressed, hence today's topic. Those who specialize in Southeast Asian studies should know that the study of diaspora is hardly new to the field. Southeast Asia figured prominently in the study of diaspora, and the Chinese, who constituted the largest ethnic minority there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, figured prominently as a paradigmatic example of a diasporic community. Moreover, Chinese there were called 'the Jews of the East', which has in turn invited analogy with other kinds of diasporic experiences (see also Chun 1989).

I emphasize the associations because it's probably undesirable to view any social or experiential phenomenon, such as the overseas Chinese in SE Asia, as an isolated entity in historical or cultural terms. The conceptual associations that we use to interpret its underlying nature and significance are really a function of our ability to generalize sociologically and historically or cross-culturally. The explicit association of the Nanyang Chinese to the Jews accents among other things the important presence of ethnic diaspora in human history. There were also other prominent diasporic communities, such as the Arab traders and Indian merchants, not to mention the waves of emigrant labor precipitated by global capitalism starting in the 19th century.

But all terms and concepts, even by strict historical usage, have deep-seated meanings and implicit connotations that may not be obvious in their overt enunciations and applications. This is the point of my talk today, if anything. Moreover, terms have a habit of being resurrected, as though they are new, when they are in fact not the case. Even in their new evocations, presentist usages can also distort the underlying nuances of existing terms.

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One example of conceptual resurrection is multiculturalism. We have been led to think that multiculturalism was invented by postmodern theory, and that postcolonial theory finally liberated the multiple identities in us all. But as any historian knows, multiculturalism is hardly a new *phenomenon*.

Most societies in history have been multicultural or multiethnic, yet few have talked about multiculturalism as *problematic*. The problematic of multiculturalism (in post- theory) has emerged more precisely as a reaction to modern norms of national identity, which assume the existence of *shared* values and a *collective* conscience. Thus, if it is more accurate to say that multiculturalism has been a problematic *only* in the context of the modern nation-state, then one should really then ask what it is about the nation-state that makes culture, ethnicity and national identity problematic issues. Similarly, multiple identities have been a standard axiom of pre-modern life everywhere, especially ones that have been defined by ongoing and regular interaction between local cultures. In the past, multicultural skills were a functional necessity rather than the product of 'identifying'. Multilingual and multicultural practices were common features of most forms of everyday economic trade and social exchange, and their effacement really began with colonial imperialism and the cultural standardization of nation-states.

The resurrection of diaspora as a term for our times is (I would argue) by the same token less the signaling of a new phenomenon than something invoked by new conceptual nuances. However, in examining these nuances, I argue more importantly that one can clearly see the conceptual limitations of the term itself and its sociological relevance only to particular contexts.

There are many examples in the current theoretical literature where diaspora is invoked, the most notable probably in the work of Edward Said, Paul Gilroy and Gayatri Spivak. However, I wish to restrict myself to writers perhaps closer to home. Rey Chow's *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* was an influential work not only in literary studies as a whole but also accented the diasporic identity of the author, a Hong Kong born female scholar working in the US. Diaspora for Chow is in a sense a loose marker of the original use of the term to denote the physical detachment of Jews from their religious homeland. Physically, diasporas are 'emblems of transnationalism', citing Khachig Tololyan, while the spirit of diasporic consciousness is largely an intellectual reality, or 'the reality of being intellectual', as she puts it. Less important than the tangible reality of the communities that comprise ethnic diasporas is what she calls, citing William Safran, 'intellectualization of the existential condition of dispersal from the homeland'. Ironically, ethnicity then is basically just a metaphor for underlining the significance of diaspora as a peculiar mindset or identity. Or to put it in different terms, the concept of diaspora ultimately highlights the seminal nature of subjective (authorial) positionality by emphasizing the desirability of critical detachment in the politics of identity. By flaunting her own intellectual identity as an Asian and a woman, writing diaspora then is a statement about the need to recognize authorial voices from the margin.

I don't wish to downplay the significance of speaker positionality that underscores the marginalized authority of diasporic voices and cultures, as this is the same notion of subjectivity that drives most, if not all, versions of identity politics, from feminist theory to postcolonial critique. Diaspora is in the first instance a codeword not only for critical detachment but also for the privileging of subaltern voices and marginal spaces vis-à-vis mainstream authority and values. Thus, diaspora not just invokes the existence of social margins and alienated communities; more importantly it champions values of marginality in challenging the hegemony of the center to speak on behalf of dispossessed others. Within this framework, however, the substance of diasporic identity matters less than the context that grounds the speech act. Rey Chow invokes her diasporic identity as an Asian woman but in a context where she sees herself as the defiant other, speaking presumably on behalf of Asians and women. But does she speak for Asians and women? One of the odd things I noticed in a recent book by Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong entitled *Postmodernism and China* was the hostility that both commentators on Hong Kong had toward Rey Chow, perhaps the most famous Hong Kong cultural studies literary theorist. Evans Chan referred to her bluntly as 'an American of Hong Kong origin'. If her Asian ethnicity is just form and not substance, then this must mean diaspora creates ethnicity only because it is an other, namely vis-à-vis the social context in which the author is situated.

Postcolonialism's need to recognize multiple identities is thus first of all the recognition of an empire of mind that has subordinated and negated difference. In short, if celebration of hybridity and championing of diasporic interests are a consequence of our need to *decolonize*, then one must ask secondly whether there are significant differences between our problematic need to invoke hybridity and diaspora and the phenomena that have given rise to them. Or to take it a step further, how does the deconstruction of the problematic of diaspora enable us to better understand the phenomenon?

Another use of diaspora in reference to Asia can be seen in the recent book of essays by Aihwa Ong and others, entitled *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (Ong and Nonini 1997). Like Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, by accenting transnationalism, Ong et al point to the existence of forces underlying the Chinese experience that elude disciplining by nation-states while building on logical relations that intrinsically differ from Western narratives of modernity. Underlying their narrative of transnationalism in a Chinese context is their attempt to view Chinese cultural politics as an extension of diasporic identities rather than as the diffusion of an essentialist hegemony. Unlike Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which overlaps with and is embedded within Western modernity, Chinese transnational modernity, as envisaged by Ong and Nonini, competes with its counterpart. Both celebrate multiculturalism, but diasporic identity invoked in the Chinese case seems to be predicated less by a 'double consciousness' that leads explicitly toward ongoing hybridity than by a determination to maintain autonomy vis-à-vis both the sinocentric core and its host society. Ungrounded and constantly shifting, Chinese transnational modernity, as understood by Ong and Nonini, resists absolutism of the state yet

maintains at the same time a collusive relationship with it in both Chinese and foreign contexts. Thus diasporic hybridity is part and parcel of being transnational.

It is not at all evident at first glance whether Ong and Nonini attribute the success of a Chinese transnational modernity to the recent success of Chinese transnational entrepreneurs or to the rise of a new global capitalism that has enabled Chinese transnationalists to flourish. In their rhetorical emphasis on diaspora, they appear to favor the former by viewing Chinese transnational capitalism as the end product of ongoing cultural practices. After all, SE Asia has witnessed centuries of Chinese comprador traders. If so, it would be possible to view the later development of large scale Chinese capitalism as the basic extension of a multicultural mode of production, writ large. Ong then expands this thesis into a full-fledged alternative theory of Chinese modernities, which in the end serves to underscore the flexibility of hybrid or multiple identities and the fluidity of constant deterritorialization.

Ong juxtaposes the PRC's state project of Chinese modernity against this moment of 'triumphalist capitalism' and views the diverse experience in Asian modernity as the result of ongoing tension between these two forces. It is really the influx of Hong Kong, Taiwanese and overseas Chinese capital into the PRC that represents the driving force behind another multinational entity popularly termed 'Greater China'. In championing the 'triumphalist capitalism' of transnational, multicultural Chinese entrepreneurs, she not only privileges a late form of global capitalism, which is the result of subtle changes in the modern world system, thus anything but local and diasporic in origin, but also seems to omit a whole history of Asian capitalism that is not transnational. Chinese capitalism is not a product of transnationalism.

I find it easier to understand the emergence of Chinese transnational capitalism as an ephemeral moment made possible by the end of organized capitalism, which emancipated rational organization from the strictures of a nation-based cultural economy. Despite the rhetoric focus Ong and others have placed on diaspora and hybridity, it is interesting to note how Chinese cosmopolitanism invoked by such modernity differs radically from Gilroy's Black Atlantic. Contrary to the bottom-up process that contributed to the rise of the Black Atlantic, the transnational modernity that Ong and others extol in fact is one where the global informs the local and where an imagined community of multicultural Chinese capitalists becomes the basic motor for creating an alternative Chinese modernity. BTW, Ong is Malaysian Chinese. I mention this, not because it is relevant but because the choice is strategic.

Diaspora: A term for all seasons?

I have deliberately raised examples from Chow's *Writing Diaspora* and Ong's *Ungrounded Empire* of Chinese transnational capitalism to suggest that hybridity and diaspora can mean very different things, despite being celebrated by the same postnational, postcolonial call for counterhegemonic discourses,

multiple identities and deterritorialization.

I'd like to raise a third voice in this discussion of diaspora, one which is articulated in an essay (now book) by Ien Ang, entitled 'On Not Speaking Chinese: Postmodern Ethnicity and the Politics of Diaspora'. Ang happens to be a Peranakan Chinese, born in Indonesia but raised largely in Holland. In her case, her identity, that is, her perception of her identity, has much to do with the way she invokes diaspora and the latter's presumed relationship to ethnicity. As we know, the Peranakans *identify* as being Chinese, even though their acculturation into Malay and Indonesian traditions have made them lose distinctive that we normally attribute to Chinese culture, namely language and customary traits. Her experiences of being seen as separate, despite her integration into the cultural mainstream, whether it be in Asia or Europe, has thus conditioned her appeal to diasporic identity. Diaspora is then in the first instance the factual recognition of difference. The fact that she is expected to speak and act Chinese, even though she may not be able to, thus defines the space within which she must negotiate her identity. If anything, there is no such thing as overseas Chinese, either as extension of an essentialist cultural category or as some presumed homogenous group of people. Chinese everywhere, especially in the diaspora, have always been culturally hybrid by nature. In invoking diasporic hybridity, she is not just advocating the right of people to choose and selectively define culture, which is really what identity is all about, but she is also challenging the authority of nation-states and hegemonic institutions to essentialize culture. Identity follows from the recognition of difference, but it is positioned ultimately in political choices about the relevance of ethnicity and culture. As she puts it aptly, 'in short, if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics'.

Ang's ruminations about the inescapable facticity of ethnicity raises, however, an interesting question about diaspora, namely is it really all about ethnicity? My answer to that is no, but I'd like to address this by rephrasing the issues invoked by various postmodern or postcolonial usages of diaspora then show how all of our discussions about diaspora are predicated on naïve assumptions about the immutability of ethnic boundaries and rootedness of innate identities. That is to say, authorial imagination in Chow's terms, the dynamics of class in Ong's analysis, and the politics of perception in Ang's view all have relevant things to say about the significance of diaspora as a concept, even though they privilege different understandings of the diasporic phenomenon and identity. But I think all these ideas can be reconstituted rather differently in a way that not only reflects a deeper understanding of diaspora itself but also sheds an important light on the changing nature of diasporic communities everywhere. In other words, diaspora is still a viable concept that has useful ramifications for empirical study. A key example in my reinterpretation is the classic paradigm of Chinese diaspora in SE Asia.

The long history of Chinese traders in Southeast Asia is incontestable. Their separateness as ethnic group vis-à-vis Europeans and local indigenous populations is heightened by their continued attachment to their homeland as

well as to their sojourning intentions as traders. Although many Chinese ethnic settlements were established in port cities, they were rarely if ever by accompanied by migration of wives or families. In time, there were of course increasing numbers of Chinese who intermarried and became assimilated or creolized, such as the Peranakans in Indonesia and Babas in Malaya, but this simply accentuated the polarization of the Chinese population at this time in contrast to other ethnic groups. In fact, their separateness was not just a function of ethnic differences but also their status as traders operating in tight personal networks. The preoccupation of most Chinese with business in the Philippines led Filipinos to use the Spanish term to refer to Chinese as *sangle* (merchant in Chinese). This was not unlike the pre-19th century use of the term Malay to denote the Muslim (i.e. Arab) trading diaspora.

The applicability of the term diaspora to characterize Chinese in the Nanyang region, even in the premodern era, is debatable. Given the Biblical connotations of the Jewish diaspora, the notion of dispersal and forced exile from a sacred homeland is inevitable, not to mention the themes of suffering and social memory that have without doubt definite parallels with the Black slave experience but have little in common with Chinese experiences, except to accent the element of detachment from a homeland or separateness vis-à-vis its host society. This sense of detachment that epitomizes the marginal nature of an ethnic diaspora is intrinsic to anthropological uses of the term, exemplified by Cohen's (1971: 2) often-cited definition of trading diaspora as 'a nation of socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed communities'.

Yet, ethnic separateness in this regard is not just the function of self-identification but can also be a function of external factors in society that maintain a stratified hierarchy between groups or prevent their integration into the polity at large. As Curtin (1984) noted in his study of cross-cultural trade in history, trading diasporas were a staple phenomenon throughout world history whose prominence began to fade with the growing domination of the modern world system and the spread of industrialization. In other words, the castelike status of diaspora is as much the function of a social system that reifies and hardens ethnic boundaries as it is the product of ethnic identification, (the latter being) as though natural and fixed.

The fictive quality of diaspora is best exemplified by the anachronistic nature of the Jewish diaspora especially in mainstream America today. One may question its applicability to those people who have overtly disavowed attachments to a religious homeland or chosen to assimilate to the cultural mainstream of its host society. For similar reasons, it would be unusual to speak of an aristocratic French or Anglo-Saxon Protestant diaspora. If an ethnic group ceases to be diasporic, because it has transcended its socially marginal status, then there is nothing ethnic about diaspora. One does not call capital that fuels corporate America diasporic, even if it happens to have Japanese or Jewish origins. Given too the extent to which foreign elements have shaped Hollywood culture, one would not call it diasporic either.

Diaspora thus has its limits, even as an 'ethnic' concept, which it is not, strictly

speaking, as I have argued above. Gilroy's appeal to diaspora was based on the evolution of a Black consciousness that was built directly on those feelings of political oppression and social estrangement and was not a function of territorial dispersal per se. Yet, the political connotations of diaspora are still evident in the way contemporary postcolonial theory has championed diaspora in order to liberate the suppressed multiple identities in us all. Reid (1997: 36) has also noted, for example, that its popularity as a term to encompass the condition of Chinese everywhere (outside of China) was heightened immensely during the first International Conference on the Chinese Diaspora, in Berkeley, CA, in November 1992. Its reception of use was found to be more favorable among North American Chinese than among Southeast Asian Chinese, where ironically diaspora was used first and most prominently to characterize sojourning Chinese traders. Its popularity now is attributable to those conditions that have created barriers and alienation.

The history of diaspora reveals in the final analysis not the primordial semantic meaning of the term so much as the restrictions imposed on its use by its underlying sociopolitical context, the latter being more important. A clearer case in point involves the now changing use of terms for 'overseas Chinese'. In the pre-modern, pre-national period, the Chinese sojourners in the Nanyang region were less citizens of a unified polity (speaking a single language [Mandarin] and sharing ties to a civilizational ideal) than disparate dialect groups tied together by familistic ties and attachments to a provincial homeland. As Wang Gungwu (1998: 1) rightly noted, 'the Chinese never had a concept of identity, only a concept of Chineseness, of being Chinese and of becoming un-Chinese'. Yet the concept of Chineseness at the time was not one invoked by the all-encompassing, politically neutral term *huaren* (being culturally Chinese). Southern Chinese at the time referred to themselves as *tangren* speaking *tanghua*, which to them just meant 'Chinese', when in fact they were regional groups speaking local dialect. There was less a notion of overseas Chinese here than a notion of Chinese living overseas. The term *huaqiao* to denote 'overseas Chinese' did not appear until late 19th century.

During the pre-modern era, the multicultural skills of Chinese traders were less a function of their multiple identities than strategic considerations based on occupational and political necessity. Success in social intercourse and economic exchange demanded fluency in many dialects and languages, as well as familiarity with diverse customs. As Wang Gungwu (1991: 139) aptly phrased it, 'for most of these merchants and entrepreneurs, being Chinese had nothing to do with becoming closer to China. It was a private and domestic matter only manifested when needed to strengthen a business contact or to follow an approved public convention'. In the colonial era, the particular role of Chinese as compradors enhanced their separateness as an ethnic community. In this regard too, the functional specialization of other traders, most notably Indians and Arabs, contributed to their separateness as diasporic communities, not just their ethnic differences per se.

The meaning and use of the concept of 'overseas Chinese' also cannot be divorced from the conditions of global capitalism that brought about large scale

immigration of Chinese laborers to Southeast Asia, starting at the end of the 19th century. Most of them were sojourners, at least initially, and their identity as a group was galvanized by Chinese nationalist sentiment that began to grow during the early 20th century and culminated in the 1911 Revolution. Through education in standard Mandarin and inculcation in Chinese history and civilization, overseas Chinese considered themselves probably for the first time as Chinese (despite regional and dialect nuances), vis-à-vis a national homeland as well as in contrast to their host society.

Nationalistic connotations of the term 'overseas Chinese' (*huaqiao*), along with the changing perceptions of Chinese living in Southeast Asia vis-à-vis their host societies, have in recent years led Chinese everywhere to increasingly use *huaren* to refer to Chinese who speak *huayu*, i.e. standard Chinese which is literally no different from the Mandarin known on the PRC as *putonghua* or in Taiwan as *guoyu*. In essence, terms differ significantly, not really because of their semantic content but because of their pragmatic context of use. This parallels the recent aversion by Chinese outside China to call themselves *zhongguoren* (Chinese) speaking *zhongguohua* (Chinese language), because of the nationalistic, or patriotic, associations of *zhongguo* with the Chinese polity. Ironically, the highest degree of resistance to both the old term overseas Chinese and new term diaspora comes from Chinese living in Southeast Asia. As Wang Gungwu (1995: 13) bluntly stated,

I do not agree to the word [diaspora] being used for the Chinese because it has implications which may have applied to some aspects of the sojourners in the past but do not apply to ethnic Chinese today. In many ways, diaspora is a word that has the kind of political content comparable to the term *huaqiao*.

Leo Suryadinata (1997) also asks if it is more accurate to call the Chinese there overseas Chinese, Chinese overseas or Southeast Asians. As Tan Chee Beng (1997) cogently remarked in his comment on Suryadinata's paper, it is not just a matter of possessing multiple identities, as though by putting on different cultural faces. The divisions among Chinese themselves show that they make explicit choices in primary cultural orientation, and even more importantly these choices are grounded in a context of territorial settlement, cultural assimilation or political incorporation to their local society rather than in their diasporic extension to a previous homeland.

Celebrating hybridity in an era of invented indigenization

The current resistance to diaspora experienced by Chinese overseas on the immediate periphery, most notably Southeast Asia and Taiwan as well, is less a declaration of their changing ethnic 'Chineseness' than a crisis of *identifying* in the sense of having been bound morally or politically to a cultural core. The tendency of Chinese to increasingly identify with their settled nation as citizens, despite their minority status and continued maintenance of cultural difference vis-à-vis their host culture, has rather important ramifications for the meaning

and use of the concept hybridity. Contrary to Gilroy's formation of a pan-national cultural consciousness, hybridity here is in essence an act of political decentering that will in the long run lead to the absorption of Chineseness there into increasingly local or indigenous frameworks of meaning. As Tan Chee Beng (1997: 31) once noted, 'Corazon Aquino has acknowledged that she has Chinese ancestry, and the Chinese press has written of her as if she is an ethnic Chinese. But how has she identified herself? Has she ever identified herself as an ethnic Chinese? As far as I know, she is just Filipino'. This contrasts on the other hand with the situation of the Straits Chinese of Malaysia, who identify as being Chinese, despite their heavily creolized and indigenized lifestyle.

In the context of indigenizing Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, it is clear that the nationalist imperative to identify has become problematic. Or to put it in a rather different way, it has become increasingly apparent that the maintenance of a bounded ethnic identity has been viewed as an irrelevant if not incompatible aspect of the conduct of economic and political life in these societies. Much of the success of Chinese entrepreneurs (past and present) in these Southeast Asian venues has been achieved through multicultural skills, often by downplaying ethnic difference. In the political arena, cooptation and networking have been staple norms of social mobility strategies by Chinese, even if it results in cultural assimilation. Successful examples of ethnic Chinese, such as Chuan Leekpai, the former Prime Minister of Thailand, and the many tycoons who have made their fortune by cultivating favor with native political leaders, show that maintenance of ethnic identity and lifestyles is irrelevant or secondary to these politico-economic concerns.

Toward a new politics of place in the spaces of changing politics

The question is thus not one of whether it is possible to have multiple identities or whether hybridity can create new identities but whether one can justifiably understand them without any reference to the socio-political structures that contain and define them *in fact*. The changing nationalist spaces of identity discourse and the shifting parameters of ethnic-cultural boundedness that characterize the process of identifying have in recent years fundamentally altered the framework for place-based imagination that is at the core of community and diasporic affiliation. It is not insignificant that Chinese in Southeast Asia have begun to see themselves increasingly as subject-citizens of their well-settled abodes, just as Taiwanese have begun to view themselves in relation to a reinvented but still indeterminate sense of place (to replace the previous spaces of polity, discourse and culture defined by the 'Republic of China'). These changes in *situatedness* have important ramifications for how new cultural discourses will be formed and what role hybridity will play in shaping the scope and relevance of identity.

Contrary to the kind of imaginary transnational fundamentalism that Tu Weiming's notion of cultural China advocates, which seems to include Chinese everywhere, I think it is fair to say that this imagined community is limited to a

small group of diasporic intellectuals in the ivory tower and is really far removed from the diverse kinds of geopolitical shifts that have been influencing Chinese in different settings. The fictive nature of the nation-state, for one, has been problematized in different ways in different venues.

The more Chinese 'identify' with the national regimes in which their routine of life is situated, the less likely it will be in the long run that one can view them as being part of a single universe of discourse, regardless of the disposition of their ethnic culture. Even in the case of Taiwan, the possibilities for identity can change radically, not just as a function of how native Taiwanese consciousness is defined but instead to the extent that it can alter its boundedness to the cultural nationalist framework in which its fate has been hopelessly entangled. Appadurai (1991: 209) attributes many of these shifts in situatedness to the recent effects of globalization or what he calls 'genealogies of cosmopolitanism'. In any ethnoscape (which may be discreet localities or higher level communities), such genealogies can reveal the cultural spaces in which new forms are indigenized (Appadurai notes how tourism has invaded the space of pilgrimage in India). While any one place can alternatively become the site of functional disjuncture or object of appropriation by other disruptive forces, the flip side of this is to recognize that any one place can be imbued with multiple meanings. The nation can thus be for some people a source of roots in a historical or political sense and for others a convenient abode or place of exile. Similarly, sacred sites can be objects of pilgrimage for some and a tourist attraction for others. The tyranny of a hegemonic, collective 'identity' associated with homogenous nation-states has given place a fixed hegemonic meaning, while on the other hand the fact that places can under *different* socio-political conditions take on multiple meanings then makes the choice of identifying with different moral communities an even more strategic and context-sensitive one.

Multiple meanings of place differ from multiple identities in the sense that they accent the primordial importance of context rather than ethnicity in the construction of identities. Rather than viewing the substance of one's ethnicity or culture as a natural point of departure, more importantly it is necessary to see how context invokes the relevance of culture, as a function of strategic choice, to the processes of identifying. Positionality within that context then becomes the subjective framework of power. In this regard, perception also plays an important role. Far from being a knee-jerk reaction to global forces, it is and can become the very source of cultural diversity.

An alternative approach to the study of place (and its ramifications for identity formation) comes from Patterson's (1994) concept of 'cosmopolis'. Although less cited than Gilroy's analysis of the Black Atlantic, Patterson's socio-historical analysis of the origins of reggae in the complex interactions of global culture and in the formation of the American cosmos shows how multiple flows (rather than the singular threat of a homogenizing cultural 'imperialism') have contributed to the invention of new cultural forms, while at the same time calling into question the meanings of place accorded to fixed cultural origins and casting in different light the status of musical culture in both the American and Jamaican cosmos. Like Gilroy, Patterson describes the formation of an

alternative modernity, one in which working class Rastafarian culture becomes a local site of hybridity whose sources of influence are global. Yet in tracing its influences to the West, one discovers that this musical culture is the site of a different kind of global synthesis.

Patterson contrasts the local assimilative strategies of working-class Jamaicans with the cultural cosmopolitanism of Jamaican intellectual elites. He resists characterizing the different sites of Black hybridity as making up a single Black Atlantic and instead argues that many cosmopolises overlap over a single terrain, making the idea of a single global system simplistic. Each distinct cosmopolis is defined by inherently different processes of cultural accommodation as well as strategies of socio-political positionality. Quite unlike Gilroy, whose Black Atlantic excludes the contributions of West Indian scholars to mainstream White scholarly discourse, Patterson's black 'nationalism' is less a hybrid 'collectivity' than one divided by social class and represented by many incompatible cultural ethos. By virtue of their overlap over a single terrain, Patterson's 'cosmopolises' lend themselves to political negotiation and conflict in ways that contrast directly with Gilroy's harmonious polyphony, especially with its experiential root in the social memory of slavery and the structures of feeling located therein. This should also have important ramifications for Chinese 'cosmopolises'. Even in the limited context of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, there are always avenues for fissions, fusions and ambiguities that have incessantly been made, unmade and remade, despite a common language and culture. Structures of sentiment, cultural or intellectual, can likewise always be created, spliced and synthesized in ways that reflect the changing geopolitical order of the times. In contrast to the way Ong et al champion the heroes of Chinese transnational capitalism, I would argue that, in any terrain, there is more divisive friction than unity. In any local setting, the cosmopolitan ethos of a transnational way of life must always compete with other kinds of social values, many of which may be rooted in social class, gender or the virtues of indigenous authenticity, in addition to machinations of the state itself.

Diaspora is in the end a concept whose origins and connotations show it to be the product of a stratified system, which is itself subject to ongoing institutional change. Thus, its appropriateness is largely a function of the power relations that effectively drive institutions and of the perception of people within that geography of power. Of course, one can champion the bottom-up process of hybridity as a means of decentering the hegemony of cultural authority, even to the point, as Gilroy does, of showing that the Black experience has contributed more to the construction of modernity than has previously been recognized by the center. But this will not detract from the other fact that, in the modern (and postmodern) world, there may always be tension between the forces of hybridity and the need to establish orthodox authority (through creation of standards, canons of correctness and lineages of purity). In *any* place, politics is not irreducible but certainly attempts to *present* itself as an a priori given. It is an ongoing, changing product of perception and negotiation for which there are no a priori rules.

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