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Review

Andoni Alonso and Pedro J. Oiarzabal, editors,
Diasporas in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community
(University of Nevada Press, 2010).

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The academic concern on whether diasporas can go home again - if we were to reverse

Clarence Walkers' book title - is not as vibrant as it was in the 1990s; instead the contemporary

diasporic theorizations are predominantly using technologically-based activities as a prism

through which diaspora, simultaneously as a process and a state, can be perceived.

Although experts in diaspora studies have guided our establishing of a broad definition of diaspora, there are assorted transformations informing the technological terrain since the burgeoning of the internet and the digital communication media that have unprecedentedly altered the way immigrants build, sustain, and restructure transnational and intercontinental networks. But if contemporary diaspora formation is partly a consequence of technological advancements, emerging socio-political and cultural-migratory networks are, consequently, shaping the technology itself. How diaspora communities are engaging in multifarious dialogues across the cyberspace and the latent capabilities of these dialogues to, accordingly, shape the cyberspace, and immigrants' host and home countries, is the subject of *Diasporas in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics and Community,* an eighteen-chapter volume edited by Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal.

This book is divided in two parts. Part 1, "Inside –out the screen: Diasporas at the margins of cyberspace," examines the intersection of emerging communication technologies with diasporas' search for and construction of identity in a state that is neither totally in consonance with the host nation nor entirely in dissonance with their homeland.

The four chapters in part one provide a succinct theoretical approach on technology as more than a mere technical tool; instead, technology is presented as a core defining factor in the definition of diaspora. An essay by Adela Ros "interconnected immigrants in the information society" is a sprightly written illustration of the emerging and rising interconnectedness among diasporas through the uses of the Internet as a way to negotiate their membership in a new environment as well as a providing a connection and a reconnection with their homeland. But it

is the oscillation between identifying with the homeland and integrating with the host lands that may potentially generate tensions among diasporas and their host nations. Jeniffer Brinkerhoff's essay *"migration, information technology, and international policy,"* suggests that one way to avoid such tensions is that, host nations must, of necessity, could establish insightful policies geared toward integration and harmonization of diasporas' cultures and identities. Also, in her essay, which touches on technology, remittances, diaspora integration, and international policy, Brinkerhoff, a widely consulted scholar on diaspora and international policy and relations, submits six policy recommendations for both host and homeland governments " as well as international development policy makers and analysts."

Most contributors in this volume use frequently the term digital diaspora, but it is Michel Laguerre, in his exploration of the impact of information technology on the subaltern diasporic communities in the Silicon Valley and San Francisco metropolis, who devotes more time defining, contextualizing, and deconstructing it. Laguerre identifies three "incarnations" through which a diaspora becomes digital: interweaving of the virtual and the real in the hybrid production of everyday life in an immigrant enclave, the negative and positive impacts of the information technology on the immigrant enclave, and the global penetration of the IT revolution into the community and the global outreach of residents to meet their local needs and improve their lifestyles. The finality connoted by Laguerre "incarnations" projects a sense of arrival, which contradicts diaspora as a "voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning," a perpetual "navigation of multiple belongings, of networks of affiliation.[1]"

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[1] See Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's article, "Diaspora dialogues: Engagements between Africa and its diaspora," in Isidore Okpewho & Nkiru Nzegwu (Eds.) *The New African Diaspora* (2009). Pp. 31- 58

Part 2 of this volume, aptly titled "Dialogues Across Cyberspace," is an extensive confluence of diasporic case studies from various part of the globe -- Africa and the Caribbean (from Cape Verde to Eritrea to Jamaica), Asia (from China to India), Europe (from Basque and Galicia), Latin America (from Brazil to El Salvador); extrapolated using different fields of study (from philosophy to political science, from DNA inquiries to 3-D imaging), while adopting different viewpoints (from ethnic composition to diasporic construction, from identity construction to digital nationalism).

Using approaches that are either theoretical, pragmatic, or both, the fourteen chapters in part 2 broadly explore how diasporas make and re-make a home, define and re-define themselves, construct and reconstruct hybrid identity, and act and re-act in relationship to issues related to host and homelands while avoiding disenfranchisement by both. The complexity of such intersections is anchored on diasporas awareness that the aforementioned dynamics are subject to constant mutative tendencies in response to disjunctive materialities and realities of diasporic existence.

The strength of this volume is its topicality breadth; from seemingly irreconcilable topics such as the 419 e-mail scam associated with Nigeria and how, once closely examined, as in Tolu Odumosu and Ron Eglash's essay, becomes an expose of identity crisis, to narratives based on explorations and references to an Indian 3-D diaspora.

But digital diaspora is also a forum vibrant with information warfare and political activism. Victoria Bernal's essay "Nationalist network: The Eritrean diaspora online" explores political activities in the cyberspace among the Eritrean diaspora as a space "beyond the reach of

the government" permitting the "possibility of political experimentation" (p. 134). Such online activism is the subject of Yitzhak Shichor's essay " Net nationalism: The digitization of the Uyghur diaspora," a crisp account of Uyghurs, a Turkic-Muslim community residing in Northwest China that only came to international limelight in the 1990s. Such, from a meritorious standpoint, is the strength of this volume- that it is sufficiently extensive and covers less studied diasporas such Uyghur, Cape Verdeans, and Galician and is enriched by fieldwork extending beyond examination of indigenous and foreign cultures and more than a mere chronicle of case studies.

The book would be very suitable for both undergraduate and graduate courses that cover diaspora studies, new communication technologies, cultural studies, media and information sciences studies (especially information seeking behavior), sociology, international relations and political communication.