**Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement, Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2009, ISBN-13 978-0-511-71938-7**

Migratory birds like the Siberian cranes cover large distances to escape harsh winters and shortage of food during the winter months. Even though they stay for a few months in their host country of migration like India, they are a source of joy as well as a source of income through tourism for locals. In much the same way, humans migrate from their countries of birth for livelihood, better life or to escape conflict or persecution in their homelands. Unlike the birds, however, most of them don't return to their homelands, having settled in their new lives in their adopted homelands. So what is the difference between migrants and Diasporas?

Diasporas are defined as migrants in host countries, who still maintain emotional and material linkages with their homelands. This book by Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff is a scholarly work about digital Diasporas, Diaspora groups that use the Internet. The term 'Digital Diaspora' is a recent coinage and describes the phenomenon of Diasporas using the Internet to connect and maintain bonds with their countries of origin. The Internet pretty much performs the same function as a physical group i.e., that is, it provides a connection to the country of origin, eases security concerns, improves a member's quality of life, creates communities that represent hybrid identities and encourages solidarity among members.

So how does the digital aspect add value? Migration is not easy. The identity of the migrant is not a zero sum game. It is typically a dynamic hybridization between home, host and lived experiences. There is a felt need of a migrant to actively express an identity. This may be derived from various forms of marginalization, confusion or not wanting to lose a sense of homeland identity.

Information technology is interactive and is an easily access tool for Diaspora storytelling, sharing and narration, thus enabling members to make sense of their experiences and feelings in their new culture and identity. The anonymity of the Internet eases the Diaspora participation especially when sharing painful memories or discussing potentially conflictive topics.

Brinkerhoff examines how immigrants who still feel a connection to their country of origin use the Internet, and this, she does through the case study of nine digital organizations. She argues that digital Diasporas can ease security concerns in both the homeland and the host society, thus improving Diaspora members' quality of life in the host society, and contributing to socioeconomic development in the homeland.

She begins her arguments by theoretically defining the term 'Diaspora' and emphasis on the Diasporan identity and its importance. She elucidates the major components that influence Diaspora identity. These are origin, language, historical memory, religion, and the habitual status of a minority in larger societies.

Diasporas may proactively promote and recreate homeland identities, these identities being more acute in the absence of a physical homeland, for instance, for people from Tibet. She cites the case of Dorjee Nud, a Tibetan born in India, after his parents fled Tibet. Nudup founded TibetBoard in the year 2000, two years after his arrival in New York. TibetBoard, explains Brinkerhoff, is an interactive and comparatively informal destination for those who may want to learn about or negotiate the Tibetan identity among Diaspora.

Brinkerhoff talks about how digital networks increase in social capital, bonding of which provides the collective identity, and how instrumental networks that can ward off personal disorder and psychic crisis. They direct their mobilized identity toward improved quality of life for compatriots in the homeland, for Diaspora communities in the host-land, or for both. For example, the IIT Roorkee Alumni Association of North America (host land) is working with IIT Roorkee (homeland) to help students explore and fine-tune their entrepreneurial instincts by pitching business ideas for start-ups to a panel of senior venture capitalists and entrepreneurs for mentorship and incubation using the digital medium.

Besides a homeland identity, IT helps Diasporas link to the homeland. Brinkerhoff cites the case of Bal Joshi who after pursuing his undergraduate in business studies in Portland, Oregon, returned to Nepal. In Nepal, he started *Thamel.com* to attract tourists after trying his hand at other entrepreneur ventures. Bal Joshi used *Thamel* in a throwback to the name of a Kathmandu street that hosts the business core. *Thamel.com* became an important vehicle for Diasporas to communicate inexpensively with their family members in Nepal. Joshi stumbled on to a new idea related to the *Dashain* Festival, the most important cultural and spiritual celebration in Nepal, the major component of which was the sacrifice of a ceremonial goat to bring prosperity in the year ahead. After a few iterations, Thamel.com zeroed in on delivering gift certificates from Diasporas that could be redeemed by the family in Nepal at a particular goat market. These become a big hit with the Nepal Diaspora who would transfer the money online for gift certificate to be physically delivered in Nepal.

The chapter, "Digital Diasporas and Conflict Prevention" analyzes how digital Diasporas by the creation of cyber communities counter the marginalization conducive to violence using examples of Somalinet and AfghanistanOnline. These cybercommunities potentially prevent conflict through opportunities to express feelings and bond with others online, as the difficulty of communication in the physical world is simplified

in the cyberworld where a certain degree of anonymity is permitted to an individual. Through these cybercommunities, members potentially deflect their frustration and animosity through verbal modes, as opposed to potentially violent forms like physical agitation and confrontation.

The author discusses how Diasporas also support agendas consistent with liberal values, such as democracy and human rights which are advantageous to selected homeland constituents and the international community alike. Furthermore, the author feels Diasporas may not threaten state sovereignty to the extent feared, and may even support it giving the example of the U.S. Copts Association and its physical world political agenda to improve the quality of life of Copts residing in Egypt. She narrates the story of  Nermien Riad, a US State Department employee on a duty in Egypt,  after visiting a Coptic orphanage in Cairo went on to start the Coptic Orphans that implements four programs in Egypt that not only help the Coptic community, but also extend their reach to non-Coptic girls and their problems.

The author brings out how today the most advanced digital diasporas are seeking to improve policy and institutional frameworks in support of both targeted homeland communities/populations and Diaspora contribution efforts. For example, the Zacatecan Federation of Hometown Associations in the United States orchestrated matching programs with the Mexican Government and spun off a political arm to lobby on both sides of the border, for an improved migrant investment environment  while the India, Diaspora members have contributed significantly to the IT sector, through direct investment brokering investment relationships and proposing and promoting necessary changes to the legal framework in order to improve the investment climate.

Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff is leaning heavily on how these digital Diasporas help negotiate hybrid identity and contribute to homeland societies. How digital Diasporas are contributing to the host-land in terms of host societies understanding of migrant culture, migrant skills and addition to host-land economy is not elucidated.  She has also not touched upon digital Diasporas support for secession by ethnic groups in homeland.

The research for this 2009 published book has been done in the early 21$^{st}$ century and hence concepts like "social media Diaspora groups" don't figure in the narrative. How social media channels "Youtube" "Twitter and "Facebook" have reworked connecting and sharing rules on the internet or usage of Skype for communication is not touched upon. Five years is a long time in the new media converged world of today and hence maybe a second edition of the book is due.

Irrespective of a little repetitiveness the book is a must read for students working in the field of Diaspora studies. Students of new media will also get a great baseline insight on digital Diasporas. This combined with the current tidings of digital Diasporas experiments with social media will be worth investigating.

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