ICT, Migrant Networks and Transnational Identity

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Abstract

The global expansion of Infromation-Communication-Technology (ICT) widens access to information, enhances communication capacity, and is expected to promote social inclusion and facilitate democratic participation. Among the most influential factors facilitating these phenomena is the effect of glocalization on languages in cyberspace.

Global migration is turning many societies into culturally diverse societies, as immigrants settle down and their descendants become ethnic minorities in their host country.

Migrants often leave behind not only *physical capital* but also much of their *social capital*. ICT – both global and glocal - plays a major role in nurturing "virtual" social capital. Global social networking sites encourage the development of *bridging* social capital, while local immigrant digital networks enable them to develop *bonding* social capital in their new country and transnational networks enable them to maintain some of their former bonding social capital in their country of origin. The traditional image of the *uprooted* immigrant is being replaced by the image of a *connected* immigrant. Today's migrants are the actors of a culture of bonds, which they maintain even as they move about. This culture of bonds became visible and highly dynamic since migrants began using ICT massively. It is more and more common for migrants to maintain remote relations typical of relations of proximity and to activate them on a daily basis. From a Diaspora perspective, *immigrants* are also *emigrants*. ICT enables them to engage in transnational connections and maintain transnational and/or pluricultural identities.

Diaspora as an analytic term is relevant for investigations of media practices among contemporary immigrants, leaving room for questions of multiple belonging with implications for everyday life. In recent years, especially with the advent Digital Broadcasting Satellite (DBS) technology, transnational media has become central in the consumption of news by immigrant populations, who tend to seek news very broadly. Extensive news media consumption, desire for more international news than found in the national television channels, and a critical stance towards the news from these channels, are also part of the picture.

Temporary and permanent immigrants use the internet as a "bridgespace"', a virtual space that supports flows of people, goods, capital and ideas between the country of origin and the country of destination. 'Matrimonial' sites are but one example. Migrant networks play important roles for immigrants and their descendants. Ethnic minority communities develop online portals in which major dilemmas emerge, such as essentialism vs. fluidity of identities; universalism vs particularism; or recognition vs redistribution. Internet discussion forums are popular online meeting places for diaspora people. Here they are articulating race and culture in the public cyberspaces. One of the recurring topics in these discussions is the nature of their identity and how this relates to living overseas. Participants exchange personal experiences, political opinions, emotional and intellectual expectations about the outer and inner limits of identity and/or culture in their everyday lives. On the Web, 2nd generation immigrant youths orient themselves to the country where they live (bridging between cultures) as well as to their parents' country of origin (bonding of social capital).

Keywords: ICT, Diaspora, migrant networks, transnational identity.

Migration, Social Capital and the Role of ICT

Migrants often leave behind not only *physical capital* (e.g. land, house etc) but also much of the *social capital* which they used to possess in their country of origin. Social capital is a concept that highlights the value of social relations and the role of cooperation and confidence to get collective or economic results. Since social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups, social consists of the expectative benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups. Putnam (2005) distinguished between *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital. The former *(Bonding* social capital) refers to the value assigned to social networks within homogeneous groups of people (e.g. members of the extended family, friends, neighbors etc), that are characterized by generalized reciprocity[a]. The latter (*Bridging* social capital) refers to the value of socially heterogeneous networks. For immigrants, their homogeneous networks are a source of comfort, help and support in times of hardships and crises. The heterogeneous networks are a source of more diversified information and advice that could be essential in the process of resettlement.

ICT – both global and glocal -plays a major role in nurturing "virtual" social capital , which is still a new area of research. Global social networking sites (e.g. *Facebook*) encourage the development of *bridging* social capital, while local immigrant digital networks enable them to develop *bonding* social capital in their new country and transnational networks enable them to maintain some of their former social capital in their country of origin.

Migration, Ethnicity and the Culture of Bonds

"Individuals don't migrate; networks migrate." (Sanchez, 1999)

Huge waves of global migration are turning many information-technology societies into culturally diverse societies. First-generation immigrants are followed by second/ third/further generations in the host country and become part of the county's ethnic minorities (often beside native minorities such as the Aboriginies in Australia, the native-Americans in the USA, the Palestinian citizens of Israel ,etc), often part of ethnic divides.

The term "immigrants" is usually used for the foreign-born inhabitants of a country , and then replaced by the term "ethnic group/minority" to include also the second /third generation offsprings of these immigrants who've settled in the new country.

Black British, Indian/South Asian, Chinese and Muslim minority communities in the UK, (Siapera 2006), Asians and Latinos in USA (Harris., Jamison,,& Trujillo , 2008 ; Mossberger, Tolbert & Gilbert, 2006), NRI - temporary and permanent immigrants to the USA from India, typically called Non-Resident Indians (Adams & Ghose ,2003), people from the Pacific Islands who live in the USA, Australia and New Zealand (Franklin 2003), Turkish or Maroccan minority groups in the Netherlands and Flanders (D'Haenens, Koeman & Saeys 2007), Ghanaian non-citizen immigrants in London (Herbert et al. 2008), Colombians in Chicago (Balcazar, Garcia-Iriarte & Suarez-Balcazar, 2009),   Russian (Leshem & Lissak 2000) or Ethiopian (Sever, 2007a) Israelis - all these are but a few examples.

Transnationalism refers to the multiple ties and interactions that link peoples across borders. It serves to challenge conventional assumptions regarding the importance of traditional borders and boundaries in defining who we are, how we think, and with whom we associate. It raises questions like: how does one's home define who one is? *Transnational identity* refers to people who identify with more than one culture, more than one nation. In some cases it raises questions about divided loyalty.

Current trends in thinking on contemporary migration (in particular, theories on transnational networks) agree that today's migrants are the actors of a culture of bonds, which they themselves have founded and which they maintain even as they move about. Formerly a latent feature but typical of all groups on the move, this culture of bonds became visible and highly dynamic once migrants began massively to use modern information and communication technologies (ICT).

While various theories of globalization focus solely on the dimensions of economic and political transactions, Drori (2007) expands on the cultural and institutional dimensions of globalization and highlights five shared dimensions between globalization and ICT, *networks* being one of them (the other four are: economic transactions, political relations, globality, and world norms). It is becoming more and more common for migrants to maintain remote relations typical of relations of proximity and to activate them on a daily basis. Thus Diminescu (2008) states that the paradigmatic figure of the *uprooted migrant* is yielding to another figure: the *connected migrant*.

■■■

Globalization, Glocalization and the role of language in the formation of migrant networks and transnational identity

Among the most influential factors facilitating - sometimes even just enabling - immigrants' networks is the effect of *glocalization* on languages in cyberspace.

At the beginning, most of the Web pages in the world were in English, and most of the early nationally-oriented Internet newsgroups conducted their discussion in English as well. This state of affairs caused great consternation for many people around the world. But it turns out that the fears of an English-dominated Internet were premature. The number of non-English websites is growing rapidly and many of the more newly active Internet newsgroups extensively use the national language. Underlying this change of direction is a more general shift from globalization to glocalization (Sever 2009). The first wave of globalization - whether in economics or in media - witnessed vertical control from international centers, as witnessed for example by the rise of media giants such as CNN and MTV. But in more recent waves, a process of relocalization is occurring, as corporations seek to maximize their market share by shaping their products for local conditions. Thus, while CNN and MTV originally broadcasted around the world in English, they are now producing editions in Hindi, Spanish, and other languages in order to compete with other international and regional media outlets.

A similar process is occurring with the Internet, although via a more spontaneous and bottom-up process. Whereas more than 90 percent of the early users of the Internet were located in North America, the Net is now growing fastest in developing

countries such as China and India, and many others. In response to this situation, web browsers are being adapted for an increasing number of languages and character sets. Thus, while Internet users around the world still use English for global communication, today they are increasingly turning to their own language to reach websites or join discussions in transnational immigrant networks. (Warschauer 2000, 2008).

Immigrant's mother –tongue plays an important role in transnational identities.

Fialkova (2005) claims that the Russian language and culture are more important factors than group consciousness for emmigrants from the FSU.

Massey & Magaly (2010) found that the use of Spanish played an important unifying role for Latino immigrants in the U.S, especially when reinforced through participation in language-specific social networks.
They explored the formation and content of transnational identities among first and second generation Latino youths in three different urban sites in the northeastern United States: Philadelphia, New York City, and the New Jersey urban corridor connecting these two poles.. They found a solidification of a pan-national Latino identity in the second generation; this did not necessarily imply ghettoization, but defined an ideological space from which the second generation encountered American society and its diverse peoples: whites, blacks, Asians, and others. *Latinidad* was employed conceptually as a key distinction between themselves and the rest of American society. The use of Spanish played an important unifying role. Respondents spoke about feeling able to communicate in an "emotional way" with other Latinos in contrast with the "Nordic" way they talked to white Americans, an alienation heightened by their poverty and economic insecurity. Feelings of "Latinidad" were bound up with commonalities of experience, language, culture, social interaction, and emotional sensibilities.

Diaspora, immigrant networks and ICT

Diaspora as an analytic term is relevant for observations and empirical investigations of media practices among contemporary immigrants, leaving room for questions of multiple belonging and conflicting loyalties, with implications for everyday life.

Defining diasporas, scholars indicate the importance of their symbolic dimensions and the ethnic group consciousness. In the case of emmigrants from the FSU the vision of "home", loyalty and belonging are renegotiated both in the metropolis and in the diaspora. Virtual encounters of ex-Soviets enable emigrants residing in various countries to sort out memories of the past and new experiences in host countries relying on familiar cultural codes and symbols. Not all ex-Soviets involved in the activities of these sites consciously belong to the diaspora. Even if they do, this does not presuppose loyalty to the Russian Federation, and the discourse of return to the fatherland has only a marginal role. Other sites seem more oriented to the successful integration in the host country, but they also reflect immigrants' attempts to reproduce familiar institutions, cultural practices, and loyalty to the Russian language. (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya, 2005)

In recent years, especially with the advent Digital Broadcasting Satellite (DBS) technology, transnational media has become central in the consumption of news by immigrant populations. This has received some attention as a factor associated with the lack of integration into their new societies (Christiansen 2004). Instead, a

transnational-identity perspective could be useful here. People with migrant experience tend to seek news very broadly. Extensive news media consumption, desire for more international news than found in the national television channels, and a critical stance towards the news from these channels, are also part of the picture. A diaspora perspective transforms the prospect presented by observers and journalists, worried about integration processes, and prompts considerations that immigrants are also emigrants.(Christiansen 2004)

The importance of diaspora groups and transnational links is illustrated, for example, in various coping strategies which Ghanaian migrant workers in London developed to overcome their difficulties, at the individual and collective levels (Herbert et al. 2008)

The rise of the diaspora concepts is highly connected to ICT and its use by migrants.

Succesful immigrants in affluent countries sometimes make use of ICT to assist development in their third-world country of origin. An interesting example is presented by Ndangam (2008) who studied how a media organization (The Post newspaper) located in Cameroon , namely within the `have not' side of the digital divide, was publishing online. A skills inadequacy in the newsroom and a relatively weak telecommunications infrastructure in the country have prompted the newspaper's online version to not only target a diasporic audience, but rely on the expertise and resources of this audience in the development and administration of its website. Illustrating this mode of collaboration between the diasporic audience and the newspaper and detailing its implications for news production and editorial decision-making, Ndangam argues that this model of online news publishing, rarely evidenced in the literature, illustrates the nature and significance of transnational relationships in the diffusion and adoption of online publishing. It simultaneously reflects an alternative transnational practice through which African migrants engage with their home of origin.

Ethnic minority youths in the Netherlands orient themselves on the Web to the country where they live (bridging between cultures) as well as to their parents' country of origin (bonding of social capital).(D'Haenens, Koeman & Saeys , 2007)

Temporary and permanent immigrants from India to the USA (typically called Non-Resident Indians or NRIs) use the internet as a "bridgespace"', namely a virtual space that supports flows of people, goods, capital and ideas between South Asia and North America. 'Matrimonial' sites, namely sites designed to support the identification of marriage partners, are one example.(Adams & Ghose, 2003*)*

Internet serves migrants as the meeting place of dispersed communities .In Israel, for instance, almost half (48.5%) of 1st generation recent Immigrants[b] participate in online forums - more than the general Jewish (38.9%) and the Arab (34.1%) population.(CBS 2007).

Internet discussion forums are popular online meeting places for the Polynesian Diaspora - people from the Pacific Islands who live in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Here they are articulating race and culture in the public cyberspaces .One of the most recurring topics in the discussions is the nature of their identity and how this relates to living overseas. Participants - many of whom are of mixed race' - exchange personal experiences, political opinions, emotional and intellectual expectations about

the outer and inner limits of race/ethnicity, and/or culture in their everyday lives. (Franklin 2003) .

For Russian emigrants from FSU, two kinds of websites are created: one is institutional sites, the other grassroots sites. The former are web pages that have emerged at the initiative of various Russian government institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGO) [c]; the latter are sites created by emigrants, both individuals and NGOs. Sites created by the Russian state organizations aim to promote ties with "compatriots abroad". Reflecting a new trend in Russian policies, proclaiming ties with the diaspora a high priority issue, these sites aim at increasing expatriates' involvement in economic, cultural and scientific life in the "old country" and encourage repatriation. Sites of the second kind, grassroots initiatives of the migrants, contribute to community building as forums for sharing useful information about institutions, laws and customs governing in the receiving society and building up a network of services rendered by immigrants to their co-ethnics. Many of these cater to the cultural needs of the newcomers and thus respond to challenges of integration and acculturation. (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya, 2005)

Today's migrants are able to maintain strong economic, cultural, political, and physical ties to their place of birth. Traditional immigrant issues such as citizenship, political incorporation, and cultural assimilation are being rapidly transformed. (Sanchez, 1999). The concept of transnationalism allows for individual diversity and collective similarity to co-exist (Green & Power,2005).

Some of the research of transnational identities and networks focuses on immigrants to neighbor countries, such as New Zealanders in Australia (Green & Power, 2005) or Mexicans in the US (Velasco Ortiz, 2005). But globalization has made transnational connections to exist also between far-away countries, one well known example being Russian immigrants in Israel, Canada or the US.

The increasing volume of transnational practices foster identity construction across borders, thereby disjoining geographical space and social space in which identities are constructed and negotiated. Some of the recent studies focus on the linkage between transnationalism and transnational identity; namely on transnational identity formation among immigrant groups with high level of transnational organizing of economic and political activities (sf. Green & Powers, 2005; Velasco Ortiz ,2005). Others pay increasing attention to transnational identity construction of immigrant groups without high levels of transnationalism (sf. Han, 2010).

Here are a few examples.

Green & Power (2005) investigated how migration to Australia affects New Zealanders' sense of identity. New Zealanders living in Australia have both an enhanced sense of their New Zealand identity and a new transnational identity, created through their experiences and interactions within their new society together with their continued contact with their country of origin/

Velasco Ortiz (2005) investigated groups located on both sides of the Mexico–U.S border that have maintained strong links with towns and villages in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca. Her research brings to light the way in which the dispersion of members of different communities is offset by the formation of migrant networks with family and community ties, while the politicization of these networks enables the

formation of both hometown associations and transnational pan-ethnic organizations. She documented and analyzed the construction of novel identities formed within transnational contexts that may not conform to identities in either the "sending" or "receiving" societies. She described in detail the emergence of a wide range of transnational indigenous organizations and communities in the greater Mexico–U.S. border region. She examined the formation of ethnic identity under the conditions of international migration, giving special attention to the emergence of organizations and their leaders as collective and individual ethnic agents of change. Three lines of development : the formation of organizations beyond the confines of home communities; the emergence of indigenous migrant leaders; and the shaping of ethnic consciousness that assimilates the experiences of a community straddling the border.

Han (2010) examined the identity dynamics among Korean military wives in the U.S who do not have high level of transnationalism but negotiate their identities transnationally by way of various identity practices to imagine themselves as members of multiple communities across national and cultural boundaries. His study reveals that the non-mobile immigrants created multilayered "imagined communities" which converts their identities to be multiple identities. This effort is the part of the non-mobile immigrants' gradual adaptation to the U.S. society and resistance to assimilation.

The impact of the digital divide between migrants' countries of origin and their countries of destination

The term *digital divide* is often used as an indicator of inequality between people and between countries and populations. It refers to gaps in future-opportunities between those with different degrees of connectedness to the information-communication-technology (ICT).Originally, the term was being used to address the assumed polarization between those who have and those who don't have access – first to computers, later on also to the internet. Today however the digital divide notion is gradually widening. Digital awareness divide, infrastructure divide , unequal skills and unequal ability to use information technology as means of production – all these are different dimensions of the digital divide. It can take the form of inequality in various facets of digital accessibility: financial, cognitive, content and political. (Mizrahi et al, 2005)

The digital divide discourse takes place on two different levels: one is an inter- national level (i.e. inequality between countries) , the other an intra-national or individual level (i.e. inequality between people or sub-groups of a country's population).

Access to ICTs in different countries is shaped by the interaction of socioeconomic, political, cultural, social, and technological factors. Fuchs*(2009)* identifies factors which influence Internet usage in 126 countries and shows that income inequality measured by the Gini coefficient is an important influencing factor besides per capita income, the degree of urbanization, and the level of democratization. The results question reductionistic digital divide approaches that analyze information inequality via focusing on a single variable such as technology or markets..

The adoption of mobile phones has been skyrocketing globally during the current decade, but present adoption levels are quite uneven across countries. Such disparities

are also found over a range of other information and communications technologies .
Stump, Rodney , Wen &, Zhan (*2008)* investigated the adoption of mobile phones at
the country level of analysis across 170 nations, examining the effects of three
country-level socioeconomic factors paralleling the individual-level demographic
traits that in past studies have predominantly predicted early adoption of innovations.
They found positive effects of populations' mean age and wealth (measured by
GNP- Gross National Product) , but no impact of a nation's education level.

Drori & Jang (2003) attempted to find patterns of differentiation between countries
worldwide and between blocs of countries in terms of IT connectedness . Their
results indicate that the global digital divide is more a product of networking into
global society than it is a mere reflection of local economic capabilities

Many of the immigrants to the so-called first world, affluent countries, come from the
so-called third-world, developing, poor countries.For immigrants coming from these
countries, namely those on the "wrong side" of the digital divide, the proliferation of
ICT in their country of destination might widen the gap between them and the local
population. On the other hand, for immigrants coming from countries that are digitally
advanced, the internet can be quite helpful in the processes of re-settlement and
transnational identity formation.

Diaspora, Transnationalism and divided loyalties

Rather than seeing migration as the loss of one national identity, it could be seen as
the platform of building a transnational identity that derives from both the country of
origin and the host country. But transnational identities are in danger of being
suspected to carry divided loyalties – to the country they came from and to the
country they settled in. When the two countries are in conflict with each other, this
danger is very real. Israel supplies an interesting example of how two different kinds
of transnational identities are being treated.

In Israel, diaspora and transnationalism play different roles for Jews and non-Jews,
and for the two large minority groups : Russian immigrants and native Palesinian
citizens of the Israeli state.

For Israeli Jews the concept *diaspora* encompasses not only contemporary emigrants
from Israel, but all Jews that do not live in Israel. The Jewish diaspora is believed to
be two-thousand years old.

For the Palestinian citizens of Israel , native for many generations, *diaspora* means
relatives, neighbors and friends who have emmigrated from Israel to western or Arab
countries, many of the latter being enemy states for the Israeli state . Thus Palestinian
citizens in Israel who maintain transnational connections with their diaspora, especiall
in Arab countries, are looked upon suspiciously by the Jewish public and officials;
such connections are often defined as "forbidden association with enemy agencies".
Transnational identity is perceived as reflecting disloyalty to the Israeli state , and
public identification with people in surrounding Arab countries, are addressed as
bordering on national betrayed.

The Russian immigrants are in a different position. They see themselves as part of a wide ex-soviet Russian speaking diaspora residing in various parts of the western world. The Israeli public accepts this half-heartedly. Their transnational connections are accepted as financially beneficiary but their transnational identity is resented as reluctance to assimilate and as a barrier to their absorption in the Jewish society, as betrayal of the Zionist ideology and – like elsewhere (sf. Christiansen 2004)- as a factor associated with lack of integration into their new society. ICT facilitates their transnational ties, which in turn contribute to the maintenance of cultural diversity in Israel and help redefine the notion of integration in non-assimilative terms.

In conclusion

Migrants often have to leave behind physical capital, as well as much of their social capital. ICT – both global and glocal - plays a major role in nurturing new "virtual" social capital. Global social networking sites encourage the development of *bridging* social capital, while local immigrant digital networks enable them to develop *bonding* social capital in their new country and transnational networks enable them to maintain some of their former bonding social capital in their country of origin.

The traditional image of the *uprooted* immigrant is being replaced by the image of a *connected* immigrant. Today's migrants are the actors of a culture of bonds, which they themselves have founded and which they maintain even as they move about. This culture of bonds became visible and highly dynamic since migrants began using ICT massively. It is more and more common for migrants to maintain remote relations typical of relations of proximity and to activate them on a daily basis.

Temporary and permanent immigrants use the internet as a "bridgespace", a virtual space that supports flows of people, goods, capital and ideas between the country of origin and the country of destination. 'Matrimonial' sites, those sites designed to support the identification of marriage partners, are one example.

Migrant networks play important roles for immigrants and their descendants. Ethnic minority communities develop online portals in which major dilemmas emerge, such as essentialism vs. fluidity of identities; universalism vs particularism; or recognition vs redistribution. Internet discussion forums are popular online meeting places for diaspora people. Here they are articulating race and culture in the public cyberspaces of the worldwide web. One of the recurring topics in these discussions is the nature of their identity and how this relates to living overseas. Participants exchange personal experiences, political opinions, emotional and intellectual expectations about the outer and inner limits of identity and/or culture in their everyday lives. On the Web, 2nd generation immigrant youths orient themselves to the country where they live (bridging between cultures) as well as to their parents' country of origin (bonding of social capital).

Some of the research of transnational identities and networks focuses on immigrants to neighbour countries, but globalization and ICT have enabled transnational connections to exist also between people in far-away countries. The increasing volume of transnational practices foster identity construction across borders, thereby

disjoining geographical space and social space in which identities are constructed and negotiated. Transnational identity formation is found among immigrant groups with high level of transnational organizing of economic and political activities, but transnational identity construction is also found in immigrant groups without high level of transnationalism.

In the case of immigrants who do not have high levels of actual transnation activity, their resistance to assimilation while gradually adapting to their new society, may involve various identity practices to imagine themselves as members of multiple communities across national and cultural boundaries.

Immigrants sometimes employ a transnational identity conceptually as a key distinction between themselves and the rest of the host society. The solidification of a pan-national identity in second generation immigrants does not necessarily imply ghettoization; it may define an ideological space from which the second generation encounters the host society and its diverse peoples. The use of mother-tongue also plays an important unifying role, especially when it is reinforced through participation in language-specific social networks. Transnational identities are bound up with commonalities of experience, language, culture, social interaction, and emotional sensibilities. Immigrants have both an enhanced sense of their original identity and a new transnational identity, created through their experiences and interactions within their new society together with their continued contact with their country of origin. The construction of novel identities formed within transnational contexts may not conform to identities in either the "sending" or "receiving" societies.

The formation of ethnic identity under the conditions of international migration, may go hand in hand with the emergence of organizations and their leaders as collective and individual ethnic agents of change. Concepts such as *diaspora, transnational relations* and *transnational identities* are gradually gaining attention among researchers of migration. After all, immigrants (to one country) are also emigrants (from another one). ICT enables them to engage in transnational connections, develop their *bonding* and *bridging* social capital, develop and maintain transnational and/or pluricultural identities.

Diaspora as an analytic term is relevant for observations and empirical investigations of media practices among contemporary immigrants, leaving room for questions of multiple belonging and conflict of loyalties, with implications for everyday life.

The concept of transnationalism allows for individual diversity and collective similarity to co-exist. Rather than seeing migration as the loss of one national identity, it could be seen as the building of a transnational identity that derives from both the country of origin and the host country. But transnational identities are in danger of being suspected to carry divided loyalties – to the country they came from and to the country they settled in. When the two countries are in conflict with each other, this danger is quite conspicuous.

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[a] Generalized reciprocity in a network means that people operate benevolently within a large network of social transactions without expectations about getting specific benefits in return — other than, perhaps, the sort of social insurance provided by the continuance of the network itself.
[b] Immigrated since 1990
[c] Similarly, Israeli government and NGOs maintain websites for addressing the Jewish diaspora abroad