



DEMOGRAPHICS NEW DIASPORAS

In a time of rapid migration, **diasporas are maps** of the flows of **wealth, goods, and meaning.**

Over the next decade, new kinds of migration—across physical and digital borders alike—will create new kinds of diasporas. These dispersed populations with shared roots will perhaps be the real emerging economies of the 21st century. And at the core of these new economies will be a commodity that will be measured, managed, and traded as vigorously as any raw material, any manufactured good or essential service. That commodity is identity, and platforms for identity creation and management will be the engines that power these new emerging economies.



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BEYOND GEOGRAPHY: A VIRTUAL UPROOTEDNESS

Following in the footsteps of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, we already know to look at emerging diasporas not so much in terms of their geo-cultural origins but in terms of their various overlapping “scapes” of experience: mediascapes, technoscapes, and workscapes for example. These scapes give rise to the multi-layered identities that define today’s diasporas—and make it impossible to talk simply about the Indian diaspora or the North African diaspora, for example.

At the same time, we see that even these scapes are built on the shifting sands of virtual platforms, from the massively multiplayer games that Chinese youth may inhabit as they travel to work hundreds of miles from home to the online self-help groups that provide “citizenship” services to diverse ethnic migrant workers from Latin America. As these platforms evolve, diasporas migrate across them. So today’s diasporas are as likely to be uprooted from their virtual home spaces as from their geographical landscapes.

BEYOND NUMBERS: LOCAL MINORITIES, GLOBAL MAJORITIES

In addition, new media have given diasporas a global voice that is perhaps out of proportion to their local numbers. As Appadurai points out, even though their numbers may be small in any given region, members of new diasporas feel themselves increasingly to be part of a global majority. This new global identity empowers them to act on the global stage, to define themselves as equal

to states in negotiating rights—whether local or global, economic or geographic. They may even define themselves as outside these traditional legal systems.

Such distortions of size and influence are likely to grow in the future as diasporas emerge from new global phenomena. For example, global climate change will create a host of new diasporas: disasters like hurricane Katrina or more permanent flooding (as forecast for Bangladesh) will spur forced migrations of local populations who see themselves as victims of global, not local disasters. Local food shortages will be seen as a collapse of a global food web, turning local famine-driven migrations into global political phenomena.

BEYOND CITIZENSHIP: IDENTITY AS COMMODITY

These new diasporas are, in effect, the new political economies of 21st century. But unlike citizens of nation-states, the new diasporas won’t share a stable geo-cultural identity. Rather they will craft their identities, day to day, from a combination of shifting physical and virtual environments. This instability will be the source of both wealth creation and social disruption.

Identity will become a commodity that can be constructed and deconstructed, and moved from one context to another as needed. Identity creation and management will become both the basic daily activity of individual members of the diaspora and the critical economic enterprise that binds diasporas together as a whole. The tools and platforms for this enterprise will be the infrastructure that drives economic growth.