

Diaspora Organisations in International Affairs

Dennis DIJKZEUL and Margit FAUSER (eds.)
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Diasporas and their organisations, which traditionally aimed to serve their interest in the homeland and abroad, have long been studied under several social science disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, political science, and geography. At the beginning of the 2000s, for instance, human and political geographers started to focus on diaspora realizing that it is a geographical concept, which addresses various geographical themes such as dispersion, boundaries, territory (as homeland), and identity. The “geographical turn” contributed to the concept theoretically, and also to transnationalism and migration studies empirically by which cases were reconsidered through the lens of geographical concepts, such as space, place, and time. Similar to geographers’ arguments, diaspora organisations (DO) -as a distinct form of collectivity- and their activities are very relevant to what we study in International Relations (IR), especially when it comes to exploring DOs’ role that transcends state borders in development, human rights, conflict, and peace. In that regard, attempts to introduce novel contributions from various disciplines have the potential to significantly enhance our comprehension of the theory of diaspora and its associated organizations.

In IR, however, diasporas and DOs have been neglected for a long time, and only very limited studies analyze them since the discipline had traditionally taken the state and system as the main unit of analysis. As Dijkzeul and Fauser state in “Diaspora Organisation in International Affairs”, this tendency resulted in producing reductionist arguments that cause blind spots in the analysis of actors and their politics in classical IR, which also limits our understanding of the role of non-state actors at the local, regional, and global levels. This leads us to an epistemological discussion raised in the book, addressing the distinction between DOs and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), ethnic or lobbying groups, and migrant organizations. Per Dijkzeul and Fauser, DOs are functionally diverse reflections of the collective identity expression of migrant community members, their descendants, or others dispersed due to the movement of borders across them. Nevertheless, I would contend that the

editors do not offer an explicit definition of a DO, and it also appears that they avoid an in-depth discussion of the contested definitions of the diaspora concept and how these definitions relate to DOs.

Dijkzeul and Fauser's edited book aims to enhance our understanding of DOs by integrating theories from IR, migration studies, and organizational sociology, and supporting their findings with extensive evidence from a diverse range of case studies. To achieve this, they intend to respond to three interrelated questions to explain the meaning, role, function, and networks of DOs in international politics: what are the main areas in which DOs operate; how does the power flow in DOs and their transnational networks; and finally, what can IR learn from and contribute to research on DOs in other disciplines? The chapters are well-structured to address these questions and several blind spots and bring empirical evidence from different regions and collectivities through the design of single or comparative case studies. It can be argued that the book predominantly centres on ethnic diasporas and could have been enhanced with more examples from religious or cultural diaspora organisations. Nevertheless, I would argue that the book makes a significant contribution, not only to the understanding of the role of DOs in IR but also to other disciplines relevant to the diasporas and their organisations. As each chapter makes a unique and different contribution to the DOs in international affairs, I will briefly discuss them below.

The first half of the book consists of four chapters as well as the Introduction. In the first chapter, which is based on a two-year project and qualitative data, Ali R. Chaudhary and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo focus on the Pakistani DOs in New York and Toronto comparatively. Discussing the role of state-sponsored integration policies on DOs, they find that the socioeconomic advantages better explain organisational effectiveness than the policies implemented by states, thus problematise the realist IR assumptions. Meantime, they also present how the state limits the DOs' effectiveness through securitisation policies, implemented in the post-9/11 period. In chapter two, Xóchitl Bada and Shannon Gleeson zoom in on the diaspora serving organisations for migrants' labour rights in Mexico and the United States (US). Based on the qualitative research employing interviews and ethnography, they reveal that the state has become less autonomous as a result of globalisation and the impact of emerging actors of universal labour rights. Nicholas R. Micinski focuses on the relationships between DOs and citizenship, which is another understudied subject for the IR theory. Proposing an analytical framework in the case of Bosnian DOs in the US, Micinski shows how the DOs have become active agents in transnational space, influencing both countries of origin and destination through networks. In chapter four, Gery Nijenhuis examines the interactions between the Dutch government policies with Ghanaian DOs in the Netherlands and reveals the limit of state power in dealing with DOs and the new geographies of resistance.

The second half of the book consists of four chapters including the Conclusion. In Chapter 5, Zeynep Sezgin offers empirical results derived from a comparative study on Syrian and Kurdish DOs in Germany. The chapter explains well how DOs, as identity-motivated non-state actors, shape politics in both countries of origin and residence, explores how DOs protect ethnic identity in internally diverse communities in the Kurdish case and also reveals how functional DOs are in comparison to other non-state actors in terms of the politics of

humanitarian aid in the Syrian case. The following chapter, which is co-authored by Estella Carpi and Elena-Fiddian Qasmiyeh focuses on the Syrian religiously-motivated DOs in Lebanon to explore the tension between faith and secular approaches in the global politics of aid. This chapter is also important in explaining different identity forms that shape the networked power other than ethnicity. In chapter seven, Danielle A. Zach contributes to the place of DOs in IR through a new typology in her examination of the role of DOs in peace and conflict and shows how social movement and network theory are functional to explore those roles of the US-based Irish diaspora. Finally, editors Dennis Dijkzeul and Margit Fauser conclude by reminding us of the research questions and explaining how each chapter responds to them. Following this, a helpful representation is given, which summarizes all empirical chapters in terms of their theoretical stances, issue areas, and what they argue for the networked power.

Thus, I can argue that this book makes a significant contribution to DOs studies, not only in IR but also in other related disciplines. Although its contributors avoid conceptual discussions on the contested meaning of diaspora and the interaction between the community and organisations, and also overwhelmingly focus on the ethnic diasporic collections, it still successfully brings together diverse geographies of DOs. Consequently, it is unquestionably valuable and insightful to consider the DOs as independent actors, use them as a unit of analysis, build the study using IR, migration, and organizational sociology theories, and apply multi-sited and historical research techniques to IR theory as was done in this collection.