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CONFERENCE REPORT

Politics, Policies and Diplomacy of Diaspora Governance: New Directions in Theory and Research

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Abstract

On December 6, 2018, academics from across Europe and beyond gathered at London's Freud Museum for a conference on the politics, policies and diplomacy of diaspora governance. This conference was organised by Senior Research Fellow Dr Bahar Baser from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR), Coventry University, UK and Dr Henio Hoyo, Research Professor from the Department of Social Sciences/School of Law and Social Sciences, Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) Monterrey, Mexico.

Keywords: Politics; policies; diplomacy; diaspora governance.

Introduction

On December 6, 2018, academics from across Europe and beyond gathered at London's Freud Museum for a conference on the politics, policies and diplomacy of diaspora governance. This conference was organized by Senior Research Fellow Dr Bahar Baser from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR), Coventry University, UK and Dr Henio Hoyo, Research Professor from the Department of Social Sciences/School of Law and Social Sciences, Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) Monterrey, Mexico.

University collaborations are crucial for strengthening and extending opportunities for impactful cross-national interdisciplinary research, as this first collaboration between CTPSR and UDEM has proved. CTPSR undertakes innovative, impactful, world-class research that strives to help build more peaceful societies without violent conflict. UDEM houses a centre which focuses on conflict resolution, and they are in the process of integrating PhD level programs. Both groups share a mutual vision and purpose in maintaining and building peaceful societies through world-class research.

This collaboration welcomes a shared learning opportunity for both centres to exchange valuable experiences and expertise, particularly with a focus on Central and Latin America and it leads the way forward for further impactful partnership opportunities. This conference summary presents the key discussion themes and ideas that emerged from the conference, along with indications for the future arising from this collaboration between the two research centres. All visual documentation available from the conference can be viewed on the conferences Facebook page, www.facebook.com/diasporagovernance.

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Opening Remarks

Participants were welcomed by Dr Bahar Baser of Coventry University and Dr Henio Hoyo of the University of Monterrey. Dr Baser explained the importance of funding from The British Academy/Newton Mobility Fund, which ensured the conference could take place. Dr Baser also welcomed keynote speaker Prof Fiona Adamson and thanked her for her long-standing work on diaspora and her support of early career researchers.

Prof Adamson opened her remarks by commenting on how appropriate the Freud museum was as a venue for the conference proceedings. Freud fled Vienna in 1938 and set up his London office, still preserved in the downstairs area of the museum, to the same specifications as those he enjoyed in Austria. For Prof Adamson, Freud's creation of a home away from home after fleeing persecution was a microcosm of the issues diaspora studies examines. She also drew parallels between Freud and our colleagues from the Central European University, who have now been forced into a form of exile in Vienna with the institution's effective expulsion from Hungary.

Outlining her intent not to present her research but to signpost areas of discussion for the conference, Prof Adamson explained that she wanted to engage with the title of the conference, particularly the theory and research elements it suggested. Citing the work of her colleague Felix Berenskötter (2018) on deep theorising in International Relations, Prof Adamson urged colleagues to remember to look at the "forest" of theory when considering the "trees" of case studies.

She continued in this vein by examining three modes of exploration in diaspora politics. The first was critical approaches which examine the state and frequently construct diasporas as a contrasting force, while also critiquing the very notions of diasporas, home/host states and other concepts. The second was methodological and behavioural approaches. For Prof Adamson, the focus on tools and methods for understanding found within these approaches needs to be balanced with the need to get become submerged in the particulars of a case and to situate the researcher's position in the research. The final mode was that of theory, which was explained as being important to avoid doing diaspora studies for the sake of it and requiring engagement with theories of the state. There were three further headings Prof Adamson mentioned were relevant to this mode, namely questions of power, space and identity.

Panel Discussions

With this grounding fresh in their minds, participants in the first set of panels set out to meet the challenges Prof Adamson had laid down. In the Case Studies from the MENA panel, Shilan Fuad Hussain (University of Urbino), Sardar Aziz (Senior Adviser Kurdistan Parliament/Iraq) and Oula Kadhum (Birmingham University) addressed cases on the Iraqi, Kurdish and Armenian diasporas and engaged in a wide-ranging discussion using three very contrasting presentation styles. Mr Aziz's explanations of how the Kurdish community seek to be insiders through alternative forms of diplomacy were complimented by Dr Kadhum's addressing of the knowledge gap on diasporas as partners in development and Dr Hussain's comparative paper on the Kurdish and Armenia diaspora.

Meanwhile, the parallel panel focused on the dynamics of migration, specifically dispersal and return. Duygu Ozaltin, Farah Shakir and Neophytos Loizides (University of Kent) explored a fundamental yet understudied aspect of forced migration and turned to the root causes behind why people flee and what happens after they have fled through the lens of forced migration in post-Sadam Baghdad. Meltem Yilmaz (Bilgi University) explored return migration and its multi-layered complexity focusing on the case of qualified Turkish migrants from specifically Germany and the US. Hicham Jamid (LISE-CNRS/Cnam-Paris and ORMES, Ibn Zohr University of Agadir)



addressed the Moroccan governance of highly skilled international migration and focused on devices and measures. All three presenters provided insightful findings that hold the strong potential to influence relevant policy and support forced migration cases worldwide.

After lunch, proceedings continued with a further panel on MENA case studies as well as one on the Politics and Policies of Diaspora-Making and Migration Governance. In the latter, Ana Isabel López García (GIGA: German Institute of Global and Area Studies) and Pau Palop-García (GIGA) both presented their quantitative research into migrant remittance funding in Mexico and diaspora policies in Latin America respectively. Combined with Sebahattin Abdurrahman's (SOAS) paper on the Western Thrace minority within Greece, the presentations led to a very lively and informative discussion session.

The parallel panel presented insightful reflections surrounding case studies on diasporas from the MENA region. Gerasimos Tsourapas (Birmingham University) explored authoritarian diaspora governance in North Africa, tagging it as 'The Long Arm of the Arab State' while touching upon relevant key issues including securitisation of immigration and cross border mobility. Barry Maydom (Birkbeck, University of London) explored political remittance cycles in non-democratic states and studied how migrants attempt to influence politics in their home countries, providing evidence from Jordan and Egypt. The study's findings implied that migrants might be drawn into competitive clientelism as a survival strategy. Zhila Gholami (Griffith University) explored the depths of literature, language and politics and their implications as new directions for Kurdish diaspora while also acknowledging the Kurdish diaspora's impact on literature. The panellists provided compelling evidence that enriches the understanding of diasporas in the MENA region and beyond as global migration is at its highest.

For the final sessions of the day, Amjad Mohammed Saleem (Exeter University) and Catherine Craven (SOAS) both dealt with development and peacebuilding between Sri Lanka and its various diasporas, explaining that the end of the Civil War in 2008 has led to significant change in political, economic and social dynamics, whilst Bahar Baser's (Coventry University) showcased the results of her fieldwork in Israel on the Jewish community from Iraqi Kurdistan which resides there.

Diaspora activism and mobilisation was tackled in the parallel session through three intriguing panellists. Corina Kesler (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) addressed the rise and pitfalls of cybernationalism and provided strong reflections on the case of Romania. Antonio Alejo (Instituto Galego de Análise e Documentación Internacional) presented new socio-political formations in an exploration of NGO diplomacies and migrant activism as an expression of contemporary global politics, through evidence provided through three experiences in Mexico. Kennedy Ebang Njikang (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) critically explored dimensions of diaspora, home-state governance and transnational political mobilisation through the lens of a comparative case analysis of Ethiopia and Kenya state policy towards its diaspora while adopting Gramsci's theory of Hegemony.

Future Directions

Building on the insightful discussions and successful outcome of this conference, the partner universities plan to publish the conference proceedings as an edited volume. They also plan to apply for a British Academy funded grant on Writing Workshops which would enable them to bring together Mexican academics and prestigious journal editors to increase academic production in Mexico.

There are also plans to extend the impact of CTPSR's RISING Global Peace Forum to Mexico in the coming year as the forum seeks out and promotes new ways of thinking about peace and



conflict. Furthermore, the centres envision wider opportunities for staff exchange programs in the future. The scope and impact of such initiatives are reliant on greater funding opportunities which would help the centres plan and implement a long-term vision for shared research activities and wider collaboration.

Reflecting on what further insight this conference has provided, Dr Baser commented “I cherished interdisciplinary research one more time. We had IR specialists, political scientists, linguists and historians at the meeting. They used all sorts of methodologies –quantitative and qualitative, which enriched our discussions. Fiona Adamson's talk was eye opening with regards to the necessity of deep theorising in this field. The conference showed me that we still focus on in-depth case studies and sometimes forget about broader questions which require taking a step back and thinking analytically and theoretically.”

Reference

Berenskötter, F. (2018). Deep theorizing in International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 24(4), 814–840.

