

My Big Fat Greek Diaspora: Greek-American Diaspora Diplomacy

Written by Maria Ravazoula

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MARIA RAVAZOULA, SEP 5 2021

During the current era of globalization, the notion of a state fails to be restricted within the official bounds of its borders and expands beyond its geophysical position. Research has argued the fluidity and flexibility of national identity as a result of diasporas (Adamson & Demteriou, 2007, p. 505). By maintaining close relations between both country of origin (COO) and country of residence (COR), diasporas have managed to promote a transnational dimension as to how states engage with their publics, as a result of their diverse, globalized identities (Adamson & Demetriou, 2007, p. 498). The ever-increasing role of diasporas thus becomes a geopolitical quest on how such groups can be utilized to benefit both countries. One such example is diplomatic practices. The use of public diplomacy could thus be beneficial, as those engaging in Public Diplomacy “often go beyond [the definitions and practices] associated with diplomacy” (Huijgh, 2016). One subcategory is diaspora diplomacy, defined as “engaging a country’s overseas community to contribute to building relationships with foreign country” (Rana, 2013, p. 70).

The emerging literature has discussed numerous groups that have engaged in diaspora diplomacy and the various ways they attempted to do so. Even though research has identified several ethnic groups, one still remains relatively unseen in the relevant literature: the Greeks. The most recent migration crisis sparked a massive reaction from the Greek diaspora on social media, including an urge to Secretary of State Pompeo to support Greece (Hellenic American Leadership Council, 2020), indicating the active role of the Greek diaspora. Evidently, research is still limited, and more information is necessary. The present essay seeks to examine how Greek-Americans entered diaspora diplomacy both for and by their country, while enhancing the current diplomatic literature. The first part will examine the theoretical framework; the second part will provide background information on the invasion of Cyprus, a critical point in Greek diasporic history, and examine how the US and Greek-Americans reacted to the invasion and finally, the last part will analyze how the practices of the Greek diaspora at the time can be classified as diaspora diplomacy. The present essay seeks to place the literature on Greek diaspora in terms of diaspora diplomacy, as the latter concept had not developed at the time of the events.

The Theoretical Concept of Diaspora Diplomacy

Diasporas are uniquely situated by virtue of their position. Their dual identity in two different countries allows them to be able to connect and understand both (Brinkerhoff, 2019, p. 58). This dual character provides a significant advantage as “they have seen the future and can ‘translate’ the ideas” (Brinkerhoff, 2019, p. 60). Finally, Brinkerhoff argues that a critical advantage is their response to global political crises, as they can mobilize more governments and conduct targeted public diplomacy through their dual identities (Brinkerhoff, 2019, p. 59-60). In order to achieve the full potential of their unique position, diasporas have various objectives. These include enhancing the images of each country to the residents of the other; lobbying for the support of COR in issues relating to the COO; assisting the trade between the two countries and finally assisting newcomers in the COR (Brinkerhoff, 2019, p. 53). By engaging in these activities, the diasporas can bridge a strong relation between the two countries. To understand how that occurs, we will examine the theory set forth by Ho and McConnell (2017).

The authors combined research on diaspora and diplomatic studies to examine “their convergence” and emphasize the “multidirectional” character of diaspora diplomacy (Ho & McConnell, 2017). They argue that diasporas “can be

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called on to conduct high level diplomatic negotiations” and “influence domestic and foreign policy agendas in their COO” (Ho & McConnell, 2017, p. 237), indicating the multivariate character and use diasporas can have. Two main types of routes are proposed to explicate how diasporas go about completing the aforementioned objectives: diplomacy through (DTD) and by (DBD) diaspora (Ho and McConnell, 2017, p. 237). The former refers to “how they function as diplomatic actors and have the ability to engage with various diplomatic stakeholders” while the latter refers to “diplomatic actions to advance alternative political visions,” specifically advocacy, mediation and representation (Ho & McConnell, 2017, p. 237).

DTD is utilized primarily by the country of origin to promote its image, enhance cultural diplomacy and facilitate relations between the two nations (Ho & McConnell, 2017, p. 241). As a result, most focus is on engaging Nye’s concept of soft power and cooperation (Ho & McConnell, 2017 p. 242). It must be noted that beliefs of diasporas can also be out of sync with COO, and thus they conduct diaspora diplomacy separately from their state, e.g. by cooperating with the CORs. The latter use migrants who have returned to COO to influence the home country and promote the interests of the receiving state. Through DBD, on the other hand, diasporas can function as independent actors and use diplomatic practices that further their own agendas (Ho & McConnell, 2017, p. 245). Their primary functions are to advocate for domestic and foreign policies that affect the COO or COR, act as mediators during internal political crises and finally can act as representatives of those in exile (Ho & McConnell, 2017).

In order to better comprehend how diaspora diplomacy functions, two examples can be examined. Rana (2009) conducted extensive research on how India utilizes its vast communities around the world. India has developed a large agenda on how to use these diasporic communities and promotes it through annual conferences (Rana, 2009, p. 366). Through official ministerial offices, they ensure the safety and well-being of their diasporas abroad, while enhancing ways of their integration to the society of the COR (Rana, 2009). These communities are then used to establish bilateral relations and increase ties between the two countries (Rana, 2009, p. 367). Furthermore, the Australian government has established an individual organization that caters directly to diaspora communities, creating a large network outside of Australia. The organization is used to create certain narratives surrounding Australia and to bring Australian initiatives to a global level (Stone and Douglas, 2018). The present paper will use Ho and McConnell’s technique of analyzing diaspora diplomacy by examining literature of diaspora studies. The following section will provide a small introduction to the conflict that sparked the diplomatic practices of Greek diaspora and will be followed by the practices that initiated the process.

Greece, US Interests and the Invasion of Cyprus

In 1974, the Greek military coup attempted to overthrow the Cypriot President Makarios, in an effort to bring to power a more union-friendly government, resulting in an invasion from Turkey (Miller, 2009). As a result, both Greece and Turkey mobilized and prepared for a potential outbreak of a war in the region (Kaloudis, 2018, p. 180). Overall, the invasion sharply increased tensions in the region, yet American interests in the region contrasted local ones.

Throughout the previous years, the Greek Junta maintained close relations with the US through setting up programs with the CIA and the Pentagon and creating a friendly climate for American businesses (Sakkas, 2004, p. 205). The US had vital interests in the region, including Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, and supported a strong presence of NATO in the area (Sakkas, 2004, p. 256). Due to the importance of the area in relation to the USSR, Americans needed the military bases for the strategic position in the Mediterranean, and the military dictatorship did everything in their power to allow that (Sakkas, 2004, p. 248). However, the US was far from being objective, even though the State Department denied any knowledge of the coup and promotion of the invasion according to a contemporary source (Couloudakis, 1977 p. 262). In fact, the US had sold weapons used in the invasion to Turkey (Kaloudis, 2018, p.162). The American involvement and the perpetrator were sufficient for the Greek community in the US to become actively involved. The following section will examine how the Greek diaspora acted in the war.

“Nothing mobilized the Greeks of diaspora [...] as the Turkish invasion of Cyprus” (Kaloudis 2008, p. 40). Before that, the Greek community in the US was largely uninvolved in US politics, partly due to the fact that many academics and intellectuals had been exiled due to the dictatorship (Prévelakis, 2000, p. 179). Kaloudis further argues that reasons for the Greeks to stay out of American politics included their hope of returning home, their disbelief against unions

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and the limitations placed by their religious-ethnic identity (Kaloudis, 2018, p. 162). However, the Turkish invasion proved a significant force that motivated the Greek communities to enter the polity en masse (Karpathakis, 1999; Prévélakis, 2000; Kaloudis, 2008; Kaloudis, 2018). As a reaction to the invasion, and in hopes that the US government would change its position, Greeks from all over the US gathered in DC to protest and place pressure on Congress (Kaloudis, 2018, p. 186). Furthermore, the community turned to national and local politicians of both parties to lobby for the Greek cause, while they attempted the Americanization of the community to incorporate the immigrants into the polity and influence foreign policy (Karpathakis, 1999, p. 57). Simultaneously, large Greek organizations like the Panhellenic Emergency Committee and the United Hellenic Association enacted significant mobilizations to influence the congress towards Greek-friendly policies (Kaloudis, 2018, p. 188). Finally, the leaders of the communities began forging relations with politicians, reminding them of their voting power, and expanding their network through fundraisers (Karpathakis, 1999). The mass mobilization led to the creation of the “Greek Lobby,” which in turn pressed for a Congressional embargo on Turkey (Kaloudis, 2018).

Analysis

The reaction, and eventual action, of the Greek-Americans during the mid-1970s is closely related to the theory set forth in the first section. The onset of the Greek diaspora diplomacy can by no means be described as DTD, but rather DBD. The diaspora had a disconnect with not only the changing Greek government, but also the “State Department of Kissinger post-Watergate” (Kaloudis, 2008, p. 42). Ho and McConnell also argued that “diasporas act nationalistic and promote extremism and radical agendas” (Ho & McConnell, 2017, p. 246). The Greek-American attitude towards the dictatorship sparked great divisions amongst them (Kaloudis, 2008, p.40), leading to a lack of consensus and consequently inaction. Nevertheless, Greeks united against the fear of a Turkish invasion in Greece, illustrating the long-standing nationalist element of Greeks.

Furthermore, looking further into how diaspora diplomacy developed onwards from 1975, it is clear that many characteristics can be assigned to diaspora diplomacy. For example, Kaloudis (2008) emphasizes how Greek-Americans developed their own identity that was separate from those left behind. This resulted in situations where the one group often failed to understand the other due to the different trajectories each community had followed (Kaloudis, 2008, p. 48). This directly relates to Brinkerhoff’s emphasis of a dual identity. The Greek diaspora has managed to create a separate identity that lies in a limbo between the US and Greece and could thus influence both through its connecting points with each. The binary position is further examined in the Greek Americans’ failure to fully assimilate into American society by sidelining the domestic issues, but rather using Greek issues to enter the local politics and maintain a “binational identity” (Karpathakis 1999, p. 55).

Finally, the immediate reaction of the communities almost follows the definitions of literature. The Greeks massively lobbied for Greek interests in the Congress, assisted in the integration of newcomers to promote their agenda, followed an independent agenda from both the Greek and the US government and attempted to advocate for the benefits of their COO. Even though their early attempts largely failed to have any diplomatic tact, Greek-Americans entered US polity for the sole purpose of promoting the objectives described 40 years later as diaspora diplomacy.

Concluding, research in diaspora diplomacy, even though still weak, focuses on how diasporas are used by the governments of the COO and COR to promote the benefits of each to the other. Diasporas often act of their own volition as representatives of their communities of origin in an attempt to assist the COO. This was the case of the Greek diaspora in the US. Research on how the Greek diaspora uses its dual identity to promote American and Greek interests has been very limited in the field of diaspora diplomacy. However, extensive research has been conducted on the migration style and assimilation of the Greek community in the American polity as a result of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. The present paper attempted to combine research in the two fields in order to showcase how a history of over 40 years can be defined as diaspora diplomacy. Moving forwards from this research, Greek-American communities and Greeks should more effectively make use of the diaspora diplomacy. This is true not only for the immigrant communities in the US but also in the European Union as a result of the brain drain. Such communities could use lobbying mechanisms both from Athens towards European institutions and vice versa to influence positions and create a stronger coherence between the two.

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