Chapter 3

Methodological Considerations and Explanation of Case Studies

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines various definitions of diaspora and how the characterization of diaspora has evolved over time and through adoption in fields beyond international relations. The chapter provides an explanation on historical institutionalism, which is adopted by the author to explain the selected case studies as well as provides greater insight into the social movement and symbolic interactionism theories of Herbert Blumer, which are used widely in diaspora studies and sociological theories on identity construction. The chapter provides justification for the author’s use of qualitative analysis and methods of researching diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on diaspora has changed dramatically since the time when the concept was primarily applied to historical diasporas, such as the Jews, the Greeks, or the Armenians. Additionally, while the study of diasporas was traditionally more popular among scholars of history and anthropology, in the past two decades it has received increasingly more attention by economists and political scientists, seeking to challenge traditional conceptions of dispersed groups and their perceived (often negative) impact on a host country. Diaspora

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research has evolved into transnational considerations of cultural identity and seeks to explain more than simply an attachment to a homeland (real or perceived). The concepts of old and new diaspora are detailed in Chapter Six, yet it is worth noting that contemporary (new) diaspora are better equipped than classical (old) diaspora to facilitate communities and discourse among scattered populations. New diaspora are situated within the digital age, which is characterized by its transnational nature, leaving theorists of contemporary diaspora with a responsibility to both explain the shifting role of the nation-state while making certain not to completely neglect its importance in fostering a collective diasporic identity. Delano and Gamlen (2014, P. 45) note, “State-diaspora relations are a clear example of transnationalism: they involve states spilling across their borders in search of their own people. While some commentators look dimly upon this as a form of long distance ethnic nationalism, others herald it as part of the emergence of emancipatory post-national, supranational and transnational forms of citizenship.”

Brubaker (2005) argues that the old (classical) characterization of diaspora was “immigrationist, assimilationist, (methodologically) nationalist, teleological...The new perspective does not make these assumptions. It is said to ‘transcend’ the old assimilationist, immigrationist paradigm” (P. 8). In analyzing the transnational and digital nature of contemporary diaspora and the accompanying politics, diasporic community influencers have co-opted the concept of diaspora and changed it from “descriptive to prescriptive”, it [diaspora] has been used by influencers to mobilize dispersed populations in order to foster diasporic network connections, build and sustain diasporic community organizations, and mobilize political action, which is now taking place at a local, national, and transnational level. The digital facilitation of discourse and sharing of information (heritage, ideology, etc.) among the diasporic community and beyond allows “dispersed Diasporas [to] gain political and community visibility” (Georgiou, 2002, P. 2). It is the digital public sphere that keeps issues in the mainstream public’s awareness as well as diasporic community members across the world.

In relation to contemporary methods of analyzing diaspora, Kissau and Hunger argue that digital methods such as content or network analysis would be helpful in deciphering the sustainability of diasporic networks online. The authors note,
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