

# On Research Literature

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SEESOX Workshop “Diaspora and Development: The Case of Greece”

March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017

## Introduction

Our research enterprise is meant to fill a gap which at first sight should not have existed: the sustained involvement of scholars and policy makers with the issue of how the Greek diaspora can, or should engage, with Greece's developmental trajectory. Simply put, if others had grappled with that question systematically, and primarily in the research community resident in Greece, we would not be here today.

Examining this gap, which I will do in a very preliminary and speculative fashion, should be itself one of the starting points of our overall research enterprise for two reasons:

- (a) First, so that we can identify and analyse the diaspora's recent as much as under-researched role in Greece's development, say in the last twenty years, interpreting the facts of this role and thus facilitating understanding of future, medium term possibilities and constraints of the diaspora's engagement with Greece.
- (b) Second, so that we can help create an intellectual clearing space where research and wider public interest can grow. By compelling through the force of argument and analysis the research community as much as opinion and policy makers to reflect upon their past omission we can facilitate future engagement with the subject matter.

In my brief intervention I will examine this omission through three interdependent angles. First that of Europe, second that of diaspora elites and third through the diaspora's increasing power of agency in Greece.

### Europe

My hunch is that accession to the then European Community, in 1981, has been a decisive factor in the scarcity of policy oriented studies on the Greek diaspora and Greece. Helmut Kohl said during the unification of Germany that either the deutsche mark would go to ex-Eastern Germany or ex-East Germans would go to West Germany. The observation could very well be adjusted to Greece's EU membership as the transfer of funds, and resulting rising affluence in Greece, stemmed Greek migration to Western Europe and lessened commensurably the importance of already declining remittances of Greek migrants in Western Europe, Australia and North America.

With accession and lessening pressure on migration, past migration episodes were probably viewed as signs of underdevelopment and migration registered in the collective consciousness as a traumatic if unavoidable experience. Migration also transited from a collective experience, undertaken under duress, to an individual choice taken by those who could afford to actually stay in Greece, a point that Lois Labrianidis has made on brain drain prior to the break out of the current crisis.

My hypothesis here is that just as the average man and woman on the street, scholars, actually with the notable exception of Lois Labrianidis, also threw the baby with the bathwater. They failed to notice that the contemporary diaspora scholarship is not limited to experiences such as the ones that Greece had just left behind but also new phenomena such as brain circulation dynamics, cross border philanthropy and so on. Equally the Greek

research community put a major focus on Greece's Europeanisation process – Greece's capacity to assimilate values, knowledge and funding from Europe and become more European in turn – but did not notice that for the developed European states and societies that they focused on, concern for their own diasporas was not something that they considered beneath them, either in research or in policy terms. After all brain drain as a term was coined in the UK to articulate the worry that this country was losing critical scientific personnel to more affluent and innovative US universities. Ireland, which represents for Greek political scientists what Greece has failed to become, developed its exports oriented strategy with the active collaboration of Irish-American managers and investors.

Furthermore little did the Greek research community care, or the Greek people and Greek stakeholders for that matter, that the European Union was not the only place they could look to in order to access values, knowledge and funding. By the 1970's onwards post WWII Greek immigrants to Western Europe, Canada and Australia were achieving affluence, their children were moving to the professions, businesses, civil service and politics. In the US, the Greek descendants of early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration were achieving even more, as did the descendants of Jewish, Italian immigrants of the same vintage, some of them acquiring massive wealth, others excelling in the professions and academia and so on.

Last but not least Greek political scientists and economists have been resolutely Europeanist in their comparative perspective all but ignoring Greece's peer group, in geographical and path dependency terms, namely the successor states of the Ottoman Empire. We have lots of political scientists and political economists who know Ireland inside out and quite a few also very familiar with other EU member states. But I doubt if we have a single PhD who has done comparative work on Greece's and Egypt's political economies. These states whether they involve transition countries in the Balkans, or Turkey and the Middle East encompass diverse diaspora-homeland interactions from which Greek scholarship and policy making would have much to learn. Israel, to give the most globally prominent example, offers rich pickings in that regard, ranging from the diaspora philanthropy to a massive Israeli Third Sector to the fusion of diaspora and homeland high-technology entrepreneurship.

I would end this section on Europe versus the diaspora with the following query: would it make sense, for our purposes, to engage in a comparative enterprise whereby we would seek the answer why Greece, as a polity, an economy and a society, became so keen to seek values, knowledge and funding from the EU and, by comparison, did not undertake a similar effort with its own diaspora? And why has our research community been a trend follower in that regard as opposed to being a trend setter? This question takes me to my next theme, that of the recent role of diaspora elites who also represent the concentrated repositories of these three elements, of values, knowledge and funding.

#### The diaspora elites

Even more glaring, in the gap in diaspora studies, is the lack of study of the engagement of diaspora elites with Greece. And these diaspora elites have already demonstrated their potency in business, finance and philanthropy by the 1990's. But they remained unseen, at least as a category amenable to scholarly interpretation, both in scholarship and in public

discourse. Only now we see glimpses of insight and more so in newspaper op-eds than in peer-reviewed publications.

Diaspora elites are also a constitutive element of Greece's Europeanisation project, commencing with the market reforms induced by Greece's euro entry. It was these market reforms that brought back to Greece expatriate bankers, lawyers, accountants and IT professionals in order to man the liberalized Greek financial sector and which also rendered Piraeus dominant over other centers where Greek shipping congregated such as London. Additionally Greek bankers and corporate lawyers, mostly residing at the City of London, played a crucial role in the management of expanding access to money and capital markets of the Hellenic Republic, participated in the marketisation of state controlled corporations as well as in capital raising of private corporations listed in the Athens Stock Exchange.

In higher education the newer Greek universities, most prominently in Crete and Patras, and some of the most distinguished research institutes have been established by repatriated Greek diaspora scientists who have managed to partly insulate these institutions from the pathologies of their older and larger peers. ADIP, the supervisory body of higher education is absolutely depended for its objectivity, such as it is, on the participation in its review processes of diaspora scientists. The instituted by the 2011 reforms boards of directors of state universities, which the present government is on the way to abolishing, have seen extensive participation of the scientific diaspora.

Diaspora academics, particularly with the advent of the internet, have been increasingly active in some of Greece's most contentious public debates ranging from the integrity of higher education leadership, to the Greek civil war to the more recent contestation around where to assign blame, to the creditors or to Greek governments, for the failure of Greece to regain access to private market financing and thus exit the official creditors programmes. Importantly these public intellectuals share a commitment to Greece's public debate and collective life while being independent from Greek institutions and network relationships.

US founded educational and cultural institutions such as Deree and Anatolia Colleges and the American School of Classical Studies have boards and fund raise increasingly from Greek-Americans. This process has been unfolding in tandem with the Greek Americans' increasing wealth and thus propensity to engage in philanthropic activity, which as we know is a prominent domain of social action in the US, underpinned by US mores as much as by US tax code provisions.

Last but not least, philanthropic organisations have become major actors in Greece's culture and the arts, in public architecture, whether through their own cultural centers and museums or through funding to both state and non-state cultural organisations. Mostly originating from shipping these organisations tend to have international boards of directors, they operate in more than one jurisdiction and they access from Europe and North America the expertise that is instrumental to their purposes. Their funding processes are distinct from those of the Greek state and of the EU, their commissioning of public works processes and their internal operations and governance are distinctly different from those of the Greek state or of wholly Greek non-profit organisations. To give you an indication of the magnitude of this involvement if we tally up the SNF cultural center, the Onnassis cultural center and

the Goulandris museum of contemporary art we could easily reach the billion euros of donations in money and artwork directed to culture and the arts in Athens in the last ten years.

On Europe and the diaspora we have posed a why: why care so much about Europe and so little about the Greek Diaspora. On diaspora elites and Greece we can pose a how: namely, how by investigating recent and current diaspora elite engagement in domains such as the ones I have mentioned we can access dynamics and constraints and intended or unintended consequences, in the impact of the diaspora on Greece's developmental trajectory.

#### The diaspora's increasing power of agency

The last major issue that I wanted to address has to do with the need to place emphasis on the diaspora's increasing power of agency vis a vis the Greek polity, economy and society.

To go back to the future, the diaspora as a source of money, ideas and personnel has been a decisive factor, the sufficient if not the necessary condition, in the creation of the modern Greek state as much as of Greek nationalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. While the Greek state is not about to leave us, necessitating its recreation by the diaspora, it is in this crisis-shaped juncture humiliated and weakened. The diaspora can thus now be the demandeur as the Greek state, due to its fiscal straits, has been discredited in local communities which have to fend for themselves, not least by reconnecting with their own diaspora communities; the recently emigrated in the tens of thousands demand vocally active political participation, starting with the ability to vote while living abroad, and in Greece's aging society and bankrupt pension system, their voices carry extra weight; diaspora investors are an important sub-component of the recipe for economic growth as the Greek economy is called upon to shift its emphasis from state to private investment; the welfare state and culture and the arts, which have faced massive cuts, are critically depended on private donations, many of them from diaspora related foundations, to maintain essential functions.

Focusing on both the Greek state and the diaspora, to determine the evolving relationship between the diaspora and the Greek polity, economy and society, we must be equally sensitive to characteristics of the global system and the EU as well as of the most important host countries of the Greek diaspora. I referred briefly to the special characteristics of philanthropy in the US which make the Greek-America diaspora the most important diaspora community in terms of charitable giving. Moving to the East we can consider how even a moderate rise in affluence in the Russian Federation has transformed Russian Greeks into intermediaries between investment, tourist and trade flows between the two countries. Critically Greece's European creditors have been privileging, through their conditionalities, the utilisation of diaspora resources: by demanding that Greece's banking sector is staffed by managers with no previous connection to the Greek political system, by raising the technocratic standards to which the Greek civil service must perform, by pressing the Greek state to sell assets to capital-rich investors. In all of these domains there are many opportunities for research as well as for prescriptive policy recommendation which are inevitably normatively informed. Finally, global trends such as the lowering of transport costs, the elimination of communication costs, social media and so on must be evaluated

from the perspective of their present and future impact on the diaspora-homeland relationship in Greece.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that there is compelling opportunity for a major leap in the study of the relationship of the Greek diaspora and Greece. The relationship was already important before the crisis and during Greece's experience of EU and Eurozone-mediated globalization. Answering the question of why Greek research and public discourse failed to notice that role, particularly from the point of view of diaspora elites, and the Greek polity, in turn, did not develop diaspora-focused policies, is relevant to the current crisis-shaped juncture. The Greek Diaspora Project can additionally focus on how the impact of the crisis on the Greek state is opening up spaces of opportunity for diaspora involvement in Greece, in the economy, in politics and in civil society. This increasing power of agency, on the part of the Greek diaspora in Greece, can drive a research output by the Greek Diaspora Project which features both well-grounded policy prescriptions as well as normatively diverse but solidly researched academic inquiry.