



How Do You Build a Diaspora?

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At Home Away from Home: Building Diaspora Organizations

by Arnon Mantver Tehilim

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The book *At Home Away from Home: Building Diaspora Organizations* by Arnon Mantver deals with the organizational capabilities of diaspora communities—groups with a history of migration residing in one country and maintaining ties (material or conceptual) with another country or homeland (real or imagined). Changes associated with globalization processes, and especially the ability to cross borders and maintain a transnational relationship more easily, have brought to the fore the international political activity of diaspora communities. For example, Eritrean expatriates living in Tel Aviv-Yafo demonstrate for or against a festival held on behalf of the Eritrean government; the

descendants of migrant workers from Turkey living in Germany organize to support or criticize the Turkish government; Ukrainian immigrants in various countries work to transfer donations to the war effort in Ukraine.

For the Israeli public, these examples are not new: The Zionist movement was a transnational Jewish organization, and the State of Israel relies to a large extent on diplomatic, financial, and political assistance from the Jews of the diaspora (especially Jews in the United States). These examples are also not new to the author of the book, Arnon Mantver, who immigrated to Israel from Ukraine at the age of five with his parents and sister, who were Holocaust survivors. He later served as the CEO of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department and CEO of the Joint Israel. Because of this, the book provides a unique opportunity to learn about the organization of diasporas from both a broad academic perspective and a practical one of someone with experience in the field.

The central question around which the book is built is what components make up successful diaspora organizations. The assumption at the base of the book, which is also well supported by the academic literature on the subject, is that proper organization of diasporas also translates into stronger and more effective political mobilization. The book focuses on five key characteristics that explain successful diaspora organization: organizational leadership; resources; the demographic composition of the diaspora; the connection of the diaspora to different networks; and the degree of geographic concentration of the diaspora. Each chapter focuses on a different characteristic, and the book is interspersed with examples mainly from the Jewish diaspora, but also with anecdotes about diasporas related to Poland, India, China, Moldova, Mexico, Croatia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

In terms of organizational leadership, the first chapter distinguishes interestingly

between different dimensions that make up the leadership of diaspora organizations: leaders versus managers versus volunteers. They all lead the diaspora organizations to some extent, but each type of leadership has different characteristics and functions in the organization. The chapter also distinguishes between various types of knowledge that are essential for effective leadership. First, successful leadership of diaspora organizations has local cultural knowledge about the language, laws, culture, and norms of behavior in the country where diaspora people live. This knowledge allows the leadership of the diaspora organizations to operate in the local political environment. Second, successful leadership possesses professional knowledge related to immigration and the integration of immigrants. This knowledge allows the leadership of the diaspora organizations to help new immigrants integrate into the country they moved to, and it also connects that leadership to other diaspora and migration networks.

The important role of knowledge also appears in the second chapter of the book, which deals with resources. Although economic resources are essential for the mobilization of the diaspora, other resources are also important; for example, a diaspora whose members possess certain technological and scientific knowledge can assist in the development of the “homeland” state. Moreover, human capital, social relations, education, and business entrepreneurship are resources that the diaspora can harness to its advantage. Tourism in the homeland, such as the Taglit (“Birthright”) or Masa (“Journey”) programs, which are certainly known to the Israeli public, is also a resource of the diaspora (although some argue that programs of this type are the result of using diaspora resources and not necessarily a resource in itself).

The third chapter of the book is devoted to demographic components of the diaspora that affect the success of its organization: the amount of time that has passed since the original immigration of the diaspora members; their

average age; their level of education; and the employment characteristics of the members.

The fourth chapter focuses on the network structure of the diaspora: the various organizations that compose it, the community structure (which sometimes crosses sovereign borders), and the family ties in it. A special part of the chapter is dedicated to digital networks, which allow the diaspora to strengthen existing networks and create new ones in a way that does not depend on a specific territory. Naturally, strong and diverse networks help to organize a successful diaspora.

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Finally, the book focuses on the degree of geographic concentration and dispersion of the diaspora (what Mantver calls “enclaves”). As academic literature on the subject has already shown, the geographical concentration of the diaspora community makes it easier for it to organize and mobilize and helps it translate its power into political influence.

Conceptually, some of the analytical distinctions the book makes are fuzzy. Knowledge is a leadership characteristic but also a resource; the scientific and technological establishment of companies and members of the diaspora is a resource of the diaspora but also part of the demographic component that characterizes it; the network structure of the diaspora is geographically decentralized (and sometimes characterized by de-territorialization), but immigrant enclaves help the diaspora to be successful. It is possible that the conceptual spillover from one chapter to the next is due to the fact that the book unconsciously switches between different goals of diaspora organizations: to assist in the

absorption and integration of new immigrants, to mobilize during a conflict in the homeland, to advocate for rights and recognition in the country where friends and members of the diaspora live, to donate and transfer money to their families remaining in the homeland, to fight for the homeland's independence or promote a certain policy toward it.

However, the book manages to weave well the academic literature and the author's own experience, and this is the book's main strength. When Mantver shares his personal experiences, the readers (or at least the writer of this review) are drawn into the world of Jewish-Israeli politics and its complexities. The fact that it is not an academic book in the traditional sense of the term allows Mantver to write freely and avoid cumbersome jargon. Another advantage of the book (which also stems from the personal biography of its author, who is also the founder and chairperson of the Center for International Migration and Absorption) is the connection between the politics of diaspora and the politics of immigration. The book illustrates the connections between local and international immigration organizations and various diaspora organizations that help new members of that diaspora, or immigrants who are not members of the diaspora at all.

Another prominent advantage of the book is the multiple examples that allow readers to observe the Jewish-Israeli case from a comparative perspective. The Jewish case is considered exceptional since not all Jews have been residents or citizens of the State of Israel. At the same time, many diaspora organizations (as well as governments around the world) see Jewish organizing in the diaspora and the ties between Israel and the diaspora as a source of learning and inspiration. Mantver himself was interviewed for Alan Gamlen's book (Gamlen, 2019) and talked about learning from Israel in the context of recruiting.

One of the main questions that arises from reading the book is the role of the country of origin or the homeland of the diaspora. As research on the subject illustrates, many countries are formulating diaspora policies, such as fostering organizations, opening government offices that deal with the issue, and extending the right to vote of citizens living abroad. Clues to the role of the state appear in the book in the description of the struggle for the liberation of the Jews of the Soviet Union—a struggle in which Israel played an important, if hidden, role. The focus on diaspora organizations leaves the home state in the background, and this opens the door for further research on the subject regarding its involvement.

In conclusion, the book is relevant for those who study the mobilization and organization of diaspora and for those in the field of migration and diaspora (either in Israel or abroad). I would like to end the book review on a personal note. The back cover of the book includes blurbs from researchers and activists in the field. The first blurb is from Prof. Gabriel Sheffer, emeritus professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who died close to the date of publication of the book. The late Prof. Sheffer was one of the pioneer researchers in the field of diasporas and international relations and set a path for many of us. This review is dedicated to him.

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