

## **Bravo, V., & De Moya, M. (Eds.). (2021). Latin American Diasporas in Public Diplomacy. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. (Price: USD 159.99)**

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Even though moving from place to place to seek better survival opportunities has been an intrinsic behaviour for human beings since the dawn of time, the emergence of the nation state and the collective identities linked to it have made migration a highly contentious phenomenon. Migrants have complex identities that transcend space: they are insiders beyond borders (emigrants) and at the same time they are outsiders within borders (immigrants). They navigate between multiple realities and, in the eyes of many, their individuality becomes a signifier of a collective identity: that of a foreign nation. In other words, migrants are inadvertently perceived as informal representatives of a nation-state and their actions shape perceptions around their country of origin. As such, the study of diasporas and their strategic role in public diplomacy efforts constitutes an important area of scholarly research. Vanessa Bravo and Maria De Moya's edited book *Latin American Diasporas in Public Diplomacy* is an insightful compendium that examines the involvement of Latin-American diasporas in public diplomacy initiatives around the world, contributing to a growing body of literature that has shifted the focus from the role of the state onto non-state actors and their often-ignored impact on public diplomacy efforts.

The book starts with a comprehensive introduction (Chapter 1) that situates and conceptualises the role of diaspora communities and their initiatives as forms of participatory public diplomacy. Additionally, the authors provide a well-documented account of the complexity of Latin American diasporas and the socio-economic and political context of their formation. The main body of the book is organised in two parts. The first part (Chapters 2 to

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5) explores state-to-diaspora case studies that feature the different ways in which governments in Latin America build relationships with their respective expatriate communities overseas, including diasporic communities of Mexicans, Guatemalans, Bolivians, and Ecuadorians (Chapter 2), Salvadorian and Colombians in the USA (Chapter 3), Argentines (Chapter 4) and Chileans in China (Chapter 5). The second part (Chapters 6 to 12) examines diaspora-led initiatives to advance public diplomacy efforts in host countries, including advocacy groups seeking political impact either in their homeland or in their adopted home. The case studies mostly focus on USA-based communities –e.g., Cubans (Chapter 6), Puerto Ricans (Chapter 7), Mexicans (Chapters 8 and 11) and Brazilians (Chapter 12)–, with two exceptions: Brazilians in France (Chapter 9) and Venezuelans around the world (Chapter 10). In the conclusion (Chapter 13), the editors summarize the findings presented throughout the book, elevate the level of abstraction, and identify distinct patterns in the way diaspora communities engage in public diplomacy efforts.

The contributions of this book are manifold. Conceptually, it highlights the complex dynamics between the state and non-state actors in public diplomacy by shifting the focus on diaspora groups. On the one hand, emigrants are increasingly recognised as public diplomacy assets that can be activated and instrumentalized by their country of origin. On the other hand, their proactive engagement also attests to their own agency to pursue their own goals which very often are not aligned to those of the state. Empirically, this book provides invaluable insights from a region frequently ignored by Anglophone academia. It does justice in reflecting the plurality of Latin America by not just focussing on diasporas from the economic or political powerhouses of the continent, such as Mexico or Brazil, among other, but also, as mentioned above, by examining the experiences of communities from comparatively smaller countries that, despite their reduced dimensions, show an enormous ability to organise and translate their efforts into political pressure in both their home and host countries.

This book is a remarkable collection of case studies authored by scholars from all corners of Latin America, whose expertise in most cases is based on their own international experiences –even as members of diasporic groups themselves. There is, however, a prominence of case studies focusing on diaspora experiences in the USA, with only a minority looking beyond (either in Europe or Asia). While this may seem to weaken the scope of the study, this limitation is nonetheless a product of the phenomenon it observes. Indeed, geographical proximity and cultural affinity are among the most determining factors regarding the destination of migrants. In any case, as a phenomenon that entails not just the physical movement of people but also a spiritual journey of uprooting, adaptation into a new cultural system and all the implications thereof, including integration, isolation, and even return in many cases, the complexity of migration is impossible to exhaust in just one volume.

Some aspects that are not directly addressed in this book but that are evident in the case studies pertain to intergenerational shifts regarding the self-identification of diasporic members, their self-perception in connection to a specific heritage and subsequent motivations to participate in community initiatives that can be considered as conducive to advancing public diplomacy efforts. For example, to what extent would second, third or subsequent

generations engage in such efforts? Is assimilation a barrier or an asset? For example, could celebrities of Hispanic or Latin American heritage become assets for public diplomacy efforts for the countries of origin of their families (e.g. Jennifer López vis-à-vis Puerto Rico, or Anya Taylor-Joy vis-à-vis Argentina, among many others)? Furthermore, what about the complexities of multiple diasporic identities such as that of mono-, bi-, and sometimes even multinational citizens? These could be added to the multiple questions the authors present in the conclusion, as an invitation to other scholars to explore in further studies.

Overall, by examining the strategic role diaspora groups play in engaging with local audiences and (voluntarily or inadvertently) helping shape perceptions of their home countries, Bravo and De Moya's edited book addresses a gap in extant literature on non-state actors and their agency in public diplomacy initiatives. In this sense, diasporas constitute public diplomacy assets that can play a significant role both by acting independently or being activated to complement state-led efforts. Finally, the relevance of this book extends beyond area studies and serves as an invaluable point of comparison for studies in other parts of the world.

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