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Diaspora Mobilizations for Conflict: Beyond Amplification and Reduction[1]

Introduction

In the early twenty-first century, scholarship on conflict processes started identifying diasporas as important non-state actors in world politics. Previously, conflict dynamics had been considered as shaped primarily by majorities, minorities, neighboring and distant states and international organisations. Yet the mounting intrastate conflicts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Kurdish areas in the Middle East, Nagorno-Karabakh, Palestine, Rwanda, Somalia and Sri Lanka, among others, pointed that diasporas affect conflicts and postconflict dynamics by way of durable links to their countries of origin. An influential World Bank study showed that post-conflict polities, which have strong links to an US-based diaspora, are not likely to resolve conflicts in the long run (Collier and Hoeffler 2000). Diaspora members support their families during warfare, but also raise funds for moderate and radical political factions, lobby foreign governments, stage demonstrations and even take up arms and become part of terrorist networks (Byman et al. 2001; Shain and Barth 2003; Sheffer 2003; Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Brinkerhoff 2011; Koinova 2014). The US 9/11 attacks , and difficult to resolve domestic conflicts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, reinforced such negative views. Yet, diasporas have not been simply agents of conflicts, but have participated in peace processes (Lyons 2007; Smith and Stares 2007; Orjuela 2008), democratisation (Koinova 2009; Betts and Jones 2016) and development (Brinkerhoff 2008). By the late 2000s the question whether diasporas are 'peace-makers or peace-wreckers' (Smith and Stares 2007) was answered that they could act as both. More productive ways to study this research agenda is to develop better conceptual tools,

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conduct comparative and quantitative studies and contribute to middle- and large-scale theorising to bring more sophisticated understanding of diaspora behaviors in conflict and postconflict processes.

This chapter focuses on concepts and theories illustrated by empirical evidence from different parts of the globe. I briefly discuss the concept of 'diaspora,' specifically 'conflict-generated diaspora.' I also look into the concept of 'diaspora mobilisation,' its operationalisations, and its relationship to 'conflict spiral' and 'contested sovereignty.' Besides drawing theoretical leverage from scholarship on conflict and postconflict processes, this research agenda uses insights from transnational social movements, foreign policy lobbying and more recently sociospatial dynamics. The chapter also discusses the emergence of new theoretical streams to deepen the existing research agenda on diasporas and transitional justice, and on weak and fragile states.

Diasporas and Their Mobilisations

The definition of the term 'diaspora' has triggered numerous debates in the founding generation of scholars working on diaspora politics, remaining inconclusive. Many scholars agreed that the term entails *dispersal* of populations –as for the Armenian and Jewish diasporas – their scattering across the globe, orientation towards a homeland and its territory, and maintenance of transnational links to that territory (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Tölölyan 2000; Sheffer 2003: Shain and Barth 2003; Brubaker 2005). Debates could not resolve whether the term 'diaspora' should incorporate only *historically dispersed* and stateless populations, or also those who are *more recently formed* and have states, while maintaining durable ties with their original homelands. As numerous scholars joined the discussion, working definitions were adopted to conduct a variety of comparative and quantitative analyses. Thereby debates emerged whether diasporas should be considered in *essential* terms and as unitary actors as in quantitative studies (Collier and Hoeffler 2000) or as *multiple actors* and even *constructed* through a

mobilisation process, as in many qualitative studies (Sökefeld 2006; Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Abramson 2017). While the debates have split along epistemological and methodological preferences, the need to think comparatively prompted others to disaggregate the term and think how 'diaspora entrepreneurs' constitute diasporas by making claims on behalf of their original homeland (Brinkerhoff 2011; Koinova 2014, 2016; see also Brubaker 2005 and Koopmans et al. 2005 specifically on claim-making).

Conflict-generated diasporas are constituted of refugees and other migrants and their descendants who have escaped individual or collective violence and repression from countries of origin and have been durably socialised with the traumatic experience of violence and dispersal. Such diasporas could be 'long-distance nationalists' (Anderson 1998), maintaining a 'myth of return' to a real or imagined territory (Safran 1991; Sheffer 2003). Their identities could remain 'frozen' in time in remote locations, while embedded in diaspora institutions (Shain 2002), thus reinforcing traumatic memories and creating less eagerness to compromise (Lyons 2007). Lyons, among the first to mention the concept 'conflict-generated diasporas,' argued that such diasporas could have a 'prominent role in framing conflict issues and defining what is politically acceptable.' He drew evidence from the Ethiopian diaspora in the US, which managed to reframe domestic conflicts and eventually contribute to peacebuilding. Diasporas could nevertheless act in moderate ways, especially when their countries of origin no longer experienced conflicts or contestation of statehood (Koinova 2016).

The concept of *diaspora mobilisation* has often been discursively engaged in scholarship on international diaspora politics, indicating the use of specific frames, mobilising structures, networks and resources, and relating to different opportunities and constraints (Wayland 2004; Koopmans et al 2005; Adamson and Demetriou 2007;

Brinkerhoff 2011; Koinova 2014). The term has also received different operationalisations. Byman et al. (2001) distinguish 'moderate' and 'radical' mobilisations, depending on whether diaspora individuals advocate *violent* tactics to achieve their goals. An alternative way to see such actions is to consider whether diaspora entrepreneurs use *transgressive* or *contained* mobilisation in line with McAdam et al. (2001) categorisations. 'Contained' mobilisations channel diaspora interests through existing rules and processes in the state and society, 'transgressive' by challenging and acting outside established rules. Considering where the target of action is located, diaspora entrepreneurs could pursue their collective interests through different channels, *state-based* or *transnational* (Koinova 2014). Considering how direct the *level of involvement*, diasporas could also exercise 'direct, or 'indirect' practices to influence stakeholders in the homeland or via host-society channels (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). Mobilisation can have different *duration*, depending on whether efforts to organise are 'sustained' or 'ad hoc' (Koinova 2016), and different *strength*, as activists can engage resources 'materially' or 'symbolically,' with intensity depending on their empowerment from theglobal position from which they organise.

The concept of *conflict spiral* comes from conflict studies and has been applied to diaspora studies according to Bercovitch's (2007) conceptual framework on diaspora intervention in a conflict cycle. Having researched the Armenian, Cambodian, Croatian, Jewish, Palestinian and Tamil diaspora cases, the contributors to a volume applying this framework (Smith and Stares 2007) found that diaspora entrepreneurs act as 'peace-wreckers' during the escalation phase rather than the prevention or termination phases of conflicts. They are more likely to act as 'peace-makers' if their political engagement reinforces their identity and coincides with the political line of the

homeland and their aspirations to statehood (Bercovitch 2007; Smith and Stares 2007). This worthy contribution nevertheless does not consider that conflicts could be recurring, be blurred or overlapping, or emerge in succession. The relationship between diasporas and conflicts is therefore not that straightforward.

I have proposed to think further about a relationship between diasporas and the *contested sovereignty* of states to which diasporas are transnationally linked. Building on Krasner's (1999) framework of challenges to domestic and international sovereignty, I developed the framework of the large-scale European Research Council Project 'Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty,' considering that the institutional strength or weakness of polities challenged in their domestic sovereignty could condition how diasporas connect and mobilise for them. Diasporas linked to fully sovereign states, even if such states are divided on ethnonational or sectarian grounds (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina versus Iraq), would do so differently from diasporas linked to de facto states, seeking international recognition (such as Kosovo, Palestine or Nagorno-Karabakh) or a stateless diaspora such as the Kurdish, linked to multiple states in the Middle East – Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran – challenged in both their domestic or international sovereignties (Koinova 2017).

Theories from Sociology, International Relations and Political Geography

To go deeper into the factors and mechanisms providing opportunities and constraints for diasporas to amplify or reduce conflicts, scholars have so far employed analytical tools from a variety of literatures: social movements, migration and transnationalism, foreign policy analysis and sociospatial theories.

Scholars in the international politics of diasporas started incorporating insights from classic works on social movements (Snow and Benford 1992; Tarrow 1998; McAdam et al. 2001) to answer *how* diasporas mobilise. Diaspora entrepreneurs act upon local and global *political opportunity structures* (Adamson 2013; Cochrane 2015; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001; Smith and Stares 2007; Wayland 2004); use *mobilising structures*, the formal organisational forms or networks available to them (Wayland 2004; Adamson 2013); become *transnational brokers* connecting previously unconnected networks (Wayland 2004; Adamson 2013; Koinova 2014); use *framing* of specific contentious issues to reach certain audiences and expand the message to others (Wayland 2004; Smith and Stares 2007; Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Koinova 2014); *cooperate* across borders (Carment and Sadjed 2017); and build domestic or transnational *coalition*s to achieve common goals. They do so though off-line politics, but also increasingly through the Internet and social media (Brinkerhoff 2009; Nagel and Staeheli 2010).

Other literatures have provided alternative explanations about *why* diasporas mobilise in more radical or moderate ways. In migration and integration scholarship, Ireland argued, on the basis of research in Switzerland and France, that if institutional arrangements contribute to the isolation of migrants in the host-state, diasporas are more likely to make homeland-oriented claims (Ireland 1994). Homeland-oriented claims could be further shaped by the conjuncture of incorporation regimes, migrants' collective identities and homeland influences (Koopmans et al 2005). Others asserted that migrants' integration (Lewis 2007), or segmental assimilation into a host society (Portes and Zhou 1993; Morawska 2004) are more likely to foster migrant transnationalism. These studies have remained inconclusive, as socially disengaged

individuals embedded in disempowered segments of migrant societies might have more incentives to radical actions, yet not act actually upon them, while highly educated and integrated individuals with no such incentives might rally in transgressive ways. In my own research, for example, while more educated individuals among the Palestinian diaspora would be found to lobby host-land and international institutions, individuals integrated across the economic spectrum could be part of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement.

Politically relevant foreign policy factors have also been identified to cause diasporas to amplify or reduce conflicts. Established scholarship on ethnic lobbying in foreign policy has been more interested in capturing specifics about how policy lobbying takes place through state institutions, party systems and trade unions. An old, politically unified, organisationally strong, partly assimilated diaspora, active in foreign policy issues and keen on alliances with other interest groups, is likely to lobby successfully (Rubenzer 2008; Sheffer 2003; Tölölyan 2000; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007). Also important is the convergence of foreign policy and diaspora goals (Haney and Vanderbush 1999). Military interventions could exacerbate diaspora mobilisations, as in the Albanian diaspora for Kosovo independence related to NATO's 1999 military intervention (Koinova 2014), the 2003 intervention in Iraq as in the Iraqi diaspora (Brinkerhoff 2008), and the lack of military intervention in the Syrian conflict and its mobilisation in the Syrian diaspora (Moss 2016). A traumatic contentious issue stemming from a failed military intervention, the Dutch UN peace-keeping's failure to protect the Srebrenica enclave during the wars of former Yugoslavia, enabled contentious mobilisations among the Bosnian diaspora in the Netherlands, long after the violent conflict was over (Koinova 2016).

Several scholars have shown the detrimental effects on diaspora mobilisations of *critical events* stemming from the country of origin, where events associated with violence play an important role. Construction of a separate Kashmiri diaspora in the UK could be attributed to the rise of anti-Indian insurgency and violence in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989 and diaspora association with Khalistan (Sökefeld 2006:273). Violent events in Kosovo and Sri Lanka also galvanised their diasporas (Demmers 2007; Koinova 2014), as did the gradual breakdown of the peace process in Sri Lanka (Orjuela 2017; Godwin 2017). The 2009 final battle, which crushed the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), also became a critical event for diaspora mobilisation (Hess and Kopf 2014). In scholarship so far, these events have been marked in empirical terms, but analysed minimally in theoretical terms. Hanafi (2005) argued that the 'center of gravity' of the Palestinian movement changed from the diaspora to the West Bank and Gaza with the 1993 Oslo Accords; Brun and Van Hear (2012) spoke of the 'center of gravity' after the LTTE defeat by the Sri Lankan government.

Taking a long-term perspective of the evolution of the Kosovo and Palestinian independence movements for statehood, I have argued that *critical junctures* – a theoretical tool of path-dependence scholarship – have the capacity to transform international and state structures and institutions, change the position of a strategic diasporic center pursuing a homeland-oriented goal from 'outside,' a homeland territory to 'inside' that territory, and vice versa. *Transformative events* – a theoretical tool of sociology – are less powerful and have the capacity to change diaspora mobilisation trajectories to expand or contract (Koinova 2017). For example, the end of communism in 1989–1991 and NATO's 1999 military intervention in Kosovo are critical junctures,

as the diasporic strategic center moved from state to exile in 1991, and from exile to state in 1999, in line with changing international regimes and state structures. In contrast, the mass killing of the family of a Kosovo Liberation Army leader in Drenica in 1998 and the mob violence in Kosovo in 2004 are *transformative*, because they expanded the mobilisation in the diaspora, but did not change its position vis-à-vis the state.

Discussion on critical junctures and transformative events and their systemic effects across the globe belongs to recent emerging conversations about effects of sociospatial embeddedness on diaspora mobilisation in international relations. These have been built on larger literature in political geography (Lefebvre 1974; Sassen 2007). As Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel (2016) have shown, peace and conflict processes could be 'spatialised' with ample evidence demonstrating that agents could mobilise not simply in states, but in sub-state units such as border areas, hotels, camps and other spaces. I made an early endeavor to theorise about diaspora *sociospatial positionality* and the power diaspora entrepreneurs derive from their social relationships embedded in different global contexts (Koinova 2012), and continued theorising in more detail (2014, 2017). The positionality of Bosnian diaspora entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, where the Srebrenica issue is salient in Dutch institutions and society, and there is physical and sociospatial proximity to the International Criminal Tribunal on Former Yugoslavia, conditions diaspora entrepreneurs to be more likely to make contentious claims, especially vis-à-vis the claims of other diaspora activists (Koinova 2016). In the UK and Sweden, for example, where the issue of Srebrenica has not been contentious, the Bosnian diaspora was more open to incorporate multicultural perspectives (Koinova and Karabegovic 2017). Adamson and Koinova (2013) have also shown that London as

a global city provides specific space for diasporas to mobilise with the clustering of institutions, networks and resources.

On the basis of different spatialities, authors have started showing that a classic triangular relationship model considering diasporas, home-states and host-states as the sole actors inducing diasporas to mobilise is no longer valid. Contexts are not simply states as classically considered in International Relations, but *sociospatial*, as diaspora entrepreneurs are embedded in relationships with others, and often function in transnational social spaces (Faist 2000; Pries 2001) or transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). Diasporas are linked to different spaces, such as cities, online, refugee camps, supranational organisations, sites of global visibility and spaces contiguous to or distant from the homeland (Brinkerhoff 2009; Adamson 2016; Gabiam and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016; Koinova and Karabegovic 2017; Kok and Rogers 2016; Van Hear and Cohen 2016). Besides *positionality*, authors emphasised the importance of *contiguity* (Van Hear and Cohen 2016; Koinova 2016), *translocalism* (Karabegovic 2017), *scale* (Koinova and Karabegovic 2016), and *multi-sited embeddedness* (Horst 2017). As this research agenda is still in inception, the systematic effects of sociospatial processes on diaspora mobilisations for amplification and reduction of conflicts are still to be analyzed

Deepening the Conversation About Diasporas in Conflict and Postconflict Reconstruction

While the initial discussion about whether diasporas are 'peace-makers or peace-wreckers' has been concluded, scholarship is seeking to deepen the conversation along several new theoretical lines. First is a more systematic analysis of the relationship

between diasporas and transitional justice. This conversation has been scattered so far, and actual scholarship on transitional justice has not been considerate that conflict legacies are not confined to the original homelands in a globalised world. Simultaneity of communications allows diasporas to voice their experiences and versions of the past in real time while transitional justice processes unfold on the ground (Koinova and Karabegovic 2017). Diasporas could participate in truth commissions as in Liberia, Haiti, Sierra Leone or Cambodia (Young and Park 2009; Hogenboom and Quinn 2011), launch court cases abroad seeking to prosecute dictators as in the case of Chilean general Augusto Pinochet (Roht-Arriaza 2006) and war criminals as in the case of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (Mey 2008). Diasporas could become involved in the establishment of legal tribunals, as in the special tribunal in Iraq (Haider 2014), or in memorialisation and genocide recognition initiatives as in the Armenian, Bosnian, and Jewish cases, among others (Tölölyan 2000; Koinova and Karabegovic 2017).

The second line of theory-building is connected to transitional justice, as the latter takes place in postconflict states, where institutions are weak and local and central authorities might lack the procedures or political will to engage with diaspora populations. Carment and Calleja (2017) demonstrate that authority, legitimacy and capacity are related not simply to domestic actors within a certain state, but to diasporas engaging from abroad with fragile states. The authors show variations of diaspora engagement regarding states, which have experienced recent violent conflicts (Afghanistan, Ukraine, Somalia) and those where intrastate violence has not been prevalent (Ghana, Haiti and India). Conflict narratives could be entrenched in fragmented state institutions and school systems, which leave youth rooted in dominant conflict-based ideologies, as in the case of internally divided Bosnia-

Herzegovina (Karabegovic 2017). Crises in weak states will not necessarily create diaspora mobilisations abroad, as durable and long-term instabilities of institutions and processes in the original homeland make diasporas jaded and uninterested active participation, as in the case of diasporas linked to Greece and Palestine (Mavroudi 2017).

While these lines of scholarship provide some future avenues of engagement, other ways to deepen the knowledge is to develop quantitative studies to scale up case-based and middle-range generalisations derived from comparative case studies into large-N analysis. Diaspora mobilisation studies have developed some initial quantitative studies regarding remittances (Escriba-Folch et al. 2017; Leblang 2017) and sending states engagement with diasporas abroad (Gamlen et al. 2013; Ragazzi 2014). But the study of diasporas and conflict and post-conflict processes is still lagging despite Hall's (2016) study on Bosnian diaspora attitudes in Sweden and Bosnia-Herzegovina. A large-scale survey conducted in 2017 within the ERC Project 'Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty' is seeking to address this gap and bring more clarity in the near future.

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