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**CREST** Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats



**From the Diasporisation to the Transnationalisation of Exile  
Politics - The Case of Sri Lanka, 1983-2016 | Thematic Report One**

## **Understanding Transnational Diaspora Politics: A Conceptual Discussion**

JUNE 2018

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# From the Diasporisation to the Transnationalisation of Exile Politics - The Case of Sri Lanka, 1983-2016

## Understanding Transnational Diaspora Politics: A Conceptual Discussion

### THEMATIC REPORT ONE

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This is the first of three reports produced out of the CREST-funded project: *Understanding When Extremism Gives Way To Moderate Politics - The Case Of Sri Lanka, 1983-2016*.

To find out more information about this project, and to see other outputs from the team, visit the CREST website at: <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/extremism-to-moderate-politics/>

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# UNDERSTANDING TRANSNATIONAL DIASPORA POLITICS: A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

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## ABSTRACT

This is the first of three CREST-funded Thematic Reports published by a team of researchers at City, University of London, and Cranfield University at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom examining political action among diaspora populations. The purpose of the report is to explore the theoretical and conceptual basis underpinning academic debates on engagement in the politics of conflict and post-conflict by communities living overseas. The research team is interested specifically in the Sri Lankan civil conflict between 1983 and 2009 and its aftermath, and understanding the attitudes towards and involvement in that conflict on the part of Tamil diaspora communities.

The CREST project is exploring diaspora communities' relationship with the changing socio-political environment in the homeland and how this influences processes of radicalisation or moderation. It recognises that the socio-political circumstances in which these processes develop are often crucial when understanding why a community or individuals within that community abroad act in a certain way; this includes analysis of different scales and levels of engagement, both in home countries and in host countries, as well as different 'areas' of engagement, which can range from social to economic to political interactions. The following review is not specific to the Sri Lankan situation; it is rather concerned with how four concepts, *diaspora*, *transnationalism*, *cosmopolitanism*, and *translocalism*, have come to frame the academic discussion on diaspora, or more broadly overseas politics and the potential of the concepts to shed light on the relationship between mobility and political action. It considers the extent to which these concepts are helpful in identifying the rationale behind specific methods of political participation, offering critical reflections on the analytical and normative usefulness of these terms.



## INTRODUCTION

Migrant communities are increasingly recognised as critical actors in their countries of origin and destination, capable of influencing political action from abroad and playing a key role in the politics of conflict, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. The academic literature on migrant political engagement is often framed around four overlapping social science concepts – *diaspora*, *transnationalism*, *cosmopolitanism* and *translocalism* - which are deployed to explain the processes associated with population movement and settlement, and the implications these have on collective and individual identity, community-creation, and to a lesser extent political engagement and political action. This review of the academic literature focuses specifically on the contribution a conceptually-driven analysis can have in better understanding processes of mobility and political action across borders in the context of engagement that seeks to either support the use of violence to achieve political aims, or to reject it in favour of moderate politics, and under what conditions such political re-orientation might take place.

It should be noted that the structure of the report separates out each of the four concepts and discusses their relevance to the analysis of diaspora political action. The authors identify, however, that within the literature the terms are used interchangeably and the meanings attached to them are not always consistent or shared. Bauböck (2010) and others have suggested that refining the academic vocabulary, for example by adding new terminology such as ‘trans-polity’, could be a useful exercise to underline the analytical and methodological differences between these overlapping terms. Bauböck is right to caution however that ‘one should avoid...introducing too many new terms into a well-established field of study’ (2010: 310) as this risks further increasing confusion and complexity in the scholarship. The report acknowledges the interconnections between the concepts and the normative implications that each term carries both individually as well as in relation to one another. The review has found that the conceptually framed literature has common ground in identifying the centrality of *identity*, *membership*, *borders* and *nation*, when analysing how political norms of citizenship and nationality develop within non-state settings and shape political action across borders.

The three thematic reports in this series are:

1. Understanding Transnational Diaspora Politics: A Conceptual Discussion
2. The Engagement of Refugees in Transnational Politics: Lessons from the Migration, Diaspora and Refugee Studies Literature
3. Asylum, Security and Extremism

These reports are available to download from the CREST website:

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# 1. DIASPORA

Over the past two decades, ‘diaspora’ has become a key concept in migration and refugee studies with, as Van Hear (2014: 177) has noted, three main associated understandings: a social science understanding, a policy or governmental notion, and a vernacular understanding used by diasporas themselves, and sometimes host populations, in their discourse. The concept has been traditionally used to identify the Jewish exodus, which remains the ‘prototypic’ case of diaspora (Brubaker 2005; Cohen 2008; Safran 1991), and consequently ‘forced expulsion and dispersal, persecution, a sense of loss, and a vision of return’ (Vertovec 2005) have emerged as the key elements in understanding diasporas and their significance in global politics.

In the academic and policy literature, the concept of diaspora has expanded beyond the Jewish prototype to include other ethnic and religious groups who share similar experiences of dispersal, usually as a consequence of war or ethnic conflicts (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Brubaker 2005; Cohen 2008; Wahlbeck 2002). Bauböck (2010: 320) has found that diasporas typically are regarded as ‘victim groups of nation-building projects’, involving violent action that caused the scattering of minorities (usually) beyond the nation-state borders and who come to develop a strong ‘myth’ of the homeland, and a desire to return that is transmitted across generations. It is also associated with the emergence of socio-political projects that encourage homeland attachment and return. Established interpretations of diasporic communities assume a disinclination on the part of the community to fully integrate in to host countries, with a tendency to adopt socio-political behaviours (which can be of a violent and extremist nature) directed at political developments in the homeland (Cohen 2008; Faist 2010). More recent literature has nevertheless identified a tendency among diasporas to embrace a wider critique of the ‘state exclusion’ of minorities. Ashutosh (2013) uses the 2008 and 2009 Tamil protests in Toronto in response to the escalation of violence in Sri Lanka to explore the impact that ‘transnational acts of citizenship’ have on the development of new forms of political participation and the challenge they pose to ‘the monopoly of national categories of belonging’ (2013: 201, 207).

Early literature on migration mainly used the term diaspora to describe ‘traditional’ population dispersal, such as the Armenian, African, and Tamil diasporas among others; however, as Bruneau has noted increasingly ‘in everyday language, [diaspora] is now applied to all forms of migration and dispersion of a people, even where no migration is involved’ (2010: 35). The wide application of the term led Brubaker (2005: 12) to conclude that there is now a ‘dispersion of the meaning of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space’. Cohen (2008) similarly notes this diffusion, particularly in what he identified as the ‘third phase’ of diaspora studies, where deconstructed notions of identity, movement and home have allowed for purely figurative or putative dispersed groups to be included within the diasporic framework, for example, the ‘queer’ diaspora.

In a bid to establish definitional boundaries and to preserve the analytical usefulness of the term, authors such as Safran (1991) and Cohen (1997, 2008) have sought to isolate key characteristics of a diaspora. In a similar pursuit of greater clarity, Faist (2010), rather than proposing clear-cut attributes, has assigned three ‘core aspects’ of the concept which he argues capture both ‘older’ and ‘newer’ diasporas. These are: dispersal (which can be forced or voluntary), the relationship between the homeland and the hostland (expressed in the desire to return or to participate to socio-political affairs), and the relationship between the members of the diaspora and the hostland (more or less positive). Such an understanding of diaspora allows for the inclusion of different ‘dispersed groups’, including ‘voluntary’, ‘self-proclaimed’ and ‘imagined’ dispersals and identities. And also, as McDowell (1996) has argued, to include refugee diasporas that are distinctive in the way that patterns of settlement, pathways to integration and forms of political action are strongly influenced by asylum systems. Such wider definitions enable analysis to consider the relationship between communities, identity-formation and cross-boundary activity in a changing political environment that challenge the primacy of the nation-state as the main actor of the international arena (Callahan 2003; Faist 2010).

## 1.1 DIASPORA POLITICS

The Political Science literature identifies diasporas as comprising transnational actors engaged in a ‘political project’ and constituting, according to Sheffer (2003: 245), ‘bona fide actual entities’ possessing ‘quantifiable memberships’. However, according to Brubaker, one of the potential challenges in the analysis of diaspora as an entity, which is by far the most common approach, is a tendency to essentialise diasporas into homogenic groups whose members are all committed to homeland-oriented projects. To overcome the problem of ‘groupism’ of diasporas, Brubaker (2005: 12) argues that diasporas should be understood not in ‘substantialist terms, but instead as an idiom, a stance, a claim’. Rather than a category of analysis describing situations or nationals living abroad (albeit belonging to an ethno-religious group whose characteristics are those usually associated to diasporic dispersals), Brubaker proposes that diaspora should instead be understood as a category of ‘practice’ through which groups are able to ‘formulate expectations...mobilise energies...appeal to loyalties’ (2005: 12). He further argues that scholars should not ‘prejudge the outcome of [political, social and cultural] struggles by imposing groupness through definitional fiat...[they should] seek, rather, to bring the struggles themselves into focus without presupposing that they will eventuate in bounded groups’ (2005: 13).

Adamson and Demetriou (2007) broadly agree with the position that identifies diasporas as both an entity but also as a political project with a capacity to organise to pursue a group’s interests:

*A diaspora can be identified as a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to 1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and 2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organisational framework and transnational links*  
Adamson and Demetriou (2007: 487).

This understanding of diasporas has proven useful in the authors’ CREST-funded research on Tamil diaspora

political action, however, field research in the UK and Canada has revealed considerable diversity within overseas Tamil communities with a range of interests that could only loosely be defined as ‘collective’. It has also found it necessary to reinsert the state and economic relations into any analysis of diaspora transnational political activity as important vectors that mediate such action. As this review will argue, the diaspora literature remains equivocal on whether there is a univocal association between diasporic behaviour and methods of political action, and the CREST project explores this equivocation.

## 1.2 DIASPORIC BEHAVIOUR AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL ACTION

The term diaspora is far from neutral in political science carrying important connotations (Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Faist 2010; Werbner 2002) in particular as it relates to, or is sometimes used synonymously with, the concepts of (collective) identity, membership and homeland (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Brubaker 2005; Brinkerhoff 2008; Wahlbeck 2002; Werbner 2002). Vertovec (2005), for example, argues that ‘belonging to a diaspora entails a consciousness of, or emotional attachment to, commonly claimed origins and cultural attributes associated with them’. The homeland is therefore thought to acquire an almost mythical status, towards which diasporas are oriented and which contribute to shape a collective identity over time, as ‘nationalist imaginings of home’ are transmitted across generations (Hess and Korf 2014: 423). Attachment to the homeland is seen as the rationale for continued socio-political action across borders, as feelings of ‘empathy’ and ‘support’ towards the homeland (Baser and Swain 2008: 8) translate into readiness to act and contribute to homeland politics, in an exercise of what has been termed ‘long-distance nationalism’ (Anderson 1992; Glick-Shiller 2005). Diasporas are therefore commonly regarded as ‘groups which favour nation-state thinking through transnational means’ (Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius 2003, cited in Østergaard-Nielsen 2006: 1).

Diaspora studies have sought to draw out the normative implications of diasporic behaviour and in general conclude that diasporas challenge traditional understandings of nation-states as entities with fixed



boundaries, citizenship and loyalties (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Wahlbeck 2002; Werbner 2002). In the literature on transnationalism and migration, as will be seen below, identities are described as increasingly de-territorialised, and negotiated across borders through movement and cultural exchange, affecting how membership and political action can be exercised across space (Glick Schiller 2005) and time (Hess and Korf 2014). The inconclusive results that past research revealed in assessing whether the values and practices of the homeland play a determinant role in influencing second generation migrants' socio-political lives (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Hess and Korf 2014; Levitt 2009; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010) highlights how identity can be transmitted and yet negotiated as socio-political circumstances change.

Consequently, as Anderson and Demetriou (2007: 492, emphasis in original) note, studies of diasporic practices 'point to the fact that *territoriality* provides only one possible organisational basis for the mobilisation and formation of political identities'. These diasporic practices lead to discussions of 'diaspora citizenship', 'dual citizenship', 'denizenship', 'transnational citizenship' and 'quasi-citizenship' as well as to a consideration of the socio-political structures, both in the host and in the homeland, that allow for these alternative understandings of citizenship to emerge and for diasporas to sustain homeland-oriented political activity (Bauböck 2010; Chadhaury and Moss 2016; Werbner 2002)<sup>1</sup>. As the link between identity, citizenship and territory is bypassed, the establishment of a socio-political and normative framework that sustains diasporic practice implies that diaspora identification can be achieved only through action and performance (Tölölyan 1996; Werbner 2002). This does not necessarily mean only through political activity, but also through the reproduction of narratives of 'home' in the origin country which 're-inscribe collective memories and visions' (Werbner 2002: 129).

Given these premises, the discussion on the relationship between diasporas and political action is somewhat polarised. On the one hand, scholars have focused on

the 'dark side of diaspora politics' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006: 1), by which diasporas are seen as extremist actors perpetrating conflicts or challenging fragile post-conflict settings; on the other hand, the literature has analysed how diasporas have committed to non-violent conflict resolution by acting as peace-facilitators and agents of democratisation.

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## 1.3 DIASPORAS AND EXTREMISM

In the conflict literature, but also in economics and less so in refugee and migration studies, diasporas are frequently viewed as 'an extremist, long-distance nationalist community that pursues radical agendas, taking advantage of the freedom and economic upliftment that the host land provides them' (Baser and Swain 2008: 9-10; Collier 2000). This is particularly evident where scholars argue that because the diasporic community does not have to bear the economic and political consequences of war, they can afford to perpetrate conflict by virtue of their living abroad and increased opportunities that allows them to gather resources (Collier 2000; Van Hear and Cohen 2015). Because of the messages of self-determination and common identity that such groups often promote, direct or indirect violent action arguably derives from a sense of victimhood that defines the diaspora, antipathy towards an 'exile-like' condition and feelings of social injustice paired with greater wealth and freedom experienced in a foreign country (Hall and Swain 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Demmers 2007).

Action usually takes either economic or political forms (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006). In the first case, diasporas gather economic resources to sustain military activity or terrorist groups (Brinkerhoff 2008; Byman *et al* 2001; Roth 2015). In a quantitative analysis that seeks to understand how civil conflict develops and perpetrates, Collier and Hoeffler (2004: 575) find that diasporas increase by six times the risk of conflict through their financing of rebel organisations; in this context, the size of the diaspora also contributes to

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1 In this context, it is also important to emphasise that the literatures on political theory and International Relations have 'lagged behind' in incorporating specific notions of diaspora in its frameworks (Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Bauböck 2010; Koinova 2010), to the extent that political norms such as 'dual citizenship' and 'multiple loyalties' have not been meaningfully incorporated in diaspora studies, and vice versa, diasporas as international actors or practices have not been fully integrated in political theory and IR.

the escalation of violence (Ibid.; Mariani, Mercier and Verdier 2016). Notable examples include the Somali diaspora (Roth 2015), the Irish diaspora and the Tamil diaspora (Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009).

Research, however, also emphasises the role that external actors play in securing the flow of funding towards the homeland. For example, Byman *et al* (2001) argue that rather than being voluntary support, the Tamil diaspora was often coerced into providing financial contributions to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, as ‘insurgent groups actively play on [the] sympathy and guilt [that diaspora groups experience] to secure critical financial and political support’ (2011: xv; 50-51).<sup>2</sup> A similar example is provided by the Kurdish diaspora’s funding to the Kurdistan Workers Party (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006: 5), and on the same line, Koser (2003: 183) found that the strategy of the Eritrean government during the conflict with Ethiopia to secure funding gave ‘many Eritreans in the diaspora a perception of “exploitation”’ which intensified economic strains within the group. This latter point is also important to underline how the country of origin often develops structures to favour economic and political interactions with their nationals living abroad (Chacko 2011; Chadhaury and Moss 2016; Van Hear and Cohen 2015).

Diasporas can perpetrate violence also directly by supporting political or insurgent groups promoting the ‘exclusive identities’ in which the diaspora recognises itself (Hall and Swain 2007), such as the Irish diaspora with the Irish Republican Army and the Tamil diaspora with the LTTE. In addition to sending financial resources and expressing direct political support, diasporas can play a key role in trafficking weapons or providing human resources for conflicts (Byman *et al* 2001; Demmers 2007). Involvement can also take other forms, as for example the case of the Jewish diaspora in the US, whose lobbying to the American Government is often seen as an obstacle to finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the international political arena (Hall and Swain 2007, Mearsheimer and Walt 2006). Consequently, Demmers argues that ‘diaspora activism should not be understood as a mere response to the “Homeland Calling” [r]ather, the host country

context can be seen as a distinct source of diaspora mobilisation’ (2007: 2) because of the political opportunities and operational resources it provides for action.

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## 1.4 DIASPORAS AND PEACE-BUILDING

The broad debate about diasporas and political action is often a simplification of diasporas as either ‘overseas warriors’ or ‘peace-makers at a distance’. Baser and Swain (2008: 11) are in the latter camp arguing that diaspora communities ‘have been high or partially effective in assisting conflict transformation processes and actively engaged in post-conflict reconstruction activities’. Empirical research has revealed that the lobbying of host governments and international organisations, as well as cooperation with NGOs, have been important channels for diasporas to become involved in the peace-building, transition and reconstruction processes (Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009; Hall and Swain 2007; Hess and Korf 2014; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006).

Diaspora members have also been directly involved in peace-building processes, for example by establishing pro-peace or pro-democracy political parties such as the Armenia’s Heritage Party, founded by a US-based Armenian (Baser and Swain 2008); by directly playing a part in peace talks, as for example members of the Somali diaspora which participated in peace negotiations in Nairobi (Zunzer 2004); or by helping to establish a transitional and post-conflict political system. This latter role has taken various forms, ranging from contributing to the drafting of legislation and the constitution, as the case of Eritrea; to filling in governmental positions, as the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq; and participating in the design and implementation of transitional justice mechanisms (Hall and Swain 2007; Haider 2014).

In addition, research has observed how remittances might be used to improve social conditions in the homeland, as for example to develop education and healthcare frameworks in the local communities (Brun

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2 The data collected by the authors’ CREST-funded research on Tamil diaspora political action suggests, as an additional motivating factor, the fact that for some members of the diaspora the LTTE was the only means to end the suffering of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.



# DIASPORA

From the Diasporisation to the Transnationalisation of Exile Politics – The Case of Sri Lanka, 1983-2016

and Van Hear 2012). This also recalls the ‘migration-development nexus’ that emphasises the important role that overseas nationals might play to cause socio-economic and political change in their country of origin (de Haas 2010, Van Houte 2016).

While some have advanced an economic rationale to explain engagement in peace-building efforts, as post-conflict periods arguably provide increased economic opportunities (Hall and Swain 2007), the literature generally agrees that, especially when considering diasporic groups in the West, the exposure to values of freedom, democracy, pluralism and human rights in the host-country plays an important role in defining diasporic behaviour towards the home country. The ‘socialisation’ into different political cultures ‘should to some extent encourage the adoption of new and more moderate views of the means through which political change should be pursued’ (Hall and Swain 2007: 119; Brun and Van Hear 2012; Hess and Korf 2014; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010). This has also been facilitated by advancement in technologies and wider access to the Internet as a space where information can be easily gathered and social action is mobilised, and where peaceful protests and demonstrations can be organised (Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009).

Therefore, as Werbner argues, a transnational dimension of diasporic identity and ‘cosmopolitan consciousness’ (2002: 120) contributes to address injustices experienced by ‘co-diasporics’ or those left in the homeland. This resonates with empirical findings of Van Hear and Cohen (2015) who suggest that diasporas might engage in peaceful action because of the desire to return or contribute to improve the livelihoods of their kin, and therefore to engage in the reconstruction of their villages and countries.

The analysis presented so far is inconclusive on whether there is a univocal association between diasporic behaviour and method of political action. The polarised and simplified images of diasporas as either pro-violence or pro-peace should be treated with caution. Questions must be asked about the assumed homogeneity of diasporic groups, in terms of their collective interests and their adherence to a single political project. Against this context, and going back to the importance of action and performance in diasporic identification, what we need is a better understanding

of what influences diasporas’ decision to mobilise, and the choice of method used for that mobilization.

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## 1.5 DIASPORA MOBILISATION

The mobilisation of diasporas against the backdrop of conflict in the homeland is an issue of growing concern among policy makers. Van Hear and Cohen (2015) propose that different levels of analysis are necessary when seeking to understand diasporas’ engagement with the homeland, specifically the personal, extended and imagined community-relations levels. This is supported by empirical research conducted by Brun and Van Hear (2012), who found that different parts of Sri Lanka have benefitted differently from the changing relationship between the diaspora and the LTTE. Nonetheless, while it presents a useful framework, this systematic approach does not advance our understanding as to why diaspora groups adopt either violent or peaceful behaviour; a central concern of the CREST project and the inspiration for this conceptual study.

Brinkerhoff (2008) has usefully developed what she terms as ‘identity-mobilisation framework’ which places identity at the core of mobilisation strategies along a spectrum, ranging from ‘constructive’ to ‘destructive’ contributions. She suggests that diasporas that are more ‘assimilated’ or ‘integrated’ in a Western (liberal) host society are more likely to manifest constructive contributions towards the homeland, hostland or both, while those who might experience feelings of marginalisation or exclusion in their host countries are more likely to engage in more destructive behaviour. More generally, confrontation of the identity of the diaspora with the host society is more likely to generate mobilisation, both in positive and negative terms. However, an important limitation of this analytical framework is that it constructs diasporas as homogeneous groups, whose identity is understood in absolute terms over space and time.

Betts and Jones (2016: 22) instead pursue an interests’ driven model of mobilisation, arguing that ‘where particular forms of transnational political mobilisation have taken place, it has been for someone and for some purpose’. By referring to social movement theory, developed also by Sokefeld (2006), they argue that diasporas are mobilised by ‘animators’, which might

be internal or external to the diaspora itself, and who have socio-political interests in doing so. Through this perspective ‘the idea of “the diaspora” as a category is constructed and mobilised for political purposes’ (Betts and Jones 2016: 27). While this argument is useful in outlining how interests of various actors and shifting power dynamics can determine the stability and length of the ‘life cycle’ of diaspora mobilisation, Betts and Jones’ analysis risks instrumentalising the diaspora as a political tool in the hands of ‘elites who, through deploying money, networks, or ideas to bring diasporas into existence, thereby serve particular interests’ (2016: 8). In addition, they limit their analysis to two cases (Zimbabwe and Rwanda), and while they address why political mobilisation might begin, end or stall, they do not explain how methods of mobilisation might vary within or across cycles of a single diaspora.

Cochrane, Baser and Swain (2009) offer a more dynamic model for understanding change in diaspora political activity by building in to their analysis a consideration of how diasporas ‘are diverse multi-layered communities, [which] can play a variety of roles at different stages in a conflict and during efforts to negotiate and implement a political settlement...[d]iaspora communities are not independent actors and their engagements with homeland politics are connected to the processes going around them’ (2009: 682-700). The understanding of diaspora behaviour as depending on time-space circumstances is supported also by Koinova (2010; 2013; 2016), who argues that diasporic action should be analysed across a spatial spectrum that compares periods of *détente* with periods of conflict. Specifically, she focuses on how ‘dynamics in the original homeland drive the overall trends towards radicalism or moderation of diaspora mobilisation’ (2013: 433), but that a traumatic issue that binds together diaspora, host-state and homeland, as for example protracted violence in the homeland, can explain why action is sustained over time (2016). Koinova argues that ‘under violent conditions, radicals usually hold more political clout’ (2010: 153) while periods of less acute violence are more likely to be characterised by the advancement of moderate action and democratic-leaning values. This argument is supported also by empirical research. For example, Byman *et al* (2001: 50-51) argue that in the context of the Tamil diaspora, military victories by the LTTE often resulted in the ‘proffering of mass spontaneous contributions’, while Brun and Van Hear (2012) suggest that the ceasefire in Sri Lanka in the

early 2000s gave the diaspora the possibility to engage in an initial action of reconstruction and recovery.

In addition to emphasising the temporal dimension of diaspora mobilisation, Koinova (2013; 2016) draws on social movement theory to show how political opportunities, framing and resource mobilisation may influence political action. Political action, she argues, is influenced both by ‘identity-based social entrepreneurs’ (understood as formal or informal leaders) within the diaspora who mobilise resources, and by the socio-political conditions in the homeland. The levels of violence in the homeland (i.e., the cycle of the conflict) and the strength of the linkages between the secessionist elites and the diasporic entrepreneurs are crucial in determining the methods of political mobilisation. Koinova therefore adds to Betts and Jones (2016)’s argument by including in her analysis the temporal dimension of action, the opportunity structures of the homeland, the agency of the diaspora and the linkages between these different elements. This model is especially useful to explain situations such as that of the Tamil diaspora, where the relationship between the diaspora abroad and the LTTE’s international network was crucial in determining political mobilisation.

The lack of a meaningful theory of diaspora formation (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Betts and Jones 2016) suggests that diaspora mobilisation is influenced by changing socio-political circumstances, reinforcing the point that diasporas should not be seen as only either essentially violent or peaceful actors. Consequently, from the literature it emerges that the concept of diaspora is not attached to a normative understanding of political action, but rather should be used as an analytical tool which takes into consideration the agency of those involved together with structural and contextual factors. As Werbner argues (2002: 1), diasporas are ‘chaordic’ entities and ‘ultimately, there is no guiding hand, no command structure, organising the politics, the protests, the philanthropic drives, the commemoration ceremonies or the aesthetics of diasporas’. What is understood, however, is that by directly or indirectly influencing political developments in the homeland, diasporas effectively carry out transnational action that crosses borders: it is on the concept of transnationalism that the next section will focus.



## 2. TRANSNATIONALISM

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Transnationalism has been defined as the ‘multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation-states’ (Vertovec 1999: 447). As an analytical framework, the concept has been used to understand the changing landscape of the international arena marked by the growing presence and influence of non-state actors such as NGOs, transnational social movements and advocacy networks (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Della Porta *et al* 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997). It includes analysis of migration, and migrant communities as important actors in that new global landscape (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1995; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Smith and Guarnizo 1998).

The concept emerged in the academic literature in the 1990s coinciding with the growing interest in the interconnections between migration, mobility and identity (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1995; Gardner 2013; Vertovec 1999, 2001). Broadly, the literature observes that migrants do not live in fixed locations, but rather develop and sustain social and political processes in two or more societies at the same time by way of creating what has been termed ‘transnational social spaces’ (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1995; Gardner 2013; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc (1994: 4-7) argue that migrants’ ‘experiences and lives [are] not sharply segmented between host and home societies’, but should instead be understood as being in a continuous flux across multiple spaces. Transnationalism therefore describes ‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origins and setting...[by building] social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders’ (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc 1994: 7).

Transnationalism thus challenges traditional push-pull migration models which tend to regard international migratory movements as one-off events through which individuals make a ‘sharp break’ with their homeland in order to ‘assimilate’ in to a destination country (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999; Gardner 2013). Transnationalism enables an analysis of migration that considers different settings and the renegotiation

of concepts of identity, space, community and ‘home’ where the focus is not on the act of movement itself but rather on the actions that permit the maintenance of cross-border links traversing societies and nation-states. It is thus seen as a ‘new paradigm that rejects the long-held notion that society and the nation-state are one and the same’ (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1995: 1).

Because of the ways in which it facilitates interaction and exchange of resources, and establishes relationships that enable individuals to adapt and maintain an identity across space, transnationalism can also be seen to sustain political activity across borders (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). In the literature, transnational political action has been mostly analysed by focusing on transnational social movements or advocacy networks as drivers of ‘positive globalisation from below’, universal human rights, democracy and equality (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Della Porta *et al* 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Such activity is described as taking place on the boundaries between states and their nationals providing a political space that has the potential to maximise action and dialogue exchange. As analysed below, the tendency to understand transnationalism as a ‘universalising’ force has been applied also to migrant transnational political action; however, a few considerations on the limitations of the concept need to be made.

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### 2.1 TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL ACTION: CONCEPTUAL LIMITATIONS

For Kivisto (2001: 550) transnationalism as an explanatory concept ‘suffers from ambiguity because of competing definitions that fail to specify the temporal and spatial definitions of the term and to adequately locate it vis-à-vis other concepts’. While the term is useful to draw comprehensive analyses of processes of migration, it arguably fails to identify a systematic framework to understand how transnational discourses emerge, develop and are sustained over time; and how they emerge in response to specific events, such as conflict at home. This is particularly valid especially

in relation to migrant transnational political action and how it is exercised.

Guarnizo, Portes and Haller (2003) argue that understanding transnationalism as a holistic and all-embracing term does not explicitly differentiate between those who engage in political action and those who do not. While they argue that the focus should be on those individuals that ‘conduct cross-border activities on a *regular* basis’ (2003: 1213, emphasis in original), this criterion still fails to explain how people gather together and engage in political action, either as a community or individually. For example, Levitt (2004, emphasis added) argues that ‘*most* migrants are *occasional* transnational activists’; and she adds that *regular* and *occasional* activities can cause meaningful change both in host and home countries, but there is little understanding of how this is quantified. This argument is further extended by Østergaard-Nielsen (2001: 3) who argues that it is generally impossible to ‘deconstruct’ political practices, and that therefore ‘economic, socio-cultural or religious transnational practices’ need to be considered within the picture as one.

This review has so far shown that transnationalism as an analytical concept cannot adequately explain what methods of political action are used in transnational political activity. While it is accepted that transnationalism has an impact on political norms such as citizenship and nationality, as for the case of diaspora, there is little analysis in the literature on how, when or on what scale such concepts may translate in to actual political action (Boccagni and Decimo 2013; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001). As Guarnizo, Portes and Haller (2003: 1215, emphasis in original) affirm, ‘[the] literature leaves little doubt about the *existence* of the phenomenon of political transnationalism and its transformative potential, but it says little about the actual numbers involved or their characteristics and motivations’. This is effectively reflected in the literature on migrant political action from abroad.

Guarnizo, Portes and Haller (2003) recognise a ‘transformative’ potential in transnationalism particularly to shape understandings of citizenship, identity and the nation-state. Scholars such as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) argue that the benefit of transnationalism lies in the fact that it bypasses the traditional ‘methodological nationalism’ of social

sciences, which sees the nation-state as the main actor of the international arena. While this assumption has been debated, as the section below on translocalism considers, nonetheless traditional understandings of the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’ as overlapping entities have been questioned, and the political consequences attached to them have been transferred from a national setting to a transnational social space. In this context, notions of dual citizenship and denizenship (a non-citizen resident) have emerged as important political frameworks that allow political action across countries, upheld by understandings that identity and membership to a community are not territorially-bounded, but on the contrary, can be extended over space (Gardner 2013; Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1995; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001).

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## 2.2 AGENCY/STRUCTURE ANALYSIS OF MIGRANT TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL ACTIVITY

As previously discussed, transnationalism provides a ‘venue’ for political engagement and economic exchange enabling non-state actors to participate in the international arena (Vertovec 2009; Held *et al* 1999). Participation takes many forms including through the giving and receiving of remittances, including both economic resources but also ‘ideas, practices, social capital and identities that are circulated between sending and receiving communities’, collectively known as ‘social remittances’ (Lacroix, Levitt and Vari-Lavoisier 2016: 1). Remittance giving is cited as an example of how migrants directly engage and achieve impact through their transnational participation (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Massey and Parrado 1994). The remittance literature is strongly influenced by a positive reading of the political and economic role that migrants play towards their home societies captured in the so called ‘migrant-development’ nexus in which migrants are actors of change (de Haas 2010; Van Houte 2016).

A further growing body of research has sought to identify the characteristics of migrants who become involved in transnational political activity. It has found that second-generation migrants are less likely to be involved than their parents in large part, it is argued, due to higher levels of assimilation and economic security



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(Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Portes, Escobar and Arana 2008; Haller and Landolt 2005). Research has emphasised that despite being born in a different country, values and practices of their ancestral homes were important determinants of second generation migrants' socio-political lives (Hess and Korf 2014; Levitt 2009; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010). Research has also analysed the role that migrant organisations play in this context (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016) and how the spread of modern technologies might facilitate political action (Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009).

While research focusing on migrants and migrant organisations provide insights in to the practice of transnational activity (i.e., through economic support and direct or indirect political action aimed at influencing the country of origins' political situation), structural accounts are useful in understanding why such activity develops in the first place, the different forms it takes over time, and the characteristics of those who participate. Research has considered, for example, the ways in which home- and host-countries' political opportunity structures might sustain and form identity across borders, while favouring cross-country resource exchange (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Chaudhary and Moss 2016). The literature focuses on integration policies and social inclusion in receiving countries (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003); and on citizenship and diaspora engagement policies in origin countries (Adamson and Demetriou 2007; Chacko 2011). Elsewhere research has focused on 'meso-level' structures offered by migrant organisations as facilitators of political activity (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016) as well as the macro-structures of the host and home countries. In an attempt to overcome an unnecessarily binary analysis, Chaudhary and Moss (2016) offer a useful 'triadic political opportunity approach' that takes into consideration receiving-country, origin-country, and transnational political contexts in shaping immigrants' political actions and that requires an analysis of motivation, opportunity and constraint at all three levels. The benefit of this approach (and one that the authors of this paper are pursuing in their research on Tamil diaspora political activity) is that it moves analysis beyond the receiving/origin country binary as the sole opportunity structure influencing the agency of migrants. In this way, transnational political institutions such as social movements, international organisations,

international legal norms and political principles can influence immigrants' political action.

As it has been argued, transnational political action is thought to be shaped by the higher exposure of immigrant groups to international norms and principles of equality, human rights and justice in the host country, and by the possibility of organising politically without repercussions. Chaudhary and Moss argue that 'immigrants, like other minority groups, are likely to protest to gain international recognition...as such, their calls for...intervention target institutions such as the UN and the International Criminal Court' (2016: 19). The authors provide the example of Yemenis living in New York who in 2015 organised regular demonstrations in front of the UN buildings to protest against the civil war. Chaudhary and Moss also argue that seeking recognition at domestic and international levels is important for transnational migration groups to assert their identities, 'particularly for those groups that lack a state...through protests, petitions and other extra-institutional collective action' (2016: 19), especially because of the social and political opportunities that the host state and the international system provide.

As the authors' CREST-funded research on Sri Lankan diaspora politics has found, an analysis of the Tamil 'transnational political field' is useful to understand how changing opportunity structures in the home country, together with a growing socio-economic gap between transnational communities and those who did not migrate, have an important impact in transnational political activism. Brun and Van Hear (2012) analyse how the relationship between the Tamil separatist organisation, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the diaspora changed over time and how this affected transnational political activity. By arguing that the defeat of LTTE in 2009 opened the way for a 'new dispensation in the political field', these scholars affirm that changes in the socio-political circumstances allowed the diaspora to acquire power in determining Tamil (transnational) politics. Nadarajah and Sentas come to a similar conclusion, 'it is the destruction of the LTTE, in particular, that has served to foreground the diaspora as a distinct, forceful and consequential element of the internationalized politics of Sri Lanka's conflict' (2013: 77). This same argument is supported by empirical research carried out by Vimalarajah and Cheran (2010: 7, 29), which found that the 'involvement of...second generation Tamil Diaspora members as key

players in the organisation of protests had transformed the nature of Tamil transnational politics’, as the void created by the loss of the LTTE could ‘be filled by the second-generation Tamils and other Tamil nationalists...even those who have been traditionally critical of the LTTE’. What is common among all these scholars is treating the LTTE defeat and disappearance as a ‘transformative event’ (Koinova 2011) in Tamil diaspora politics; an idea that the authors’ CREST-funded research on Tamil diaspora political action has also encountered in its field research in the UK and Canada.

Brun and Van Hear (2012)’s discussion of LTTE-diaspora relations is useful in understanding how changes in the distribution of power in the home country can affect the ways in which transnational action is carried out. However, the challenge remains to identify the underlying reasons for the shift in attitude towards the LTTE, and the use of violence, among members of the Tamil diaspora. Reading across the literature suggests that changing attitudes towards conflict and specifically the use of violence to achieve political ends can be better understood when considering increased opportunities for participation and socio-economic well-being in the host country, as well as the exposure to international norms and spaces for discussion. In this line of argumentation transnationalism is typically regarded as positive and viewed as contributing to the development of global citizenship, universality and openness (Van Den Anker 2010: 80). This assumption has however been challenged in two ways.

First, in the context of migration, change is often assumed as something fixed and unitary, voluntarily brought about by individuals with a conscious understanding of the social-political structures that surround them (Van Houte 2016). Faist (2010), however, cautions that a transnational understanding of human mobility (as, for example, within a diasporic setting) has the potential to reinforce and reproduce potentially negative beliefs and ‘isms’ such as nationalism, patriarchy, sexism, sectarianism and ethno-nationalism. In addition, the transnational bonds that unite communities in host countries and the homeland are used as channels for the exchanging of resources in pursuit of what Brinkerhoff (2008) has termed both ‘constructive’ and ‘destructive’ action. Transnational links are just as likely therefore to facilitate the transfer of money to continue or escalate a conflict, or to challenge mainstream state power, as the

case of Mali expatriates’ attempts to hamper state-led projects from abroad (Dell 2013).

The second challenge to the optimistic viewpoint on transnational action relates to the unintended consequences of engagement. Remittance sending and diaspora investment in countries of origin, particularly in post-conflict contexts, have been shown to increase inequality and deepen impoverishment (Brun and Van Hear 2012; de Haas 2010; Levitt 2004; Van Houte 2016;). Byman *et al* (2001) argue in their analysis of the Tamil diasporas’ engagement with the homeland that donations for military purposes were also channelled through organisations that provided development and humanitarian programmes in Sri Lanka, as ‘it is particularly difficult to prove that funds raised for humanitarian purposes are being diverted to propagate terrorism’ (2001: 52). In this context, it would be also important to understand whether such action was consciously carried out by the diaspora or whether the LTTE was coercing or acting without the knowledge of Tamils abroad.

Faist (2010: 15) therefore cautions that ‘transnationalism...[does] not suggest a (linear) progression of the universalisation of rights...there are no clear-cut assumptions associated to the [term] that increased cross-border interaction brings to a further spread of global norms’. While the transnational framework embraces processes that connect different societies through spontaneous or organised migrant engagement it does not necessarily imply a horizontal vision of society through which norms of universalism, global justice and equality are spread as usually envisioned within the cosmopolitan ideal. Research on transnationalism and political action indeed shows that ‘while exposure to certain political regimes and procedures [e.g., within democracies] may hold sway, its importance may be overestimated’ (Lacroix, Levitt and Vari-Lavoisier 2016: 3) in influencing political activity across borders. Therefore, while the relevance of transnationalism associated to political action is demonstrated, it should be approached as a process with ‘no pre-determined outcome...[which] needs to be read in the light of migrants’ individual and collective characteristics, and the structure of opportunities accessible’ (Boccagni and Decimo 2013: 2)



## 3. COSMOPOLITANISM

The literature on transnationalism signalled a wider intellectual interest in globalisation and its effects on global socio-political and economic dynamics. Cosmopolitanism similarly emerged as a concept that sought to explain political engagement within and across migrant communities (Glick Schiller 2010). Several types of cosmopolitanism are deployed in the social science and humanities literature, including ordinary cosmopolitanism (Datta 2009), practical cosmopolitanism (Haupt 2007), thoroughgoing cosmopolitanism (Christiano 2008) banal cosmopolitanism (Hannerz 2006), unconscious cosmopolitanism (Beck 2006) and cosmopolitanisation (Beck 2002; Beck and Grande 2010). The variants reflect both the difficulty that scholars have on agreeing what cosmopolitanism is, and the flexibility of the term to include divergent phenomena operating at many different levels (Vertovec and Cohen 2002).

In the literature, cosmopolitanism has acquired political, socio-cultural and moral connotations (Haupt 2007; Martell 2011; Hannerz 2006; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Politically, it has been linked to a concern with tackling common global problems through the creation of a 'world government' or establishing global institutions that challenge the primacy of the nation-state as the main actor of the international political arena (Bauböck 2002; Beck 2006; Archibugi, Held and Kohler 1998). Culturally, it tends to refer to the exchange of cultural practices, both figuratively and practically, that are thought to signal an increasing openness to difference and 'otherness' (Appadurai 1996; Appiah 2007; Hannerz 2006; Martell 2011). In the realm of morality and ethics, cosmopolitanism is presented as 'a philosophy (that) promotes the notion of citizens of the world creating a universal moral community or humanity committed to universal values' (Vertovec 2006: 4, cited in Haupt 2007: 3; Erskine 2000; Dower 2009). Or as explained by Fine (2003: 612), inspired by Kantian philosophy, 'the idea of cosmopolitanism...denatures the nationalist view of the world, challenges the common sense that treats nationalism as an insuperable fact of modern life, and offers in place of nationalism a universalistic idea of justice'.

A common underlying and broad narrative associates cosmopolitanism with 'more inclusive arrangements of compassion, solidarity and peacefulness' (Hannerz 2006: 10) and a concern for 'people in the world with different identities, beliefs and cultures living together with respect for each other' (Martell 2011: 617; Datta 2009; Roudometof 2005; Jones 2013; Parker 2003). An essentially optimistic understanding of cosmopolitanism - sometimes termed the positive face of globalisation (Bordoni 2014; Giddens 2002; Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis 2009) - is achieved through an attitude, a philosophy, a condition and a model for practice rather than a framework to interpret contemporary social dynamics (Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Bauböck 2002). Unlike in transnationalism, the boundaries that are maintained to identify cross-border processes are bypassed to adopt a global, borderless account, which entails a 'serious obligation to further the conditions of human well-being and oppose what undermines it' (Dower 2009: 195; Beck 2006). Cosmopolitanism is therefore seen as an 'ethical stance' of the individual to value 'the other' with an outward approach that strives to achieve an essentially 'progressive humanistic ideal' (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis 2009: 1, 23).

There are limitations to the usefulness of the concept in helping explain transnational or diasporic political action; not least because the inherent utopianism of much cosmopolitan thinking is ultimately abstract. Scholars struggle to identify precisely who the cosmopolitans are in society, and how cosmopolitan practices are or should be expressed (Bauböck 2002; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Holton (2002: 154) rightly points out that cosmopolitanism 'raises questions about the coherence of this increasingly diffuse and somewhat vague concept for purposes of social enquiry'.

### 3.1 COSMOPOLITAN POLITICS

In terms of political analysis, the cosmopolitanism literature focuses mainly on a macro-level analysis (Beck 2006; Archibugi, Held and Kohler 1998) exploring how a cosmopolitan world view may affect notions of identity, citizenship and political participation

(Appiah 2007; Bauböck 2002; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). The academic debates share commonalities with the literature on transnationalism and the role that (transnational) social movements can play in spreading norms of justice, solidarity and equality (see, for example, the literature suggested by Beck and Sznaider 2006; Bauböck 2002 and Kaldor 1996). Nonetheless, there is little specific research on how the micro- or community-levels play out in a context of political cosmopolitanism, particularly where individuals are assumed to be members of several or overlapping political communities (Bauböck 2002).

Cosmopolitan politics has two main but overlapping elements: the first relates to the establishment of a system for global governance; the second, more conceptual, addresses how political norms are affected by a cosmopolitan understanding (Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Both share an underlying principle that the notion of cosmopolitan politics is essentially one of pluralism, entailing norms of universal justice, obligations towards others, and co-existence of multiple loyalties (Appiah 2007; Kaldor 2002; Martell 2011; Van den Anker 2010). Empirical analysis centres on the emergence of networks of international (or global) institutions to tackle common issues to all humanity, such as climate change or poverty, including inter-governmental institutions (Held 2005), social movements and 'global' civil society (Kaldor 2002; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997). Conceptual discussions, on the other hand, tend to focus on norms of 'cosmopolitan democracy' (Archibugi and Held 1995; Bauböck 2002; Kaldor 2002); cosmopolitan citizenship and identity (Hannerz 2006; Van den Anker 2010); and changing notions of the nation-state (Archibugi and Held 1995; Archibugi, Held and Kohler 1998; Bauböck 2002; Beck 2006; Martell 2011).

A recurrent argument supporting cosmopolitan politics is that political power relations have moved away from the nation-state towards a global framework (Archibugi, Held and Kohler 1998; Beck 2006; Martell 2011) that is sustained by understandings of global citizenship and justice, and by the idea that universal values such as human rights traverse national settings that have become inadequate to tackle global problems. Cosmopolitanism defined through the pursuit of global cooperation, consensus and democracy is described as benign and non-confrontational, where solutions to

global problems entail a 'common risk consciousness' of nation-states that allows for politics to be carried out at a global level in a pluralist and consensual way (Beck 2006; Bauböck 2002; Held 2002; Martell 2011).

Such an approach is useful in understanding how principles of cooperation, consensus and democracy come to underpin cosmopolitan forms of politics, and how these are seen to be increasingly necessary in the contemporary political arena. However, within such analysis, nation-states are frequently assumed as outward-oriented entities with an 'innate' global consciousness based on ideas of common humanity and obligations towards the 'other'. Historical developments have shown that conflicts can arise even within such a cosmopolitan attitude (Kaldor 2002; Erskine 2000), to the extent that Martell (2008: 131) argues that cosmopolitanism, and especially of the form promoted by Beck (2006) is understood as 'an external reality that is not subject to agency', and which does not take into consideration the still important role that nation-states play in defining global politics. In addition, this system arguably reinforces top-down power dynamics that renders micro-level (cosmopolitan) political action difficult to analyse. As Hannerz (2006: 25) observes, 'cosmopolitanism may be understood as engaged in creating another burden for ordinary people' as the creation of a world society might become even 'less accessible to influence from below'.

Despite such self-reflection the cosmopolitanism literature remains optimistic that 'being critical of cosmopolitan politics does not necessarily mean doubting cosmopolitanism in its normative, cultural or sociological forms' (Martell 2011: 618; see also Haupt 2007; Kaldor 2002). In fact, the general understanding in the literature is that a 'cosmopolitan outlook' can be useful in dealing with the challenges of the contemporary era as, 'unlike political nationalism [it] registers and reflects the multiplicity of issues, questions, processes and problems that affect and bind people, irrespective of where they were born or reside' (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 22). There is therefore a general agreement that increased cooperation in the global arena can be explained by the spread of common values such as universal justice and human rights, as well as increased interconnectedness and socio-political exchange that shift the centre of analysis from the local towards the global.

## 3.2 BEYOND STATE-BASED COSMOPOLITAN POLITICS

Rather than taking the nation-state as her principal point of reference, Kaldor (1996, 2002) talks of a ‘cosmopolitanism from above’ that is generated by the creation of global institutions complemented by a ‘cosmopolitanism from below’, operated by global social movements appealing to universal principles of human rights and democracy.<sup>3</sup> Kurasawa (2004) includes civic associations and concerned ‘ordinary’ citizens as drivers of such processes. As Vertovec and Cohen (2002: 12) argue:

*the fact that individuals can continue their roles and identities as national citizens while directly engaging in political activities aimed at a sphere beyond the nation-state points towards an understanding of the cosmopolitanism of individuals conveying complex political interests.*

While the underlying argument is that individuals can become directly involved in cosmopolitan politics, by joining international campaigns or advocacy organisations, nonetheless there is little understanding of how such dynamics play out at the individual or community level, and which direction they take when faced with a political problem. Kurasawa (2004: 252), for example, argues that ‘cosmopolitanism from below is...without guarantees...and remains a work in progress’.

The discussion on individual-level cosmopolitanism has developed in two ways: conceptually it has focused on how political and cultural norms associated with the individual (i.e., citizenship, membership and identity) change through a cosmopolitan lens; while empirical research focuses on cosmopolitanism as an ‘everyday practice’ often detached from the moral principles of the concept (Datta 2009; Haupt 2007). Cosmopolitanism at the individual level suggests obligations towards strangers, openness towards difference and a willingness to engage with the other

(Appiah 2007; Hannerz 2006; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). This raises questions about what it means to be a ‘citizen of the world’ (Appiah 2007; Dower 2009; Hall 2002) particularly where identities have become increasingly less territorialised and homogeneous (Appadurai 1996), and simultaneous memberships and loyalties ‘below’, ‘above’ and ‘alongside’ the nation-state have emerged (Held *et al* 1999: 450).

While ‘cosmopolitanism does not necessarily imply an absence of belonging, but the possibility of belonging to more than one ethnic and cultural localism simultaneously’ (Werbner 1999: 34), little literature has focused on what this implies in terms of political action (Bauböck 2002). And the literature that has emerged has been accused of embodying ‘all the worst aspects of classical liberalism – atomism, abstraction, alienation from one’s roots, vacuity of commitment, indeterminacy of character and ambivalence towards the good’ (Waldron 1992: 764-5). This is important because of the criticisms that cosmopolitanism has attracted as a homogenising force that abstracts agents from their particular ties and loyalties, therefore strengthening exclusionary forces (Erskine 2000; Van den Anker 2010). As Parekh (2003) comments, ‘cosmopolitanism ignores special ties and attachments to one’s community’ to reach an ‘abstract level of universal well-being’ (2003: 12).

In terms of a research agenda, a challenge emerges when seeking to investigate a cosmopolitan intent. The object of research becomes necessarily either an attitude or a sentiment of impartiality or partiality in order to understand how notions of cosmopolitanism can develop and drive socio-political action (Appiah 1997, Haupt 2007; Roudometof 2005, Jeffers 2013). In one of the few empirical analyses of the relationship between migration and cosmopolitanism, Haupt (2007) implies that both thin and thick forms of cosmopolitanism can influence ways of belonging and action. There is therefore the need ‘to combine an appropriate level of impartial concern for all with adequate room for the partiality necessary to living our lives as the particular people we are’ (Jeffers 2013).

3 It is important to underline that Kaldor (2002: 227) also emphasises that cosmopolitan groups, including pro-democracy and ‘liberation’ groups, ‘are not...confined to non-violent resistance’. While she does not elaborate further, this is to be contextualised within a framework of ‘new wars’, characterised by intra-state rather than inter-state conflicts. She suggests that self-defence groups or reformist forces like the Rwanda People’s Front (RPF) or the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) might be counted among these cosmopolitan or democratic political groups.



A research agenda would further require, as Van den Anker's (2010) and Erskine (2000) have suggested, analysis that works on a number of levels, for example, by invoking 'embedded cosmopolitanism' that 'builds on people's particular ties and yet involves solidarity across borders' (Van den Anker 2010: 83). Solidarity is here understood as a 'sense of duties of charity' towards others and is expressed within one's own fellow members of a community. This can take the form, within the context of migration, of remittances or investment in developmental projects in the country of origin. Empirical evidence is provided by Mohan (2006: 870-1), who, in his analysis of how the Ghanaian community living abroad facilitated development at home, argues that 'obligations can only be specified and analysed within the moral universe of the community under investigation'. Specifically, action is defined in terms of 'what a "good" member of that community should do', in a way 'localising' cosmopolitan action. As Erskine (2000: 588-590) argues, 'embedded cosmopolitanism relies on a reconstituted understanding of the morally relevant community, by which "communities of place" are supplemented with "dislocated communities"'; the precondition for cosmopolitan socio-political action to develop is that 'multifarious, overlapping... communities intersect', of which 'the stranger' is a member and with which a moral agent identifies.

The compromise between principles of universality, human rights and solidarity and 'local' applicability, which resonates with the literature on migration and transnationalism, is seen as necessary because of the difficulty of understanding how individuals can carry out cosmopolitan processes in practical terms (Appiah 2007; Erskine 2000). As Appiah (2007: 163) argues, a certain degree of partiality is needed to fulfil one's obligations towards the 'other', as 'to recognise that everybody is entitled...to exercise certain human capabilities and to be protected...is not yet to say how all these things are to be met'. Consequently, there is a gap in understanding how cosmopolitanism develops theoretically and morally, and how it is exercised practically, captured in discussions about 'practical cosmopolitanism' (Haupt 2007) or 'everyday cosmopolitanism' (Datta 2009). As Haupt (2007: 10) argues:

*practical cosmopolitanism describes behaviour and practices that draw upon knowledge about and familiarity with*

*different cultures and that do not necessarily have to be morally reflected on...[it] emphasises individualism, generality and universality, however does so inconsistently and predominantly from the perspective [of] the individual's current personal needs, interests are rights and not from a perspective based on a consistent moral, inclusive consciousness.*

Early debates in cosmopolitanism tended to take for granted the relationship between mobility and cosmopolitanism where mobility was principally seen as a privilege of the global elite and of those who could afford to gain the 'openness' of mind by travelling and experiencing 'transcultural' settings (Söderström 2006 557; Datta 2009; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). More recently, however, authors such as Beck and Grande (2010: 417) have argued that cosmopolitanism is not necessarily 'a lifestyle choice but the tragic involuntary condition of the refugee or otherwise dispossessed'. Differentiating between cosmopolitanism, understood as a philosophical doctrine, and cosmopolitanisation as a social scientific concept, Beck (2006: 19, emphasis added) argues that 'becoming cosmopolitan is also, and even primarily, a function of coerced choices or a side effect of unconscious decision'. It is therefore almost seen as a strategy for survival, rather than an innate attitude towards the 'other'. Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis (2009: 3) have elaborated on this point in arguing that 'cosmopolitanisation relies on certain types of mobilities' (i.e., forced movement caused by need and socio-political circumstances) but also that 'mobility alone does not guarantee cosmopolitanism ...[as it]... may promote unc cosmopolitan sentiments and practices', which resonates with Faist's (2010) argument on transnationalism.

The literature has increasingly sought to distance itself from the position that international mobility is a precondition for cosmopolitan attitudes to develop. For example, in an analysis of Zambians residing in rural areas, Ferguson (1999) makes a distinction between 'localists' and 'cosmopolitans' within a context of rural-urban migration. Elsewhere, Tomlinson (2002) suggests that localities, rather than differences, should be seen at the basis of cosmopolitan understandings. He argues that cosmopolitanism is not about experiencing different cultures, but it is rather about 'localities becom[ing] increasingly penetrated by globalising

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forces...[and] integrate local and distant (global) culture experiences within the same phenomenological space' (Tomlinson 2002: 252). He points out that this account does not provide a 'progressive substance of moral agency', but on the contrary, presents a challenge for cosmopolitan politics to stir this framework of 'openness in the direction of consensually emergent global solidarities' (2002: 253).

In a similar vein, Vertovec and Cohen's (2002: 14) question on whether 'exposure to other cultures... lead[s] to a fundamental change in attitudes' remains unanswered. Kendall, Woodward and Skrbis (2009: 149) suggest that 'cosmopolitanism is an intellectual and political project ...[it is] ideal – yet to be realised'. At the theoretical and moral level cosmopolitanism remains associated with understandings of openness, cooperation and positive confrontation. However, existing empirical analysis suggests that these narratives are heavily filtered by one's individual perspective, and that further research should seek to understand how migrants' political action across different political communities is affected by cosmopolitan principles.

## 4. TRANSLOCALISM

We have seen how transnationalism ‘trespasses’ the boundaries of the nation-state when analysis the connections between mobility and political action, and how cosmopolitanism adopts a ‘boundaryless’ account with clear repercussions, discussed throughout this paper, on how narratives of home, identity and membership are negotiated at the global, national and local level. The concept of translocalism (or translocality) seeks to further address these issues by focusing attention on the ‘local’ and how locales transform as people become more mobile (Castree 2004).

Broadly speaking, translocalism can be understood as an umbrella-term identifying how mobilities ‘transgress boundaries on different scales’ (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 375; see also Grillo and Riccio 2004). For this reason, it has mostly been studied in relation to the concept of transnationalism (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013; Smith 2011). Specifically, it has been defined as an ‘earlier deterritorialised notion of transnationalism’ (Brickell and Datta 2011: 3) which ‘deliberately confuses the boundaries of the local in an effort to capture the increasingly complicated nature of spatial processes and identities, yet it insists on viewing such processes and identities as place-based rather than exclusively mobile’ (Oakes and Schein 2006: 20). As with transnationalism, translocality is understood as a relational process that emphasises the dynamic connection between people and spaces to ‘understand the (re)construction of places through the movements of people, material objects and ideas through places’ (Verne 2012: 18; see also Benz 2016; Smith 2011). The concept has become increasingly popular in a variety of disciplines, including geography, anthropology, development studies and history, where understandings of mobility, networks, scales and place acquire particular significance (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013) and where forms of migration and how they are sustained across space and time are intertwined with those of translocalism (Benz 2016; Brickell and Datta 2011; Grenier and Sakdarprlak 2013; Verne 2012).

### 4.1 TRANSLOCALISM AND TRANSNATIONALISM: METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

There is a close convergence in both the conceptual (Brickell and Datta 2011; Smith 2011) and empirical (Berg 2008; Chacko 2011) literatures on translocalism and transnationalism. Empirical research has largely sought to describe and explain how dynamic processes underpinning the exchange of ideas, people and resources can contribute to a re-negotiation of identity, space and place across different levels of analyses, with a primary focus on the local. The main difference between translocalism and transnationalism is arguably a matter of methodology (Berg 2008; Brickell and Datta 2011; Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013; Smith 2011) with the literature on translocalism positing that transnationalism fails to challenge the methodological bias in social sciences that confers undue importance to the nation-state as an entity and the primary level of analysis.

Wimmer and Glick-Shiller (2003: 596), for example, argue that by changing ‘the lens through which [they] perceive the world, putting aside some of the preconceptions of methodological nationalism’, scholars in social sciences have been able to investigate issues that are not confined by the boundaries of the nation-state, as for example transnational migration, identity-formation within diasporic settings, and long-distance nationalism. Transnationalism has therefore been considered as a useful framework to understand how social processes associated to mobility and identity have been carried out and sustained across borders and space.

The concept of transnationalism has, however, remained engrained in a static understanding of the world as formed in clearly distinguishable scales (Verne 2012). Wimmer and Glick Shiller (2003: 576) admit that the concept itself ‘may reintroduce methodological nationalism in other guises’. An example of this concerns analysis of identity-formation and nation-state building processes across territories, common in diaspora studies, as ‘the image and analytical techniques associated when



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describing a bounded national container-society are reproduced, albeit in different form' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 598). Therefore, despite seeking to engage with concepts of de-territorialised identity, by focusing mostly on the exchange across national borders (which sustains the origin/receiving country dichotomy), and on how transnational migration trespasses such national boundaries, transnationalism maintains a framework that reproduces narratives of identity, place and membership as somehow bounded within space (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013; Graf and Thieme 2016). The meaningfulness of the 'local' is therefore overshadowed, as 'rather than privileging one level over another, a transnational perspective holds these sites equally and simultaneously in conversation with each other' (Levitt 2004: web source).

Translocalism, conversely, seeks to avoid such limitations by drawing attention to 'the local as situated across a variety of scales – body, home, urban, regional or national' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 9). It therefore privileges the 'local-to-local' and how migrants and non-migrants' everyday socio-political practices are filtered by their own localised experiences in a way that 'captures the diverse and contradictory effects of interconnectedness between places, institutions and actors' (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 375; see also Graf and Thieme 2016). Translocalism adds insights to the literature that recognises that many migrants remain 'rooted in a particular place and time' (Levitt 2001: 11). The concept of 'situatedness' across geographies may allow us to understand how migrants negotiate concepts of belonging and identity across spaces and scales (Brickell and Datta 2011; Smith 2011). The corollary being that translocality is a 'situated mode of human agency and mobility across spaces and places' (Brickell and Datta 2011: 7) that rejects the notion of container-spaces (Greiner 2010) and that, on the contrary, seeks to understand how people and spaces interrelate in a global world (Banerjee 2011). Translocality therefore 'suggests a thoroughly relational perspective on space and spatial processes, in which conditions and events in one place are, to a large extent, defined and shaped by conditions and events in other, connected places' (Benz 2016: 143).

Rather than being a form of 'grounded transnationalism', translocalism can be understood as encompassing frameworks that offers a nuanced approach to the relationship between space and mobility. It does so by moving away from the nation-state as the primary level

of analysis, and by challenging traditional geographical and social dichotomies such as space/place, local/global, origin/destination country, favouring instead a non-hierarchical analysis of how mobility and locality relate across spaces. Such an approach is thought to open the possibility to analyse alternative historiographies of globalisation and challenge mainstream (and westernised) social understandings of movement and mobility (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013).

The concept does permit a nuanced understanding of collective identities, as often the relationship between a transnational community and 'home' transcends the nation-state to focus on a specific area or place, especially in the case of diasporas (Graf and Thieme 2016; Lohnert and Steibrink 2005). Diasporas may therefore be understood as translocal communities 'with a common origin situated and embedded in a translocal social field that spans a variety of multi-scaled spaces and locations' (Graf and Thieme 2016: 333; see also Etzold 2016). However, such a conceptualisation presents research challenges, not least where translocalism is seen as a process that develops out of collective experiences without a clear understanding of to whom and to which dimensions (social, political, economic) this applies. While some have argued that translocalism should be understood as a 'particular condition, a particular way of being in the world...characterised by the tension and interplay of mobility and situatedness' (Verne 2012: 19), there is a risk of homogenising all mobility-space relations under one translocal approach. This also potentially overshadows situations in which translocal processes do not develop, change over time or involve only one dimension (as for example, social) against others (as for example, political).

Brickell and Datta (2011: 6) have recognised this methodological limitation in identifying the need to understand at what scale the local is constructed, and what in reality is politicised and when it begins to have relevance. In fact, while conceptual investigations present useful discussions to understand why these dynamics emerge, as is also for the case of transnationalism, it is less clear how these are exercised in practice and what is their rationale for such implementation. Specifically, while some research seeks to understand how identity and social interactions are re-negotiated within translocal settings (Graf and Thieme 2016; Main and Sandoval 2015), there seems to be limited empirical analysis about how political

practices and norms transform and are exercised across different scales. For example, while Smart and Lin (2007) focus on how norms of ‘local citizenship’ are exercised within China, nonetheless the focus is on how these shape the ‘local’ in communities of insiders and outsiders (migrants and non-residents), rather than how non-residents can exercise political action from abroad.

As the following section will discuss, the particularity of each local scale also implies the need for a thoroughgoing analysis of socio-political circumstances that have an impact on how these dynamics might develop. Therefore, translocalism can arguably offer a broad framework for interpretation that emphasises the existence of a relationship between mobility and space situated within a ‘local’ dimension, but that, however, does not systematically explain how and why this develops in practice.

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## 4.2 EMPIRICAL TRANSLOCALISM

The empirical literature on translocalism tends to address the relationship between mobility and locality and what this entails in terms of socio-spatial dynamics. This includes analysis of both processes of international migration (Benz 2016; Berg 2008; Chacko 2011) and internal migration (Greiner 2010; Lohnert and Steinbrink 2005; Tenhunen 2011), as well as a focus on development (Benz 2016; Grillo and Riccio 2004; Leung 2011), social interactions (Strubel 2012; Graf and Thieme 2016) and political action (Berg 2008; Chacko 2011; Tenhunen 2011). And elsewhere we can also find a concern with the flow of remittances (Velez-Torres and Agergaard 2014), the movement of goods (Verne 2012) and the exchange of ideas, traditions and symbols (Graf and Thieme 2016; Ma 2002; Strubel 2012) between communities and locales.

Translocalism offers a transformative framework through which migration and mobility provide crucial opportunity structures for translocal social networks to develop and influence the ‘local’. This is evident especially within the migration-development nexus, where migration and mobility play an important role in improving the livelihoods of their communities at home by translating ‘external modernisation interventions’ into local settings (Benz 2016: 150; Chacko 2011). This does not necessarily involve international

migration, but can also develop along rural-urban mobility dynamics; with the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’ understood as ‘sub-systems of a translocal system’ sustained by social networks and increased opportunity structures (Lohnert and Steinbrink 2005: 102). Authors such as Banerjee (2011) also affirm that translocality can be a form of resistance by indigenous populations against ‘internal colonialism’ or forms of ‘extraction, expulsion and exclusion’ provoked by state- and non-state actors such as transnational corporations.

The translocalism literature seeks to identify the ways in which the characteristics of the ‘local’, embedded in particular socio-political contexts, are transmitted and developed across scales. For example, in relation to translocal development, Leung (2011: 484), who analyses academic migration between Germany and China along the brain drain/brain gain axes, argues that ‘whether an impact is considered as a positive development is a matter of perspectives and embeddedness in specific temporal-spatial frameworks’. Researching into the relations between Senegal, France and Italy, Grillo and Riccio (2004) find that translocal social processes must be analysed within political, social and cultural contexts, and that migrant-promoted development might often fail because of inexperience, unreliability and miscommunication between different locales. Vélez-Torres and Agergaard (2014) argue that the socio-political dimension of a translocal connectivity is important to understand how political action develops. Their example shows how Afro-descendent Colombian communities in California and Florida remain actively involved in contesting government schemes created to exploit their local territory in Colombia. This has been possible not only because of the establishment of a specific administrative body, envisioned by the Colombian constitution, but also thanks to the ‘ideas and the capacities [that migrants] have built [which] can help strengthen social mobilisation against dispossession’, as for example by supporting legal processes (Vélez-Torres and Agergaard 2014: 122). The opportunity structures both in the homeland and in the host country have therefore played an important role in shaping political mobilisation.

Similarly, Chacko (2011), who analyses the Ethiopian diaspora in Washington DC and the ways in which it maintains linkages with the home-country and fosters ‘belongingness’ in day-to-day activities within the host-

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country, has found that as people move, they reproduce narratives of ‘home’ that contribute to the development of different place-based identities across spaces, which are reflected, for example, in the desire to remain involved in political action from abroad. However, Chacko (2011:176) also finds that with increasing length of stay in the host country, ‘immigrants are likely to identify more with the neighbourhoods, localities and cities in which they reside...forming new configurations of place-based bonds’. While this is not explicitly analysed by the author, the increasing integration within the host-community can include socialisation with ‘local’ liberal norms of democracy and human rights. Chacko, for example, reports on the efforts of the Ethiopian diaspora in Washington to establish the ‘Ethiopian American Council...to create greater awareness in the United States about Ethiopia and its recurrent problems, particularly those related to famine’. The Council was effective in lobbying the American government to take action against Prime Minister Meles for alleged human rights violations.

However, the reproduction of ideas of ‘home’ in new localities may also mean that tensions can arise between different local narratives, both in relation to how everyday life is carried out and to how social and political interaction across borders is sustained. To this end, both Brinkerhoff’s (2008) identity mobilisation framework and Faist’s (2010) argument that sustained cross-border interaction might reproduce potentially negative beliefs or behaviour acquire even more validity within a translocal setting.

Berg (2008) further explores this relationship in her analysis of translocal political action of Peruvian Urcumarquinos in the United States and her attempts to explain why, following the lynching of two thieves, migrants abroad decided to economically support the legal processes defending the local community that had perpetrated the violence. She found that the generally poorer conditions and the marginalisation that the Urcumarca community experiences in Peru were key factors driving their long-distance support:

*migrants’ translocal engagements  
are motivated by these structural  
patterns of exclusion experienced by all  
Urcumarquinos, migrants and villagers  
alike – and as such they can be understood  
as a continuation of local struggles, now*

*extended in space, against economic and  
political marginalisation of provincial  
populations in Peru...migrants’ relationship  
to the homeland is not formulated in terms  
of allegiances to the Peruvian state, but  
rather to the local community of Urcumarca  
(Berg 2008: 1104).*

As discussed above in relation to transnationalism, the political dimension of translocalism may help to explain why political interaction is maintained across borders. Identification with a community as well as a territory, marginalisation or improved socio-economic conditions are all factors that can drive translocal socio-political mobilisation expressed through remittances, political participation or financial and legal support. While some literature has focused on local-to-national interaction (Chacko 2011), others have focused on local-to-local processes (Berg 2008; Tenhunen 2011) or both (Velez-Torres and Agergaard 2014). This arguably underlines how ‘translocality illuminates the many processes and scales at which mobilities occur’ (Chacko 2011: 172), providing a holistic analysis that takes the local as its departure and arrival point. Nonetheless, the approach fails to shed much light on the rationales behind methods of socio-political action that are employed by migrants and communities abroad, and on the contrary only emphasises the need to take into consideration the context in which the ‘local’ is embedded in order to better understand why social and political mobilisations develop in certain ways.



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# CONCLUSION

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This review of the theoretical and conceptual literature was undertaken in the course of a CREST-funded research project that seeks to identify the drivers that shape diaspora political engagement in conflict and post-conflict transitions. The paper assesses the extent to which four social science concepts - *diaspora*, *transnationalism*, *cosmopolitanism*, and *translocalism* - provide an intellectual basis for understanding specific methods of political action. The conceptual literature provides a nuanced interpretation of the ways in which political action may be pursued across borders. It does so in particular by explaining the relationship between mobility and political action and how that relationship influences the norms of identity, membership and citizenship. Collectively, however, the literature provides only minimal analytical guidance on predicting or identifying the rationale behind specific methods of political participation. Research by Koinova (2010) examines how processes of radicalisation or moderation are influenced by diaspora relationships that in turn respond to the changing socio-political environment in the homeland; however, as the author herself comments, the literature remains still limited in isolating and explaining the drivers of such processes.

The authors' research into Tamil diaspora politics both before the 2009 defeat of the LTTE and to the present day has shown that the socio-political circumstances in which diaspora political engagement develops are crucial to understanding why a community abroad acts in a certain way. Critically, analysis must include an awareness of different scales and levels of engagement, both in home countries and in host countries and the spaces in between, as well as different 'areas' of engagement, which can range from social to economic to political interconnections. It has further found that simple correlations commonly found in the social sciences literature, for example an assumed association between diaspora and violence or between cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and, to a lesser extent, translocalism, with peacefulness and positive change, are simplistic and misleading. Research suggests the need to consider the 'performative' power of language (Bourdieu 1991) and the extent to which a group of people whether (self-)described as a specific

entity will act following the discourses and narratives commonly associated with that entity. The literature identifies that the act of labelling groups as diasporas (or indeed as cosmopolitans or transnationalists) carries the risk of reifying notions of collective identity (Betts and Jones 2016; Sokefeld 2006).

Both structural accounts and the agency of those who engage in political action need to be analysed in order to understand why diaspora political engagement takes the forms it does in response to changing events in the country of origin as well as in the countries of settlement. While considerable conceptual and empirical research focuses on how political norms can be interpreted through different frameworks and what this implies in terms of political methods, there is limited research in understanding what these different frameworks entail in relation to the rationales that sustain political behaviour. This suggests that these terms (*diaspora*, *transnationalism*, *cosmopolitanism*, and *translocalism*) offer useful frameworks that need to be complemented by contextual analysis, rather than a normative understanding of the methods and rationales of political action across borders.

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