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

## **The Engagement of Refugees in Transnational Politics: Lessons from the Migration, Diaspora and Refugee Studies Literature**

JUNE 2018

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# The Engagement of Refugees in Transnational Politics: Lessons from the Migration, Diaspora and Refugee Studies Literature

## THEMATIC REPORT TWO

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This report was 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/>

Thematic Report Two complements the previous report's broad conceptual discussion by specifically focusing on an analysis of the context and drivers of political action among diaspora and refugee populations, and engaging with the term 'refugee politics'. It considers if the available diaspora and migration literature sheds light on whether the processes and dynamics of forced migration are likely to generate identifiable forms of political engagement.

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# THE ENGAGEMENT OF REFUGEES IN TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS: LESSONS FROM THE MIGRATION, DIASPORA AND REFUGEE STUDIES LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This is the second 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, that cumulatively build a comprehensive picture of the state of knowledge on political action among diaspora and refugee populations. The research team is specifically interested in applying the theoretically-informed, literature and evidence grounded conclusions arising from these reports to understand the attitudes towards and involvement in the Sri Lankan civil conflict (1983-2009) and its aftermath by Tamil diaspora communities, but with a broader application.

The CREST project is exploring diaspora and refugee 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 to 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 include social, economic and political interactions. Thematic Report One discussed how four analytical concepts, *diaspora*, *transnationalism*, *cosmopolitanism*, and *translocalism*, have come to frame the academic discussion of overseas politics and the potential of the concepts to shed light on the relationship between mobility and political action. The current paper – Thematic Report Two – complements the previous report's broad conceptual discussion by specifically focusing on an analysis of the context and drivers of political action among diaspora and refugee populations, and engaging with the term 'refugee politics'. It considers if the available diaspora and migration literature sheds light on whether the processes and dynamics of forced migration are likely to generate identifiable forms of political engagement.



## INTRODUCTION

Increasing refugee flows since the end of the Cold War resulted in a steep rise in scholarly interest in the topic of forced displacement and forced migration. As a consequence, the discipline of refugee studies emerged largely as a legal-political field of research seeking practical policy solutions to refugee ‘issues’. The topic area of refugee politics, and specifically the interest of this report, namely the ways in which refugees are active agents influencing political developments both at home and in the host country, has received relatively little attention within the refugee studies literature. The continuing ‘refugee crisis’ in the Mediterranean and North Africa which came to world attention in 2015 and 2016, and the steep rise in the number of refugees and migrants entering the European Union, in particular Germany and Sweden, has widened the general debate about the migration-politics nexus. While the engagement of refugees and asylum seekers in transnational politics is a concern of some governments and their security services, the issue of refugee political engagement is yet to fully penetrate the academic literature. The author’s CREST-funded research on the Sri Lankan conflict that this paper supports considers this gap in the literature. The paper draws together available knowledge by addressing the concept of ‘refugee politics’ and reviewing the contribution of the migration studies and diaspora studies literature to our understanding of transnational political engagement in the context of forced migration. It explores theories of integration and incorporation that might favour political mobilisation and offer a critical reflection on the current state of knowledge.

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. REFUGEE POLITICS

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The increase in protracted refugee situations, largely as a result of intra-state wars during the second half of the 20th century, sparked an academic interest in refugee movements and their significance for global politics. It shaped a literature that was concerned principally with identifying solutions to the plight of those encamped on borders and for whom protection and safety frequently proved elusive. Aware of the academic limitations of the field of study, scholars in recent years have cautiously sought to move beyond a predominantly problem-focused and policy-driven analysis of refugee issues centring on integration, repatriation, and international cooperation in refugee affairs, towards a broader and more critical intellectual agenda. A widening of the refugee studies field means that scholars are increasingly drawn from a variety of disciplines ranging from geography to sociology, and from political science to anthropology, with the gradual introduction of new perspectives, theoretical and methodological approaches.

Within this wider cross-disciplinary refugee literature questions around the active political engagement of refugees, which is the primary interest of the authors' CREST funded research, has remained largely under-addressed. Where it is covered, the International Relations and Political Science literature approach the topic from a mainly normative point of view placing the nation-state or the international political system at the centre of most analysis. As a consequence, refugee politics has, in many respects, become synonymous with the *governance* of forced migration and a concern with refugee management has directed attention to how refugee phenomena are or should be dealt with by nation-states and the international community (Betts 2011; 2013; Betts and Loescher 2014). Research questions are often framed in relation to concerns with

the ethical implications of forced migration movements, operational and legal responses in the current (Western) political systems (Gibney 2014; 2015).

It is noteworthy that the landmark book, *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* published by Oxford University Press in 2014, while offering a broad definition of forced migration with topics ranging from development-induced displacement to the social representation of refugees, did not address specifically the issue of refugee politics in a way that takes the refugee as the main subject of analysis, and in which the individual is considered an active political figure. While the refugee studies literature acknowledges the importance of ethnographic and sociological analysis to foreground the individual refugee experience (Wahlbeck 2002), and a body of work is emerging that includes anthropological and sociological accounts of displacement and forced migration, the agency of refugees as political actors is mostly absent.

As the first Thematic Report in this series has shown, a wider trawl of relevant literature, that includes the diaspora and migration literature, opens a door onto empirical and theory-backed research that can assist in efforts to better understand the ways in which migration and diaspora experiences shape political engagement. Though as cautioned, in the absence of a specifically refugee or asylum-seeking focus, the question remains unanswered whether the political action carried out by refugees and refugee communities across the world, both towards their country of origin and within their host countries, is a substantially different phenomenon to the political engagement of non-refugee migrant communities and their members<sup>1</sup>.

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1 It is important to consider how the terminology is used within these fields of research. While, generally speaking, a 'refugee' is recognised as such only when asylum is legally granted by a State complying to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or complementary legal bodies (i.e., the Kampala Convention), there is a tendency with the migration and forced migration literature to associate 'refugees' with 'forced migrants' as a more general category. This is evident, for example, in the literature on 'conflict-generated diasporas' (Cheran 2006; Haider 2014), whereby diaspora formation is seen as a direct consequence of *refugee* flows (and not, more generally, forced migration movements).

In thinking about why the mainstream refugee literature has avoided such questions, Chimni (2009) has suggested that refugee research has largely supported Westernised ideas and practices of humanitarianism with the effect of disguising what he terms ‘imperialist narratives’. This author is broadly critical of the dominance of refugee studies by Western institutions and their closeness to intergovernmental bodies. Consequently, while acknowledging that refugee studies has helped to counter the image of the ‘refugee as a parasite’ in part by deploying more positive representations, Chimni (2009: 15-16) nevertheless argues that the preoccupation of the literature with the failings of western liberal states’ responses to refugee situations and the search for solutions, may have contributed to the shaping of those very policies by reproducing knowledge that overly focuses on refugee movements as a problem to solve. In this way, it can be argued that refugee studies has inadvertently reinforced the academic and popular construction of the refugee as a passive actor in a wider political and humanitarian framework dominated by states.

As will be discussed in the following sections, the migration and diaspora literature, unlike the refugee literature, has a broader focus and has addressed directly the migration-politics nexus in examining how migrants engage in long-distance political action and the ways in which hostland and homeland socio-political structures might favour or inhibit cross-border interactions. Out of this literature has emerged several frameworks that analyse theories of integration and incorporation, including studies of state policies for diaspora engagement (Baser 2017; Chaudhary and Moss 2016; Faist 2010; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006) which are closely linked to research on political mobilisation processes within diasporic and migrant communities abroad (Betts and Jones 2016; Koinova 2009, 2010, 2014; Sökefeld 2006). As discussed in Thematic Report One and elaborated in greater detail below, important

elements of the migration and diaspora literature build on the concept of transnationalism as a ‘conceptual paradigm’ allowing a focus on cross-border political engagement (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Glick Shiller, Basch and Black Szantos 1995; Vertovec 1999).

While there is a broad literature on the normative, political and legal implications when differentiating between *refugees* and *migrants* (Carling 2015; Feller 2005), analytical distinction is much more limited within the broad category of *forced migrants*. For example, while Martin defines refugees as a ‘sub-category of forced migrants’ (2000: 3, cited in Turton 2003: 3), Turton (2003: 4) argues that ‘there has been a growing tendency... in both academic and policy circles, for refugees to be mentioned in the same breath as “other forced migrants”, almost as though these were interchangeable categories’. This has potential implications for the ways in which conceptualisations of political action might be made, as refugees have access to a variety of legal and political resources due to their protection by the 1951 Convention that other forced migrants do not enjoy. On the contrary, as Bose (2006: 59) argues, ‘there are many other and more subtle forms of pressure that have compelled population movements throughout history’ which are often not differentiated within the forced migration literature.



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## 2. REFUGEES AS POLITICAL ACTORS: LESSONS FROM THE MIGRATION STUDIES LITERATURE

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The migration studies literature reveals the growing importance of cross-border and internal population movements in national and regional politics. This literature is engaged in research that examines the relationship between political narratives and migration, including different forms of political activism (Bloemraad, Silva and Voss 2016; Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016); the impact that integration and emigration policies have on migrant mobilisation (Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul 2008; Chaudhary and Moss 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001); and the impact of political action in the home country (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016; Itzigsohn and Villacres 2008; Ông and Meyer 2008) including the migration-development nexus (de Haas 2010; Nyberg-Sorensen, Van Hear, Engberg-Pedersen 2002; Piper 2008). While in a number of these studies it is the case that the term migration conflates voluntary and involuntary movements, and refugees and asylum seekers may be included in the analysis, the literature seldom focuses on how the specific political and legal conditions of forced migrants affect long-distance action (Banki 2013). This is a gap in the knowledge that the authors' CREST-funded project seeks to address, and it has been found that while the insights deriving from the migration scholarship are relevant to refugee or forced migration experiences, the current state of research does not capture the specificity of refugee experiences or the potential for political action.

A fruitful body of literature within migration studies, with implications for political action across borders, examines the migrant and refugee integration process in mainly Western hosting societies, including Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and Scandinavia (Strang and Ager 2010; Kunz 1981; Smyth, Stewart and Da Lomba 2010; Yu, Ouellet and Warmington 2007). This literature aims mostly at identifying indicators of successful integration by observing coping mechanisms, and analysing social engagement and the reproduction of narratives of 'home' as part of the integration process.

The political lives of refugees are largely absent from the models of integration thus far developed, including in official reports and papers commissioned by the Home Office in the United Kingdom (Ager and Strang 2004), the Scottish Refugee Council (Mulvey 2013), or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Stewart 2009). These official documents do not refer to refugee political action towards the homeland as a potential field of (policy) interest, and consider evidence of 'political commitment' and 'political action' in the host country among the main indicators of successful refugee integration.

The authors' CREST-funded research into Sri Lankan Tamil political engagement during the years of conflict and in the post conflict period following the 2009 defeat of the LTTE, suggests that structural and agency accounts drawing on the migration and diaspora studies literature can improve our understanding of the unfolding processes of refugee politics. The following sections review the migration literature examining opportunity and mobilising structures, and intra-group dynamics, that are likely to shape political engagement, and in the third part of the review these themes are picked up again in relation to the diaspora literature.

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### 2.1 MIGRATION STUDIES AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

Traditional theories of integration, namely assimilation and multiculturalism, seek to understand the ways in which recent arrivals find a place within host societies. While multiculturalism calls for a recognition of minorities through social, cultural and political rights, assimilation is understood as a process by which 'immigrants give up past languages, identities, cultural practices and loyalties' to become full members of their host society (Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul 2008: 162; Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2014). Different

intensities of integration are assumed to occur over time with second-generation immigrants more likely to become ‘accustomed’ to the receiving society’s lifestyle and values than are their parents. Such unilinear models of assimilation have been criticised as over simplistic, leading to more refined theories that seek to capture the divergence of integration and assimilation experiences particularly where belonging and membership have not been achieved. Useful correctives to unilinear models include ideas around segmented assimilation (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005), racialisation (Omi and Winant 2009) and racialised incorporation (Chaudhary 2015).<sup>2</sup>

Understanding methods of integration has important consequences for how political action might be exercised, as the host country constitutes a socio-political structure that is likely to influence political action. Openness towards cultural minorities within refugee and migrant receiving states affects the ways in which immigrants relate to their host societies, as ‘the unanimous consensus seems to be that the legal, cultural, economic and social conditions immigrants encounter upon arrival greatly shape their fate in their new homelands’ (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2016: 1016). Research has therefore focused on the socio-political conditions that might affect migrant political action and in this context, multiculturalism is often seen as a more favourable political structure to foster immigrant political organisation because of its openness to diversity (Bloemraad 2005). Assimilation, which implies a ‘rapid shedding of old loyalties and identities’, would arguably be more likely to limit

continued interaction with the country of origin (Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003: 1239).

However, the reality is more complex. For example, when assessing whether multiculturalism or assimilation were more or less associated with transnational political action, empirical research by Chaudhary and Guarnizo (2016: 1029) does ‘not offer definitive evidence either for or against multicultural policies’ being conducive to immigrants’ organisational capacity. Rather, they suggest that particular opportunities and constraints associated with official multiculturalism may vary across different immigrant groups. It is also relevant that while assimilation is generally assumed as a potential source of marginalisation (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001), the ‘socialisation’ of migrants within host societies can contribute to the spread of liberal political norms associated with peaceful political action. Such an association has been studied particularly in relation to how degrees of marginalisation and an inability or unwillingness to integrate may be associated with violence and, in extreme cases, result in terrorist or disruptive attacks aimed at the host society (Brinkerhoff 2008; Demmers 2007).

The link between integration and political action has also been studied in relation to engagement with politics in the country of origin as expressed, for example, through nonviolent protests (Ông and Meyer 2008)<sup>3</sup>, lobbying (Chacko 2011), raising funds or engaging in advocacy on issues in the country of origin (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2014; 2016), or through supporting processes of democratisation via long-distance political action such as voting (Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008;

2 In general terms, these theories suggest that ‘aliens’ are not simply incorporated into new societies, but rather their inclusion follows narratives related to generational differences, race and social status that affects how they relate to the hosting society. While overall they provide a more nuanced approach to integration dynamics, their analysis remains rather limited especially in understanding how these affect socio-political behaviour. Focusing on studies based on the American society, segmented assimilation argues that ‘the United States is a stratified and unequal society, and that therefore different “segments” of a society are available to which immigrants might assimilate...[as] there is more than one way of “becoming American”’ (Xie and Greenman 2005: 2). Different trajectories of ‘upward’, ‘downward’ or ‘stagnant’ social mobility can therefore be observed especially across generations (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly and Haller 2005), suggesting that second-generation migrants’ incorporation experiences much depend on the social status of their parents. Expanding by including other narratives, racialisation suggests that ‘race’ and ‘social status’ are often associated in identifying group boundaries, therefore how different ethnic groups acquire social status within a hosting society is influenced by their perceived race (Omi and Winant 2009). In an attempt to include generational status and race in one integration framework, Chaudhary argues that racialised incorporation includes linear and non-linear trajectories of socio-economic incorporation of second-generation migrants while ‘acknowledging the hierarchical nature of the socially constructed racialized categories into which groups are incorporated’ (2015: 326). It is essential to notice that, as the studying of migrant integration developed over time, narratives provided by these theoretical frameworks have become implicitly accepted into general thinking about integration, allegedly limiting a theoretical discussion on the topic.

3 Although an exception is presented by Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl (2016) focusing on refugee protests to acquire political rights within the receiving country.



## REFUGEES AS POLITICAL ACTORS: LESSONS FROM THE MIGRATION STUDIES LITERATURE

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

Miller 2011). The findings in this literature are relevant to the authors' research as they suggest that while exposure to democratic political norms within the receiving countries is inextricably linked to support for democratising processes within the country of origin, 'the contribution of migrant transnational politics to the deepening of democracy is limited' (Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008: 682). This may be related to the weak pressure that migrant groups are typically able to exert over their national governments.

Research conducted among migrant communities whose entry in to the country of settlement was through a claim to refugee status suggests, in the most part, that due to their legal status asylum seekers and refugees rarely have access to traditional methods of political action such as voting in the origin country (Brees 2010). There are important exceptions, however, and literature on conflict-generated diaspora has produced evidence of the profound impact that such groups can exercise towards homeland politics (Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009; Hall and Swain 2007). The research suggests that various elements concerning the country of origin, the country of reception, social status, as well as external socio-political events need to be taken in account when seeking to understand political orientation and engagement within refugee groups towards a host society or the country of origin.

Elsewhere in the literature there is an attempt to decentre the state from such analysis. Chaudhary and Guarnizo, for example, have argued that 'the state's role by itself... does not constitute a sufficient condition or explanatory factor [for migrants' organisational capacity] ...rather, the effects of government policy seem to be contingent on immigrants' mode of socioeconomic incorporation and internal social stratification' (2016: 20). Specifically, methods of 'exit' affect adaptation and political interaction (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2014; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001) suggesting that the special condition of refugees would have an impact on how this particular group of migrants integrate and exert political agency. Such communities, it is widely assumed, carry with them the values of their homeland while being influenced to varying degrees by the values of the host country, which shapes the capacity and inclination of refugees to organise and influence domestic politics at home (Van Hear 2014).

In a comprehensive analysis of Latin American immigrants in the United States, Guarnizo, Portes and Haller (2003) note that better integration within the context of reception can facilitate transnational political engagement thanks to increased resources. Equally, Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001: 617, emphasis added) have argued that 'it seems sensible to assume that *where they have any resources*, refugees will mobilise and target these on overthrowing the regime from where they have been forced to flee'. This suggests that the increased socio-economic conditions that refugees usually experience in the host country can be channelled to exercise political action. Similarly, Wallace Brown (2013: 80) suggests that 'in cases of political expulsion, there is seemingly direct correlation between forced exodus due to civil conflict and a willingness to help armed resistance in the home country through fundraising, the political lobbying of host governments, the purchasing of arms, or increasingly, by returning to engage directly in civil conflict'.

Increased access to resources can therefore bring migrant and diasporic communities to contest state politics, for example by disrupting state-led political and developmental initiatives (Dell 2013) or by supporting rebel groups in civil wars (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004), and this is particularly the case where such individuals and communities do not have to bear directly the economic or socio-political consequences of such actions. Others however argue that 'the resources that they command make immigrants part of local elites' and that this limits interests in challenging the socio-political system from which they might have been forced to flee (Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008: 683).

Banki (2013) adds a further dimension to this analysis with the concept of 'precariousness' experienced by refugees within host societies. While it is often assumed that migrants and refugees in the receiving country will experience better socio-economic status than in their country of origin (Collier 2000; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003), refugees often experience precarious conditions comprising 'struggles surrounding citizenship, labour rights, the social wage and migration' (Neilson and Rossiter 2005: web-based source). While this social condition usually entails a lack of political structures which in turn discourage political mobilisation, 'alternative forms of mobilisation performed by precarious refugees may be, by the fact of their clandestine nature, more

powerful’ (Banki 2013: web-based source). Banki’s observations chime with Brees (2010: 283)’ analysis of Burmese refugees in Thailand for whom the ‘lack of [political opportunity structures] is an incentive to remain politically active from a safer distance...[as] despite the absence of any fiat by either the home or the host government, political transnational activities may exist’. Consequently, while legal status affects methods of transnational engagement – as for example in relation to the level of institutionalisation of political action - nonetheless it is not considered a necessary condition for cross-border interaction.

The available research would therefore suggest that the *position* of migrants and refugees within their receiving society will have an impact on forms of political action, as more or less favourable political opportunity structures affect the resources needed to carry out activity across borders. Nonetheless, ‘forced migrants can be transnational actors even in the absence of durable integration or stability’ (Brees 2010: 295), as their socio-political conditions may constitute drivers for political commitment despite enjoying limited capabilities to do so.

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## 2.2 TRANSNATIONALISM AS A MOBILISING STRUCTURE

It was argued in Thematic Report One that the literature on transnationalism does not offer analytical guidance on predicting or identifying the rationale behind specific methods of political participation. At the same time, transnationalism, defined as ‘multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across borders of nation-states’ (Vertovec 1999: 447), offers a useful framework to identify and explore some of the drivers and also outcomes of migrants’ cross-border socio-political activity. It was discussed in that report that the concept has developed from defining a process of ‘de-territorialisation’ of identity, membership and loyalties that are expressed *across* borders (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szantos-Blanc 1994) to one that analyses integration *within* host societies (Miller 2011; Wahlbeck 2002). From this has emerged a literature examining the relationship between transnationalism and political activism among migrant and diasporic communities (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Chaudhary and Moss 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001, 2006) that has the potential to shed light on the

drivers of refugee political engagement. Chaudhary and Guarnizo, for example, have observed that ‘those whose political ideas and activism led them out of their country seem to keep their activism alive from afar’ (2014: 19). Østergaard-Nielsen (2001: 10) concurs and finds that ‘studies have concluded that political refugees who left on a collective basis take a more active and engaged stance towards their homeland than economic migrants’. Banki (2013: web-based source), however, is more sceptical in arguing that, ‘the character of the transnational field where refugee activists engage has been theorised poorly’. Wahlbeck (2002: 228-229) adds to this critique of the state of knowledge by suggesting that transnationalism as a conceptual framework ‘is not specific enough to describe the specific refugee experience’, as it does not emphasise the political nature and the peculiar relationship that refugees have with their homeland.

While, as previously stated, there is insufficient differentiation between migrants and refugees in the analysis of the dynamics of political action across borders, the literature on conflict-generated migration does provide useful frameworks to understand processes of political mobilisation. And indeed, the literature is beginning to acknowledge that refugees are not constrained in their movement by the durable solutions based policy options of either a stage of encampment, return to a country of origin and the reclaiming of citizenship, or relocation in a third country through a successful asylum claim or participation in refugee resettlement programme. That rather there is a fourth transnational reality in which refugees belong to families and networks that are divided between different societies and localities, as well as immigration and refugee statuses, and it is in this context that refugee political engagement needs to be researched. In this much more fluid existence, as Van Hear has noted, ‘the return of some members of a household or community to a “post-conflict” society may be predicated on others staying abroad’ and that ‘transnational links and [community] connections that develop to sustain societies in conflict are likely themselves to be irrevocably integral parts of the “post-conflict” society’ (Van Hear 2014: 185-186). These are important observations as they suggest that it is in the fluidity of the refugee experience, and often in the transition from one stage of the refugee cycle to another (i.e., from encampment to onward movement to a third country, or from encampment to return home through



formal or spontaneous repatriation) that the conditions for political engagement will be created.

The literature therefore suggests that refugee political action is embedded within a framework that both sustains and is dependent on transnational activity, and develops in a way that reflects the particular political and legal positions of refugees. This does not only refer to direct cross-country activity such as financial, political and material support, but also to transnational political action exercised through indirect means, for example, by appealing to international institutions or norms such as human rights (Brun and Van Hear 2012). As Chaudhary and Moss (2016) suggest in their ‘triadic political opportunity structures’ model, research into refugee politics needs to take place in the receiving society, the sending society and in the ‘transnational’ spaces in between.

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### 2.3 INTRA-GROUP DYNAMICS AND POLITICAL ACTION

Bauböck (2010) and Brubaker (2005) caution against the characterising of migrant and refugee communities as undifferentiated ‘groups’ who adopt collective forms of behaviour based on a shared relationship with home and common experiences of exile. Rather it is important to acknowledge the ways in which intra-group dynamics shape the migration experience and how, for example, alternative identities and struggles among displaced populations who seek to engage in the politics of conflict and peace lead to quite different socio-political practices.

Conducting research among various Latin American groups in the United States, Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) provide a quantitative analysis of how ‘migrants’ engage in transnational political activities. They find that ‘the number of immigrants who are regularly involved in cross-border activism is relatively small...[and] transnational engagement is significantly different by gender and associated with migrants’ age, human capital and social capital’ (2003: 1238) with women being considerably less involved than men. However, in research among Dominican, West Indian and Latin American groups, Kasinitz *et al* (2004) find on the contrary that more women engage in ‘transnational’ activism, although this includes non-political action. The research raises two relevant issues:

first that ‘political action’ is not easily measurable or quantifiable (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001); and second, that the social structures within a minority community also potentially affect how action across borders is carried out, especially in relation to the local or ethnic-specific narratives that are reproduced within it (Faist 2010). Importantly, Guarnizo, Portes and Haller (2003: 1239) have observed that ‘the transnational field is significant...[because] it affects the way immigrants incorporate themselves, and alters conventional expectations about their assimilation’, suggesting that structural narratives of ‘home’ affect how political action is exercised more than the socio-political environment of the host country in which they are embedded.

With regards to gender and political action, Crawley (2001: 79) argues that ‘women’s political participation continues to be marginalised within existing policy and practice and the challenge which is posed to the authority of the state by various forms of gendered resistance is underestimated’ as ‘women’s experiences are effectively depoliticised’. While Crawley analyses this in relation to how women’s political participation might be a cause of displacement and sufficient to grant refugee status, it is nonetheless relevant when considering long-distance political participation. The establishment of political communities abroad often reproduce ‘patriarchal, non-egalitarian structures’ that limit women’s engagement in political action (Pescinski 2016: web-based source), effectively rendering (refugee) women’s experiences invisible. It is further relevant to note that despite the growing importance in policy terms of gender in conflict settings, as the United Nations Agenda on Women, Peace and Security shows, surprisingly little academic and policy-oriented literature has focused on the role that refugee women might play in peace-keeping settings. This is also influenced by the fact that women are usually understood as recipients, rather than drivers of such processes (UN Women 2015).

How the host country setting might affect group dynamics has also been explored in relation to generational differences (Levitt 2009; Portes, Escobar and Arana 2008; Haller and Landolt 2005) and this is a focus of the authors’ CREST-funded research that informs this report and that was also addressed in Thematic Report One when discussing how diasporas challenge traditional understandings of nation-states. It is a common assumption that second-generation

migrants are less inclined than their parents to be involved in cross-boundary politics because their outlook is more strongly influenced by the values and practices of their new society (Haller and Landolt 2005; Portes, Escobar and Arana 2008). Levitt (2009), however, finds that the ways in which new generations are exposed to both the transnational field of their parents and the structures of their 'home/host' country leads to the development of socio-political behaviours that are likely to contradict such an assumption. In an analysis of Pakistani, Gujarati, Brazilian and Irish communities in the US, Levitt (2009: 1239) finds that practices 'are not just a continuation of the first generation's involvement in their ancestral homes, but an integral part of growing up in a new destination... rather than being caught between the pressure both to Americanise and to preserve homeland traditions, the children of immigrants create a complex set of practices of their own'.

Such observations enhance understanding about how generational differences in political involvement are mediated by processes of integration within the new society, and the necessity to consider intra-group dynamics within refugee communities particularly where they relate to narratives of 'homeland' and 'return' in ways that differ from 'voluntary' migrant communities (Wahlbeck 2002). Research on Kurdish communities in Europe, and especially Great Britain, would suggest that the refugee experiences of parents and relatives has some impact on second-generation political activism (Baser 2011). Similarly, Hess and Korf (2014) analysing second-generation Sri Lankan Tamil's political engagement in Switzerland, found that interest in transnational political action was favoured by 'the multiple sense of belonging both to Switzerland and to the Tamil "nation" and...the pain of witnessing the brutality of war and suffering of Tamils' (2014: 419). In particular, they argue that while first-generation activism had focused mostly on gathering financial and political support for the Tamil cause, the different 'modes of belonging' of second-generation members of the diaspora meant that Swiss and international norms of peace, human rights and democracy that 'have practically no links with Tamil (party) politics in Sri Lanka' (2014: 430) became central in second-generation political activism. For Hess and Korf (2014: 421) this suggests that integration and identification with the host society's values can have a profound impact on how political action is carried out across

time, especially if 'critical' events in the origin country contribute to trigger adopting a particular political position towards an issue. In the case of Tamils, 'the final battle in northern Sri Lanka in 2009 brought young (second-generation) Tamils in Switzerland to rearticulate their Tamil "roots"' (2014: 430).

Socialisation within the host society will therefore be important in shaping attitudes towards pressing political issues. Graf and Thieme (2016) have considered the ways in which inter-generational relations might contribute to identity-formation within refugee communities. Differentiating between 'second-generation' and 'new generation' Eritrean refugees in Switzerland, the authors argue that 'encountering the new generation of Eritreans...entails that second-generation Eritreans tend to distance themselves from [it]' (2016: 338) because of the ways in which the latter group perceives the former. This is arguably mediated by the fact that second-generation Eritreans have resided in Switzerland for longer, and consequently have a 'post-immigrant' perception of 'the other' despite sharing the causes of displacement and being recognised as refugees (as opposed to immigrants). Haider (2014: 213) argues that 'there is little attention to the relationships among conflict-generated refugees or other diaspora members who remain in their host country or move to resettlement countries'. Orjuela (2008) notes that Tamil-Sinhalese relations within the diaspora can be more polarised *outside* the homeland, potentially affecting the ways in which identity-relations develop and how these in turn affect collective political action towards the homeland.

These discussions suggest that intra-group dynamics are complex and varied, and that socio-political behaviours related to homeland politics are influenced by narratives, norms and structures of both societies of 'origin' and 'destination'. While more literature should focus on the gendered experiences of refugee movements and how these might affect political action, it seems evident that second-generation refugees' political attitude is the result of a compromise of the different cultures with which they identify. Having emphasised the transnational character of political action across borders and the need to take into consideration a variety of structural elements, both within and external to migrant and refugee communities to understand how political action might unfold, the following section



## REFUGEES AS POLITICAL ACTORS: LESSONS FROM THE MIGRATION STUDIES LITERATURE

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

of the review focuses directly on the scholarship on conflict-generated diasporas and political mobilisation.

## 3. REFUGEES AS POLITICAL ACTORS: LESSONS FROM THE DIASPORA STUDIES LITERATURE

Conceptualisations of diaspora are necessarily intertwined with processes of forced migration and while there is a range of empirical research on the impact that diasporas may have in their homelands, ‘most studies focus on the *practices* of conflict-generated diasporas...that affect developing countries...with few exceptions...the *modes, conditions* and *causal mechanisms* of diaspora mobilisation [within hosting societies] are yet to be identified’ (Koinova 2014: 1044, emphasis in original). The literature is however changing; as Van Hear (2014) has noted, there has been a convergence of refugee studies and diaspora studies over the last 30 years with the recent ‘emergence of diaspora, and the associated notion of transnationalism, as key concepts in migration and refugee studies’ stimulating research that addresses the ‘implications of increasing migration for politics and international relations’ (2014: 177). The convergence has occurred despite the absence of an overarching theory of diaspora formation (Betts and Jones 2016; Koinova 2010) and a generally wide interpretation of the concept, to include a range of migrations, which in turn has led some authors to question the analytical usefulness of the concept.

The authors of this report are using the concept of diaspora not to refer to a group of people but rather, following Brubaker (2005: 12), as ‘an idiom, a stance, [or] a claim’ that underpins a long-distance political project through which expectations are formulated, energies are mobilised and loyalties are appealed to. The CREST researchers are broadly in agreement with Faist’s typology of diaspora that isolates three key elements: first a population ‘dispersal’ (which can be forced or voluntary); second, a relationship between the homeland and the hostland (expressed in the desire to return or to still participate to socio-political affairs); and finally, a relationship between the members of the diaspora and the hostland (more or less positive). And finally, this paper adds support to Van Hear’s (2014: 176-177) observation that a further core characteristic

of a diaspora is an enduring presence abroad and ‘some kind of flow or exchange...between or among spatially separated populations comprising the diaspora’. Drawing on this interpretation of diaspora the following sections consider the significance of the core tenets of the concept for an analysis of refugee political engagement.

### 3.1 REFUGEE POLITICS AND THE CENTRALITY OF TRAUMATIC DISPERSAL

A diaspora is, ‘by definition...a transnational network of *dispersed political subjects*’ (Werbner 2002: 121, emphasis added) and therefore the concept of ‘dispersal’ and the sustained socio-political relationship between host country and homeland are central to the study of diasporas as political projects enacted across borders by (self-)identified communities (Brubaker 2005; Van Hear 2014; Koinova 2010). The presence of such underlying narratives is particularly relevant for the study of refugee communities and their socio-political behaviour. As Wahlbeck (2002: 226) has noted, cross-boundary links contribute to processes of identity-formation at a distance within displaced communities, to the extent that the ‘very strong political orientation towards the “homeland” will be different to the relations other migrants have towards their country of origin’. The importance of political activity in contributing to identity-formation within refugee communities abroad has been observed within Kurdish (Wahlbeck 1999; 2002), Tamil (Brun and Van Hear 2012), Salvadorian (Landolt, Autler and Baires 1999) and Burmese (Brees 2010) refugee groups, for whom politics is described as giving ‘a sense of order, a purpose in the fragmented lives of the refugees’ (Wahlbeck 2002: 226). It is the case then that, ‘refugee research needs a conceptual framework in which the refugees’ specific transnational social relations can be described’, and the concept of diaspora has served such a purpose (Wahlbeck



## REFUGEES AS POLITICAL ACTORS: LESSONS FROM THE DIASPORA STUDIES LITERATURE

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2002: 229). As Wallace Brown (2013: 68) has noted, ‘in either a pejorative sense, or in terms of positive contribution, the language of diaspora...has been, and continues to be, involved in debates about “political community”’, shaping the ways in which identity, culture and political norms relate to one another within displaced communities.

These arguments are important because as Cheran (2006: 3) has identified ‘asylum-seekers and refugees are key players in the making of diasporas and transnational communities’). The centrality of ‘traumatic dispersal’ in both diasporas and refugee flows has contributed to the development of a niche body of work exploring ‘refugee or asylum diasporas’ or ‘conflict-generated diasporas’<sup>4</sup> which examine the impact that such ‘forced’ or traumatic dispersal has on how the diaspora evolved and its impact on diaspora politicisation (Koinova 2011, 2013, 2016; Lyons 2007, 2009; Van Hear 2006; 2014).

It is important to consider the significance of forms of dispersal when assessing the influence of conflict-generated diasporas on homeland politics. As discussed in Thematic Report One, while earlier literature focused on diasporas as ‘peace-wrecking’ actors supporting conflicts in the homeland (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004), more recent literature has acknowledged diasporas as groups with the capacity to facilitate peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction in their country of origin (Baser and Swain 2008; Haider 2014; Smith and Stares 2007). With recent research increasingly focusing on the conditions that may influence political mobilisation and the forms it takes (Betts and Jones 2016; Chaudhary and Moss 2016; Koinova 2011; 2013; 2016; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001; 2006), Wallace Brown (2013: 8) has observed ‘that diasporic and transnational groups relate to their country of origin differently depending on how they were “dispersed” from their homeland’. However, as Koinova (2010) has argued, the literature continues to be limited in the analysis of how these ‘mobilising

conditions’ might be a cause of either *radicalisation* or *moderation* of (conflict-generated) diasporas in relation to homeland politics. Consequently, generalisations on *what kind of actor* diasporas could be and should be avoided as ‘ultimately, there is no guiding hand, no command structure, organising the politics, the protests...’ or the aesthetics of diasporas (Werbner 2002: 126).

The review of the diaspora literature would suggest that the *condition* of refugees as displaced people is correlated to long-distance political action where traumatic memories and the sense of victimhood or antipathy towards ‘exile’ are identified as drivers of mobilisation or engagement in homeland politics in ways that shape processes of conflict and democratisation (Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009; Demmers 2007; Lyons 2009; Koinova 2010). Conflict-generated diasporas are ‘embedded transnationally in both their homelands and host-lands, [and enjoy] simultaneous access to [their] political contexts, developing the capacity to respond quickly to political projects around the globe’ (Koinova 2011: 438). Particularistic tendencies often associated with the displacement experience, such as ethno-national or religious characteristics, are reproduced not only in the host country, but also in continued socio-political engagement with the homeland (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001; Faist 2010; Koinova 2014). Consequently, refugee diasporas may mobilise to contest the authoritarian political systems which caused their displacement, as they embody an ‘inherently political stance’ that may not be reflected in other migrant groups (Betts and Jones 2016: 3; Wahlbeck 2002). This possibility reinforces the observation made by Brubaker (2005) and others that diaspora should be understood as a political project rather than simply a network of people outside their country of origin.

It has been noted elsewhere in this paper that individuals and communities that have been driven from their home by violence are likely ‘to be less willing to compromise and therefore reinforce and exacerbate

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4 Following widespread calls to avoid ‘groupisms’ in the studying of diasporas, it is necessary to underline that the concept of ‘conflict-generated diaspora’ does not imply that *all* of its members have been forcibly displaced by war, but that rather they identify with an ethnic or religious community that once was. Conflict-generated diaspora members therefore might include refugees, forced migrants, regular migrants and second-generation migrants. This is specifically evident when considering those communities displaced by conflicts which may have been resolved, but that nonetheless retain the concept of ‘traumatic dispersal’ as central to their identity formation, as for example the Armenian, the Kosovar, the Tamil, the Kurd, and the Jewish communities.

the protractedness of homeland conflicts' (Lyons 2007: 529; Betts and Jones 2016). Economists have argued that a desire to overthrow the government that is regarded as the architect of the displacement event, or at least a state that failed to protect citizens against displacement perpetrated by other actors, paired with higher socio-economic status in the receiving society, may act as an incentive to perpetuate homeland conflict (Collier 2000). However, others argue that traumatic dispersal could equally trigger a desire to reform the political system that allowed forced displacement to occur (Banki 2013; Hall and Swain 2007) with the aim of improving the livelihoods of kin left behind and changing conditions at home in order to facilitate later return (Brun and Van Hear 2012). These reflections relate to a wider discussion about the possible 'mobilising structures' that enable political engagement among conflict-generated diasporas.

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### 3.2 DIASPORA MOBILISATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

As summarised previously, the literature on diaspora political action focuses mainly on support for rebel groups through the voluntary or involuntary allocation of financial and human resources (Byman *et al* 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006); lobbying to influence the host country's foreign policy towards the homeland (Chacko 2011; Hall and Swain 2007); involvement in peace-talks (Zunzer 2004; Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009), and contributions to the building of new legal and political systems (Baser and Swain 2008; Hall and Swain 2007). Analysis has tended to be limited to identifying the *causes* that drive behaviour (the *why* question), and the extent to which political mobilisation might change or evolve over the course of a conflict (Koinova 2010).

When investigating the experiences of Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in exercising political action, Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) suggest that refugee

political mobilisation can be understood through a capability-desire model, and that specifically, political factors associated with governments and causes of displacement are often important determinants of the desire to contribute to political change within the country of origin. While on the one hand refugees might have the resources to act politically, they might not want to do so. As these authors put it, 'if an individual is in opposition to the government in the home country, and therefore does not want to support national reconstruction under that government, he or she may choose not to contribute despite being able to do so' (2001: 626). While somewhat simplistic, this model is important because it takes into account the *agency* of individuals within a diaspora as political actors and, as the following section discusses, it is through theories of social movements that the question of agency has been usefully explored<sup>5</sup>.

Sökefeld was one of the first to theorise diaspora mobilisation in order to counter 'essentialising approaches [to diasporas] which represent diasporas as given social formations that are naturally rooted in a distant 'home'' (2006: 268). Specifically, he argues that diasporas should not be accepted at face-value as already formed communities, but rather 'have to be analysed as historically contingent social formations that result from processes of mobilisation' (2006: 280). On the contrary, for Sökefeld diasporas should be understood as 'imaginary transnational communities' whose formation is an issue of social mobilisation, as 'the crucial question becomes why and how people are made to accept a certain discourse and to participate in it' (2006: 268). Consequently, theories of social movements allow scholars to understand how 'people get mobilised for collective purposes and actions' as they focus on political opportunities, mobilising structures and practices, and framing as explanators for political action (Sökefeld 2006: 268).

Accepting that mobilising structures are understood as 'collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilise and engage in collective action'

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5 Understanding how forced displacement can be a driver for political action opens to discussion the nature of the correlation between diaspora understood as a political stance and different diasporic groups that are not necessarily conflict-generated or associated to forced movements (Bose 2006). In other words, it would be interesting to understand whether differentiating the causes of displacement (more or less voluntary) has an impact on how diasporic political projects emerge and how political action is exercised.

(McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996: 3), an emerging literature is focusing on how diasporic associations can be seen as drivers for political mobilisation (Chaudhary and Guarnizo 2014; 2016) and how an important role is played by ‘mobilising elites’ that drive political engagement (Betts and Jones 2016; Koinova 2013). This not only resonates with findings within the migration studies literature that only a minority of individuals engage in transnational political action, but also counters essentialising approaches of diasporas as social formations. Sökefeld (2006: 271, 278) argues that the formation of a diaspora can be understood ‘as a response to specific events and developments’ and ‘depends on actors taking the initiative and giving voice to a discourse of community’. This concept, later elaborated by Koinova (2013; 2014; 2016) and Betts and Jones (2016), suggests that ‘diaspora entails a differentiated involvement of actors with...positions of leaders and of followers’ (Sökefeld 2006: 278). Through the example of the Alevi diaspora in Germany, Sökefeld suggests that processes of diaspora formation and mobilisation are responses to specific critical events, as for example violent episodes of discrimination towards the community, which are ‘used’ by individuals to ‘transform certain conditions into an issue, that help to define grievances and claims, and that legitimise and mobilise action’ through issue-framing (2006: 270). These processes often link such issues to ‘master frames’ such as human rights, identity and justice which help to generate and direct mobilisation. He further argues that ‘a diasporic imagination may arise coevally with the migration’ and ‘it is quite probable that this simultaneity of movement and imagination is found in cases where the migration is a consequence of communal violence and persecution’ (Sökefeld 2006: 275). For this author the Tamil diaspora from Sri Lanka is a good example. It can therefore be argued that the experience of refugees, their displacement and their processes of community-formation, can become mobilising structure for action. However, Sökefeld (2006: 267-268, emphasis in original) also argues that these dynamics of ‘discursive imagination of community [are] not a direct and necessary outcome of migration movements’ and that ‘migrants do not necessarily form a diaspora but they may *become* a diaspora by developing a new imagination of community, even many years after the migration took place’. This is particularly relevant when seeking to understand second-generation migrants or refugees’

involvement in diasporic action (Hess and Korf 2014; Levitt 2009).

The identification of mobilising structures within the dispersal and migration experience provides a basis for understanding the underlying dynamics of political engagement. While Sökefeld (2006: 276) is right to observe that ‘imagination of transnational communities are not established once and for all but have to be reproduced time and again in order to continue’, no specific analysis is presented to show how diasporic mobilisation changes over time.

Recent work by Koinova (2013; 2014; 2016) and Betts and Jones (2016) is beginning to fill this analytical gap. Koinova focuses on the role that ‘entrepreneurs’ play in driving diasporic political action, arguing that these ‘pursue sovereignty-based claims through state-based or transnational channels’ (2014: 1044). Specifically, she defines these figures as a ‘formal or informal leader who actively makes claims on behalf of a “diaspora” and mobilise material or symbolic resources for their original homeland’ (2014: 1066). Similarly, Betts and Jones (2016: 9) argue that ‘animators’, which can be either internal or external to a diaspora, allocate resources in a strategic manner that direct political action; in such way if support ends, ‘diasporic political mobilisation will cease to have content’, although this might ‘stagger on’ for some time because of inertial forces. Betts and Jones further suggest that the ‘life cycle’ of a diaspora depends on the interests of such animators, essentially presenting an instrumental view of ‘diaspora’ as a tool in the hands of ‘elites who, through deploying money, networks, or ideas to bring diasporas into existence, thereby serve particular interests’ (2016: 8). Based on research among the Zimbabwean and Rwandan diasporas, their analysis is useful in outlining how political mobilisation *itself* might be dependent on specific interests. Consequently, the model explores how diasporic action might fade, stall or increase over time depending on the social and financial support it receives. One aspect Betts and Jones fail to explore explicitly is whether these dynamics also contribute to a change in methods of political action, although it can be assumed that if interests change (i.e., in relation to an issue in the homeland), ways of pursuing them also might change, as ‘the forms and trajectories that these diasporas take depend on the character of the animators’ (2016: 214). It is also not clear from the analysis how power dynamics within the diaspora effectively evolve,



and how ‘elites’ or ‘animators’ seek to engage other members in political action.

While processes of identity- and community-formations are crucial and often driven by a minority, the ability of members of a diaspora to gather is also contingent on other factors that go beyond the interests of a few to engage in political action. For example, in her analysis of Burmese refugees in Thailand, Brees (2010: 290) argues that ‘a small core group stays strongly involved in the home country, while a much larger rim of people only becomes active at special junctures such as highly contested elections or natural disasters’. This implies that while only a minority of members are involved politically, key events appealing to the identity or livelihood of a community can also be important mobilising factors.

This argument resonates with Koinova’s research on diaspora mobilisation, which presents the most comprehensive framework to understand how political mobilisation might develop and evolve over time. While she refers to diaspora entrepreneurs as drivers of action, she also argues that ‘migration integration regimes, threats from radical right parties, host-state foreign policy and transnational influences can trigger episodic diaspora mobilisation’ (2016: 500), although these elements are unlikely to sustain political action over time. Comparing the case of Bosnian Muslim with Croat and Serb refugees in the Netherlands, Koinova argues that a ‘traumatic issue that binds three actors – diaspora, host-state and home-state’ (2016: 500) drives a process of sustained political action of conflict-generated diasporas, affirming that the failure of the Dutch government to address the Srebrenica Genocide deeply affected the ways in which Bosnian Muslims mobilised both towards the homeland and the hostland.

Elsewhere Koinova further observes that ‘dynamics in the original homeland drive the overall trend towards radicalism or moderation of diaspora mobilisation in a hostland...[which] is a result of the conjuncture of the level of violence with another viable, the linkages of the main secessionist elites to the diaspora’ (2013: 433). In this context, internal dynamics within the community, both abroad and still in the homeland, are understood as crucial to define methods of political action, adding however that timing of a conflict and specific episodes deeply influence trends towards radicalisation or moderation within the diaspora (Koinova 2013: 450).

Her findings resonate with the arguments put forward by Sökefeld (2006) and the empirical research of many others (Brun and Van Hear 2012; Byman *et al* 2001; Cochrane, Baser and Swain 2009; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010), which show that the cycle of a conflict can be a useful framework to understand trends within political action, with more peaceful times associated with moderation and democratic-leaning action (Koinova 2010). This conclusion chimes with Cochrane, Baser and Swain (2009: 682)’s analysis of how the Irish and Tamil diasporas have changed approach over time, as ‘diasporas have a significant potential role to play in peace-building processes, are diverse multi-layered communities, and can play a variety of roles at different stages in a conflict’. Research underway by the authors of this paper is building on this important analysis through the identification of key stages in the evolution of Tamil diaspora politics in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict before and after the 2009 defeat of the LTTE.

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### 3.3 FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS TO TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORKS

The process of ‘framing’ is important to political mobilisation because, according to Sökefeld (2006: 270), it captures ‘all the ideas from which an imagination of community is composed, the ideas that define migrants as members of a transnational community or relationships as relations of belonging’. While framing is principally related to ideas of ‘identity’, ‘home’ and ‘belongingness’, the process may also relate to specific events that take on importance as incidents that affect the entire community (2006: 271) as well as to the ways in which political mobilisation is conceived. Framing in relation to diaspora mobilisation is understudied, however, there is a growing literature on the ways in which diasporas appeal to the so-called ‘master-frames’ of democracy, human rights and peace as drivers for political action.

Banki (2013), for example, has suggested that diasporas use international (humanitarian) institutions as channels through which to promote reform in the home countries by exercising international pressure on norms of human rights. Acknowledging the importance of domestic and international recognition for their grievances leads immigrants to ‘name and shame’

national and multi-national institutions and assert their identities – particularly for those groups that lack a state’ (Chaudhary and Moss 2016: 19). Operating through international channels is seen as a way to ‘unify’ different diasporic groups across the world and to define a ‘line of action’ towards the homeland; one of the most notable examples is the creation by various Tamil communities of a Global Tamil Forum and a Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam in the late 2000s aimed at ‘pursuing the goal of Tamil Eelam on the island of Sri Lanka through democratic and peaceful means in a manner consistent with the laws of the state they live in’ (TGTE 2009, cited in Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010: 20; Brun and Van Hear 2012). In an extensive analysis, Chaudhary and Moss (2016) underline how focusing on the ‘transnational’ level allows scholars to move beyond the hostland/homeland dichotomy, effectively providing a more comprehensive understanding of how collective action might be shaped.

Similarly, Koinova (2011: 437) argues that conflict-generated diasporas ‘hope that by linking their claims to a global political opportunity structure of “liberalism” they “play the game” of the international community interested in promoting the liberal paradigm, and thus expect to obtain its support for the legitimisation of their pro-sovereignty goals’. This has been studied, for example, in relation to Eastern European diasporas’ involvement in post-communism reconstruction, whereby the groups contributed to democratisation processes in the homeland (Koinova 2009). However, her research suggests that there is considerable variation within diasporas’ ‘democratic’ action, ranging from liberal to procedural aspects of democracies depending on the nature of the diasporas, the relationship with the homeland and the strength of nationalist forces within the groups. Koinova further argues that some diasporas, such as the Lebanese and the Albanian in the United States were reluctant to promote liberal and democratic-leaning values in the homeland. While they did appeal to some norms of ‘global liberalism’ in their political action, ‘they use liberalism not normatively but instrumentally and for utilitarian purposes’ (2011: 451).

The literature on campaigns for international justice recalls Cohen’s (2008: 141) argument, outlined in Thematic Report One, that the development of a cosmopolitan sensibility is a necessary condition for

diaspora mobilisation, referring to cosmopolitanisation as a process whereby different cultures and traditions interact, and through which members of the diaspora become mobile actors within a globalised framework. Specifically, he argues that diasporas are ‘able to interrogate the universal with the particular and...to use their cosmopolitanism to press the limits of the local’ (2008: 150). This narrative links to the processes of ‘socialisation’ within hosting societies that allow diasporas to exploit the liberal tools of democracy to promote change within the homeland regardless of whether this understanding of cosmopolitanism appeals to philosophical and normative narratives associated with universal solidarity and respect for diversity. However, what this implies in terms of political consequences in the homeland depends on contingent elements of the diaspora, the homeland, and the host society in which they operate (Koinova 2010; 2011).

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### 3.4 TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The academic literature reviewed for this paper focused in the main on the *positive* impact that diasporas can play in peace-building and reconstruction processes seeking to understand the methods of action through which diasporas acted as moderators of conflicts within the homeland (Baser and Swain 2008; Hall and Swain 2007). Recent attention has turned to the engagement of diasporas in processes of transitional justice where the motivation for engagement is closely connected to ‘the idea of a potential return to the homeland’ which ‘affords them a legitimate stake in the way they interfere with homeland policies...[as] the notion of a “secure homeland”, a place to return in time plays a very important role in diaspora behaviour’ (Baser and Swain 2008: 14). The United Nations Security Council provides a ‘working’ definition of ‘transitional justice’, which refers to it as ‘the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation’ (2004: 4). These measures therefore aim to ‘redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses that occur during armed conflict and under authoritarian regimes... promot[ing] possibilities for peace, reconciliation and democracy’ (Duthie 2011: 243).

The link between displacement and transnational justice therefore lies on the idea that when repatriation or return takes place, this can be interpreted as a sign that peace-building processes are effective (Bradley 2012). In other words, ‘if peacebuilding is considered to be a transformative process whereby a society moves away from conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful relationships, transitional justice can be seen as contributing to peace building...[and] reconciliation’ (Lambourne 2009: 35). Methods to achieve transitional justice include ‘judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, primarily individual prosecutions, truth-seeking, reparations, institutional reform, vetting and memorialising’ (Haider 2014: 210), therefore promoting narratives of change that support the ‘transformative’, and not only the ‘transitional’ aspect of justice, and that require involving all dimensions of society, from the legal to the political, from the economic to the cultural (Lambourne 2009).

For Haider (2014: 224) it is important to study the engagement of diasporas in transitional justice because, ‘it is necessary to look beyond the question of whether [the diaspora] are a “problem” or a “resource” to their home country, and to explore whether and how their participation in transnational activities can benefit themselves as affected communities’. Despite refugees being the direct product of conflict and the main beneficiaries of peace-building processes, there is surprisingly little literature seeking to understand what role they might play in these contexts. Rimmer (2010: 1) has argued that ‘current discussions about transitional justice in a post-conflict state tend to ignore the issue of who is included and excluded... there is no existing study of refugees or IDPs in their relation to transitional justice’, while Purkey (2016: 1) proposes that in practical terms ‘refugees continue to be largely excluded from meaningful participation in peace processes and transitional justice initiatives’. Within the policy-oriented literature, a lack of analysis in this area is attributed to the fact that in practical terms, ‘displaced or formerly displaced persons...face significant obstacles to participating in or accessing transitional justice [programmes]’ while cooperation between transitional justice organisations and other actors (including diasporic organisations) might be limited by diverging goals or methods of action (Duthie and Bradley 2012: web-based source).

In the academic literature, Haider has played an important role in the analysis of the role that conflict-generated diasporas play in transitional justice processes. She argues that the transnational nature of diasporas as political communities could ‘result in more effective transitional justice outcomes, through greater inclusiveness and more comprehensive truth-telling, and progress in processes of reconciliation’ (2014: 207). Importantly, she suggests that ‘these activities may emerge from diaspora mobilisation or may be facilitated through host country, home country or transitional justice policies’ (Haider 2014: 209), underlying how the complex system of action that includes the agency of the diaspora and the structure in which it is embedded should be taken in consideration when understanding how such activities evolve. Haider discusses the various roles that diasporas might assume in transitional justice processes, ranging from awareness-raising to providing input for reconstruction strategies (both through ideas and personnel), as well as ensuring that human rights violations are addressed through transnational channels. Empirical analysis on the role that diasporas might play is also advanced by Zunzer who, by focusing on the role of the Afghan diaspora in post-conflict settings, argued that ‘diaspora members played an important role during the Petersberg Talks, in the ongoing Bonn process of political transition, and as connectors between the international community, the national administrations, international civil society and the private sector’ (2005: 5-6).

While acknowledging their role as ‘active agents’, one can also not forget the potential status as ‘victims’ of diaspora group members. Haider’s research underlines how refugee diasporas engage in transitional justice not only because of the prospects of a return or for the betterment of life conditions of kin still in the country, but because ‘many will have been victims of human rights violations that the transitional justice mechanism seeks to address’ (Haider 2014: 216). This status as victims – either directly or through family members – makes those diaspora members eligible for reparations, in the form of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and/or the ‘the right to know’ what happened, why and where (Young and Park 2009: 351, 354).

In their own research, the authors of this report have found that tracking the engagement of the UK and Canadian Tamil diaspora in transitional justice processes is useful for understanding more broadly the



contextual factors, drivers and motivations for long-distance political engagement, and specifically how the experience of displacement and ‘being a refugee’ shapes such engagement. The authors however agree with Hall et al (2017) that refugee engagement is both complex and nuanced and cannot be reduced to simply an instrumental desire to improve conditions at home or to seek redress for past grievances. As Hall et al found in their research for Bosnians who were victims of violence during the Yugoslavian wars, the local post-war context influenced transitional justice preferences, including how displaced and non-displaced victims held starkly contrasting views on how peace processes should be conducted. As direct exposure to violence seems to be highly correlated to the desire to engage in transitional justice processes, there is a paucity of research on what motivates second-generation members of diasporas who are further removed from the original acts of violence when compared to their parents. Further research is required on how second-generation refugees acquire knowledge of events that precipitated traumatic dispersal and how this knowledge informs their reading of history – both family and national – and creates a desire for political engagement.

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### 3.5 LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

The previous discussion links to Van Hear and Cohen’s (2017) insistence that different levels of analysis need be taken into account when analysing diaspora engagement with the homeland, as political action develops across personal, extended, and imagined community-relations. This is methodologically important in particular when considering Van Hear’s (2014) argument – discussed also in Thematic Report One – that diasporic peaceful engagement in conflict is not driven by enhanced values of liberalism, cosmopolitanism or desire to bring peace to one’s own community, but rather to contribute to livelihoods strategies of their kin. And further that:

The hope of humanitarian and development actors has been that, by virtue of gradual incorporation into Western societies, diasporas – or at least some of their members – would be drawn into nurturing ‘liberal peace’ in conflict ridden societies...However, as in more stable environments, diaspora engagement in conflict settings tends to be privately oriented on family and community than concerned with broad societal renewal (Van Hear 2014: 181).

Empirical evidence from the Tamil diaspora has shown, for example, how different areas of Sri Lanka have benefitted very differently from the changing relationship between the diaspora and the LTTE (Brun and Van Hear 2012; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010), suggesting that economic and political engagement followed kinship, family and community lines (Chacko 2011; Koinova 2013). It could be argued that channelling engagement in this way is a product of the refugee condition whereby family or community members might still be in the country of origin unable (or unwilling) to move, thereby presenting a useful framework to understand how refugee political action might unfold.

A further example is provided by Brees (2010), who argues that the inability of international organisations to reach specific areas of Myanmar provided an incentive for Burmese refugee groups in Thailand to organise across borders and provide assistance to internally displaced people and their communities affected. Similarly, Hoehne, Feyissa and Abdile (2011) suggest that diaspora involvement, both financially and politically, in local dynamics, as well as engagement with local religious or clan organisations have had a crucial impact in contributing to peace-building processes in Somalia and Ethiopia. This research reinforced Van Hear and Cohen (2017)’s argument that political action often develops from local and community levels rather than at national ones.

This paper, therefore, has found that diasporas and their behaviour should not be taken as absolute phenomena (Brubaker 2005), but rather be ‘deconstructed’ to identify specific dynamics which might explain how political mobilisation unfolds. While empirical evidence often focuses on smaller-scale interactions, this is rarely acknowledged; on the contrary, focusing on particular community or family links, including among different diasporic groups could provide a useful framework for analysis. This includes, within conflict settings, focusing on how the relationship between the diaspora and separatist groups develops over time (Brun and Van Hear 2012; Koinova 2013), which is a major theme of the CREST project that informs this paper.

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# CONCLUSION

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This review has sought to understand why and in what ways individual refugees and refugee communities are likely to engage in cross-border political action. It found that although ‘refugee politics’ is not an issue widely addressed in the refugee studies literature, research in migration and diaspora studies has provided useful analytical frameworks to guide further work on this topic.

The migration studies literature is helpful in better understanding the contextual dynamics within which refugees might act politically. Theories of integration and incorporation, as well as the strong interest in transnationalism as a framework to describe migrants’ socio-political position between different societies, can explain why refugees might engage in cross-border political action. While some have argued that integration within the host society can represent a desire of migrants and refugees to ‘move on’, others have contended that exposure to narratives of democracy, human rights and justice might have a positive impact in the ways in which migrant communities and diasporas act politically towards their homeland. In this context, Koinova and Van Hear’s call to analyse in depth the motives, methods, results and dynamics of democratising processes is essential to reveal what kind of actors these groups can be.

Diaspora studies also provide useful frameworks to analyse refugee politics. As the concept of diaspora has evolved over time, the sub-field of ‘conflict-generated’ diasporas, which sees a direct correlation between forced movement and diaspora formation, has emerged as an important area of research. While initially the literature focused on the methods of political action deployed by diasporas in their homeland, the interest in mobilisation processes has widened the focus. Most importantly, there has been a normative shift towards the understanding that diasporas are not essentially either ‘violent’ or ‘peaceful’ actors, but that on the contrary specific elements concerning the conflict, the host and origin country, and the diaspora itself should be taken into account when seeking to explain how political action might unfold. In addition to a number of explanatory frameworks, social movement theory

has added a welcome theoretical depth to the study of diaspora mobilisation.

Social movement theory provides a comprehensive framework which allows scholars to focus on a variety of elements – namely political opportunity structures, mobilising structures, framing – and to use them either in combination or individually to explore the concept of refugee politics. As Chaudhary and Moss (2016: 7) argue, ‘social movement scholarship attends to how various factors shape mobilisation dynamics... [and] one of the most significant contributions of social movement theory has been its formulation of how political contexts shape the timing, character, and outcome of collective action’. A body of recent empirical research including ‘animation theory’, as proposed by Betts and Jones (2016), and to a certain extent also the emerging transitional justice framework, are derived from social movement theory. Within this work, the literature on political opportunity structures is perhaps the best developed, while research on ‘framing’ processes and how they shape cross-border political action, is in its infancy.

The lack of theoretical diversity in refugee, diaspora and migration studies arguably limits our understanding of refugee communities as political actors, and the social movement focus runs the risk of only associating political activity with groups and organisations. The specificity of the refugee experience as a social, legal and in some regards administrative phenomenon, taking place in situations of traumatic dispersal, through flight, encampment, onward movement and integration, are not fully captured in the existing literature. Important gaps include, for example, how the seeking of asylum affects political action; the impact of decision-making in pursuing ‘protection’ options and the participation in networks to achieve such outcomes; how the lack of refugee status might shape community-formation and cross-border political action; whether people displaced because of political reasons have different experiences from, for example, development-induced or natural disaster refugees (Sassen 2016); and how the lack of political opportunity structures in the country of origin shapes these processes (Brees 2010).

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