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Koinova, M.

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# Unintended Consequences of Diaspora Entrepreneurship During Post-Conflict Reconstruction

**Dr. Maria Koinova**

University of Amsterdam

**NETHERLANDS**

Over the past decade the interest of scholars and practitioners in transnational diaspora politics has significantly increased. The interest surged in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the US (2001) and the UK (2005) performed by individuals of foreign origin, and has been maintained by sporadic home-grown terrorist attempts, a recent backlash against multiculturalism and heated debates over immigration policies in western societies. In addition, an accelerated globalization and new information technologies continue to facilitate simultaneous interactions among migrants across the globe. Through the Internet, Skype, and social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Youtube, diasporas residing in one part of the globe become more likely to instantly affect events in another. Hence, scholars and practitioners have concerned themselves to understand diaspora mobilization and its impact on both original home countries and countries of settlement.

Political entrepreneurs from the Armenian, Croatian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Jewish, Kosovo Albanian, Palestinian, Sikh, and Tamil diasporas have demonstrated that diasporas could exacerbate intra-state conflicts in their original homelands (Shain 2002, 2007, Sheffer 2003, Hockenos 2003, Fair 2005, Adamson 2002, 2006, Smith and Stares 2007, Koinova 2010a). They do so by way of demonstrations, lobbying, and clandestine activities, such as fund-raising for radical groups, purchasing of weapons, and drafting soldiers. Some of these studies have been related to growing scholarly agendas on civil wars and terrorism, providing insights into their transnational dimensions. Much less attention has been paid to diaspora activism during post-conflict reconstruction. Most of this scholarship has explored the vast potential of diaspora remittances for the economic development of societies, oftentimes amounting to 12-18 % of a country' GDP per capita, but rarely on how they affect political processes.

What do we know about diasporas and political development during post-conflict reconstruction?

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*Diaspora entrepreneurs investing back in their original homeland could carry with themselves new political influences that change local dynamics in the short or long run.*

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can engage in the formation of new constitutions, as did the Kurdish diaspora for the provision of Kurdish autonomy in the future Iraqi state (Natali 2007). They can provide monitoring of external elections, and participate in referendums, as did the Kurds and the Macedonians on different occasions (ibid, Koinova 2010b). They can also provide much needed political leadership for new governments as in the cases of post-conflict Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Kosovo, and Iraq. Women, although sidelined by male domination during the development of peace initiatives, can also contribute to peace-building, mostly through grass-roots organizations (Al-Ali, 2007).

Diaspora political and business entrepreneurs can return to their original homeland and take top governmental and business positions. Diasporas can reframe traumatic identities of conflict parties in the homeland, and contribute to reform as did the Ethiopian diaspora in the US vis-a-vis the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict (Lyons 2006). According to Bercovitch, diaspora members can be agents of healing of psychological traumas, as did some in the aftermath of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Diaspora entrepreneurs can also participate in problem-solving workshops, as did Jews and Palestinians prior to and in the aftermath of the 1993 Oslo process. They can aspire to strengthen civil society by transmitting norms, values, and institutions characteristic for a democratic polity (2007). They

While these studies provide a helpful map of diaspora practices, a deeper understanding of causes and effects of diaspora mobilization is still due. Here I sketch three examples demonstrating that focusing simply on inquiring into a practice deemed positive for post-conflict reconstruction – such as a democratic procedure, providing remittances

or investing in economic development – can have unintended negative consequences or other mixed results on inter-ethnic post-conflict dynamics.

### Three Cases of Diaspora Participation: Referendum, Remittances, and Investment in Post-conflict Reconstruction

Participation in referendums is usually associated with core democratic beliefs and practice. Yet, Macedonian diaspora activism in the aftermath of the brief 2001 civil warfare in Macedonia demonstrates that participating in a referendum can boost local nationalism. The Macedonian diaspora, primarily organized by its most radical brethren in Australia and through the World Macedonian Congress, has been instrumental in the creation of a 2004 referendum in the original homeland. The referendum was aimed at challenging a package of laws that would allow the Albanians – whose guerilla soldiers clashed with the Macedonian military and paramilitaries in 2001 – to enjoy more decentralization of power and self-governmental rights in the western parts of the country. The legal package was a bid for implementation of the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement, which defined the terms of the peace agreement and post-conflict redesigning of the state. Hence, local and international interests were vested in this agreement. Macedonian diaspora activists and their local counterparts – often extended family or long-term friends – were highly mobilized prior to that referendum through grassroots initiatives and media campaigns. Their activism was considered as threatening the fragile post-conflict peace in a volatile Balkan region. It took the European Union significant resources to launch an anti-referendum campaign, and the United States to recognize Macedonia by its highly debated constitutionally proclaimed name, Republic of Macedonia, to convince ethnic Macedonians to stay away from the referendum polls. While the referendum did not succeed and Macedonia continued on the path of decentralization, it demonstrated how influential a diaspora can be during fragile post-conflict development.

Diaspora remittances are welcome by post-conflict societies, yet scholarship needs to better understand how they change or help to consolidate local inter-group dynamics. Remittances to areas strongly affected by the war may help consolidate the power of the winners and undermine that of new minorities in these areas. For example, a 2007 Riinvest study of diaspora contributions to Kosova's post-conflict economic development demonstrated that Kosova Albanian migrants from Prizren (27.5%) send the most remittances back home. They are followed by their ethnic brethren with origins from Prishtina (24.6%), Mitrovica (12.2%) and Ferizaj (11.4%). If read from an economics point of view, these percentages tell us about the remittance habits and

potential for development of specific settlements. If read from a political science point of view, however, these data are indicative of a different dynamic. Prizren was the area most significantly affected by Milosevic's ethnic cleansing shortly prior to NATO's 1999 military intervention. At present, Serbian presence in this area is confined to the Orthodox Decani Monestary, a UNESCO protected site surrounded by military checkpoints. Also, while prior to the 1999 war the capital Prishtina was inhabited by both Kosovo Albanians and Serbian communities, Serbs living there at present are an exception. Many live in the Gračanica enclave, a Serb settlement in the outskirts of Prishtina, or commute to Prishtina if employed there. This case demonstrates how remittances could help consolidate business networks on an ethnic basis, rather than to develop cross-cutting cleavages, a liberal goal cherished by the international community in post-conflict societies.

Last but not the least, diaspora entrepreneurs investing back in their original homeland could carry with themselves new political influences that change local dynamics in the short or long run. The late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his diasporic connections to Saudi Arabia are a case in point. The Sunni Muslim Lebanese entrepreneur made his fortune in Saudi Arabia during the oil boom and returned to Lebanon in the late 1980s. In the aftermath of the civil war (1975-1991) Lebanon's post-conflict recovery was largely associated with his name, since he managed to channel his own vast fortune made on construction businesses and Saudi resources into the Lebanese post-conflict economy. Hariri consolidated his economic and political power as a prime minister of five governments between 1992 and 1998 and between 2000 and 2004. He was assassinated in 2005 because of some opposition to the Syrian influence in the domestic politics of Lebanon. His assassination became a focal point for the mobilization of anti-Syrian sentiments and movement which led to the popular 2005 "Cedar Revolution," that helped end Syrian troops' presence in the country for the past 29 years. Nevertheless, five years later his son, Saad Hariri who currently heads a government of a pro-Western anti-Syrian coalition, the March 14 Movement, has been allegedly advised by Saudi royalty to be more accommodating to Syrian influence in Lebanon (Stratfor 2010). While Saudi Arabia was not politically influential in the aftermath of the civil war, twenty years later it became yet another external power to effectively meddle in the fragile Lebanese political environment, alongside Syria, Iran, Palestinian groups, and others. Ironically, Rafik Hariri's diaspora entrepreneurship paved the way for this new Saudi political influence.

The Forum These three cases demonstrate that considering the influence of diasporas on post-conflict reconstruction processes needs more scrutiny with regard to causal processes

and mechanisms in the political realm. While diaspora participation in democratic political practices, sending of remittances, and financial investment could restore conflict-ridden polities and economies, they could also create new and unanticipated political dynamics.

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