A contextual understanding of diaspora entrepreneurship: identity, opportunity and resources in the Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish diasporas

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Abstract

Purpose – Within the growing study of transnational entrepreneurial practice, existing conceptualisation of diaspora entrepreneurship has often lacked engagement with the particularities of the diaspora condition. This paper seeks to advance theoretical understanding and empirical study of diaspora entrepreneurship through identifying the processes that generate diaspora entrepreneurship across economic, social and political spheres.

Design/methodology/approach – To analyse the relationship between the development of venture activity and diaspora (re)production, in depth, qualitative biographical analysis was undertaken with UK-based diaspora entrepreneurs embedded within the particular contexts of the Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish diasporas. Skilled and active diaspora entrepreneurs were purposively selected from these extreme case contexts to explore their entrepreneurial agency within and across the business, social and political realms.

Findings – Results identified key dimensions shaping the development of diaspora entrepreneurship. These comprised the role of diaspora context in shaping opportunity frameworks and the mobilisation of available resources, and how venture activity served to sustain collective diaspora identity and address diaspora interests. These findings are used to produce an analytical model of the generation of diaspora entrepreneurship to serve as a basis for discussing how heterogeneous and hybrid entrepreneurial strategies emerge from and shape the evolving diaspora context.

Originality/value – By placing the reproduction of social collectivity centre-stage, this paper identifies the particularities of diaspora entrepreneurship as a form of transnational entrepreneurship. This recognizes the significance of a contextualised understanding of entrepreneurial diversity within wider processes of diaspora development, which has important implications for policy and practice development in homeland and settlement areas.

Keywords Immigrants, Entrepreneurship, International entrepreneurship, Ethnic groups

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As processes of economic globalization have advanced and migratory flows become increasingly complex, recognition of the role of entrepreneurs in shaping transnational flows

of capital, commodities, labour, knowledge and enterprise activity has increased (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Drori *et al.*, 2009; Honig *et al.*, 2010; Yeung, 2009). The need to develop a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between migration, enterprise and society (Vershinina and Rodgers, 2019) has led to a rapid growth in the study of wide-ranging forms of transnational entrepreneurship encompassing research into immigrant, ethnic, refugee and diaspora entrepreneurs (Egorova, 2021; Nazareno *et al.*, 2019). This has focussed attention on the varied entrepreneurial practice different types of migrants engage in across diverse contexts and its socio-economic consequences (Elo *et al.*, 2018; Portes and Martinez, 2020; Zapata-Barrero and Rezaei, 2020).

However, as Egorova (2021) observes, these diverse terms across the field of migrant entrepreneurship require more specific definition and assessment as to how observed findings are rooted within immigrant-, transnational-, ethnic- or diaspora-related factors. In the case of the term diaspora entrepreneur, which has become increasingly prevalent (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Elo, 2016; Riddle *et al.*, 2010), what differentiates diaspora entrepreneurship from other forms of transnational and immigrant entrepreneurship frequently remains unclear. Specifically, the notion of diaspora entrepreneurship often fails to set out explicitly how embeddedness within a diaspora *informs* transnational entrepreneurial practice. This weak specification of what actually constitutes diaspora entrepreneurship, the processes that generate it and how it should be conceptualized, acts to limit the scope of research and policy activity (Elo *et al.*, 2022).

Achieving an improved understanding of diaspora entrepreneurship matters to entrepreneurial study for a number of reasons. First, as a social phenomenon, the growing migratory flows and populations of forcibly displaced and refugee populations globally (Van Hear, 2009) means that the numbers of entrepreneurs operating within diaspora contexts is already high and set to increase further. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR, 2021) reported that at the end of 2020 there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced individuals, including 26.4 million refugees. Drawing together our understanding of migration and transnational entrepreneurship therefore becomes increasingly important (Honig, 2020), and the notion of diaspora is a critical dimension to this (Discua Cruz and Fromm, 2019).

Second, comprehension of diaspora migration contributes insights into crucial wider debates in current entrepreneurship studies relating to context, identity and our understanding of entrepreneurial activity. The multifaceted and varied nature of context and how it influences entrepreneurial actions, motivation, desires and identities (Afreh *et al.*, 2019; Elo *et al.*, 2022; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017; Zhang and Chun, 2018), is at the core of the realisation of transnational diaspora entrepreneurial activity. Embeddedness within a given diaspora context informs an entrepreneur's identity, mobility and wider social and political worldview, shaping the nature of their venture activity (Ozasir Kacar and Essers, 2019). Examination of diaspora entrepreneurship also requires embracing the myriad and complex ways in which everyday entrepreneurship is enacted, and move beyond dichotomies of social and economic entrepreneurship to recognise entrepreneurial diversity (Baker and Welter, 2017; Johannisson, 2011; Prince *et al.,* 2021; Welter *et al.,* 2017).

Finally, enhanced understanding here has implications for policy and practice in diaspora homeland and settlement contexts. As actual and/or potential key actors within diaspora space, diaspora entrepreneurs can play influential roles in shaping institutional change in places of settlement and notably within homeland areas (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Newland and Tanaka, 2010; Nielsen and Riddle, 2010; Portes and Martinez, 2020). A significant number of these homeland areas are of wider geopolitical significance with histories of past and/or ongoing conflict where the need for mobilising social actors to achieve effective political action is particularly pressing.

The purpose of this paper is to advance the conceptualisation and empirical understanding of the processes generating diaspora entrepreneurship. To achieve this the paper first combines a critical review of both the existing immigrant entrepreneurship and diaspora studies literature, to develop a basis for comprehending the contextualised

production of diaspora entrepreneurship which places the notion of diaspora at its centre. This then informs a qualitative study of prominent diaspora entrepreneurs embedded within the particularities of the Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish diasporas, using an extreme case methodology as a means of generating wider insights (Seawright, 2016). Findings identify various hybrid entrepreneurial strategies produced through processes combining collective diaspora identity and organizational structures with opportunity frameworks and resource availability The paper concludes with a discussion of how thinking about diaspora entrepreneurship in a manner that directly engages with its role in reproducing social collectivity, identifies a distinctive entrepreneurial form: one significant to processes of diaspora development and to understanding the embedded transnational nature of immigrant entrepreneurial activity operating across economic, political and social spheres.

Transnational and diaspora entrepreneurship

Although the engagement of members of diasporas in venturing activity can be traced back across many centuries (McCabe *et al.*, 2005), discussion of diaspora entrepreneurship has become prominent in the entrepreneurial literature over recent years (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Ekanem, 2019; Elo, 2016; Elo *et al.*, 2018, 2022; Ojo and Nwankwo, 2017; Osaghae and Cooney, 2020; Riddle *et al.*, 2010; Zapata-Barrero and Rezaei, 2020). As the highly complex mosaic of diverse migrant and diaspora communities has become ever more apparent globally, use of the term diaspora entrepreneurship has risen, alongside other related and overlapping terms including immigrant, transnational, ethnic, refugee and return entrepreneurship. The interchangeable use of these terms within the existing literature reveals an absence of academic consensus as to the differences and relations between these forms, and the lack of clear, conceptually informed, definitions to make sense of the rapidly changing global landscape of complex migratory movements of people and their entrepreneurial activities (Egorova, 2021; Nazareno *et al.*, 2019).

The study of immigrant entrepreneurship for many years focused predominantly upon the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs in settlement countries, particularly within developed Western economies (Verver *et al.*, 2019). Conceptually, this emphasized a contextualized understanding of action rooted within the interface between ethnic resources and the opportunity/constraining structures within which they operate, most notably through the mixed-embeddedness approach. This identified embeddedness in both the social networks of immigrants and the socioeconomic and politico-institutional environment of the country of settlement (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2014).

However, as flows of labour, capital and commodities within a globalising economy have grown, diverse forms of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship have become evident and existing conceptualisations of migrant entrepreneurship increasingly challenged (Ram *et al.*, 2017). The notion of transnational entrepreneurship identifies immigrant entrepreneurs embedded within two or more cultures, responding to conditions within host societies, and using ethnic resources to move beyond the bounds of their ethnic groups (Chen and Tan, 2009; Drori *et al.*, 2009; Morawska, 2004; Urbano *et al.*, 2011). Immigrants here are operating in complex, cross-national domains, with dual cultural, institutional, and economic features which enable various entrepreneurial strategies that exploit business opportunities in both their former place of origin and settlement country (Drori *et al.*, 2009). This distinctive opportunity structure of transnational entrepreneurs enables them to take advantage of their positioning across two worlds, variously as a means of ensuring survival, for breaking out of existing markets, and/or achieving competitive advantage (Terjesen and Elam, 2009; Wang and Liu, 2015).

Enabled by new information and communication technologies, much migrant entrepreneurial activity needs to be understood in relation to its embeddedness transnationally, within homeland regions and broader diaspora relations (Bagwell, 2018;

Nazareno *et al.*, 2019; Portes *et al.*, 2002). This recognition has prompted current debate focussed upon moving beyond the existing notion of mixed embeddedness to one which has been variously termed "transnational mixed embeddedness" (Bagwell, 2018), "simultaneous embeddedness" (Nazereno *et al.*, 2019; You and Zhou, 2019), "multicultural hybridism" (Shinnie *et al.*, 2021) or "multifocality" (Solano *et al.*, 2022). These notions seek to broaden the scope of the mixed embeddedness concept to include institutional and social embeddedness within homeland areas/countries of origin as well as countries and places of diaspora settlement (Duan *et al.*, 2021; You and Zhou, 2019). They also recognize the highly fluid, diverse and connected nature of the global economy and the migrant entrepreneur's role within this (Valenzuela-Garcia *et al.*, 2018). Important here is recognition of the diversity of immigrant populations, flows and statuses and the presence of "superdiversity" in certain contexts (Vertovec, 2009; Shinnie *et al.*, 2021).

As a result, increasingly the starting point for analysis has become the simultaneous involvement of migrant entrepreneurs in multiple places and multiple groups, and how this impacts upon the pursuit of opportunities and available resources (Solano *et al.*, 2022). The combination of unequal access of individual entrepreneurs to various forms of human, social and financial capital alongside variations in the institutional circumstances arising from host, home and wider transnational contexts, creates significant variations in immigrant entrepreneurship (Nazareno *et al.,* 2019).

The growing diaspora entrepreneurship literature reflects this focus upon the ability of entrepreneurs with multiple affiliations to cultures and places, to realize opportunities arising from increased globalisation and cross-border economic activities. The existing literature provide insights into the diverse nature of diaspora entrepreneurial activity, which extends across a range of low to high skilled entrepreneurs, business types and host, homeland and wider diaspora contexts (Elo, 2016; Elo *et al.*, 2022). In so doing it identifies the varying opportunity structures within which diaspora entrepreneurs are operating, and the differing available resources upon which they draw, particularly in relation to social networks and social capital (Katila and Wahlbeck, 2012; Osaghae and Cooney, 2020).

A number of core themes are evident within the transnational diaspora entrepreneurship literature. These include attention upon the agency of migrant entrepreneurs to shape institutional environments and ethnic identities and consciousness, acting as what Brinkerhoff (2016) terms "institutional diaspora entrepreneurs". This recognizes the particular impact and significance of transnational immigrant entrepreneurial activity to homeland areas (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Brzozowski *et al.*, 2014; Mago, 2020; Nielsen and Riddle, 2010; Santamaria-Alvarez *et al.*, 2019) and how home country conditions and ties influence immigrant entrepreneurial activity (Brzozowski and Cucculelli, 2020; Duan *et al.*, 2021).

The diaspora entrepreneurship literature also recognizes a wider range of non-financial and non-economic factors that inform entrepreneurial practice. Studies have demonstrated the role diaspora entrepreneurs play in providing a broader range of intangible social remittances that flow from the host to sending country communities in the form of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital (Discua Cruz and Fromm, 2019; Lacroix *et al.*, 2016), and the importance of non-pecuniary motivations related to emotion, social status, identity and politics (Nielsen and Riddle, 2010).

Finally, diaspora entrepreneurship focuses attention on the complex issue of migrant entrepreneurial identity. Growing recognition of the importance of entrepreneurial identity (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021; Leitch and Harrison, 2016) and its relationship to context (Jones *et al.*, 2019) have been particular evident in the emerging understanding of ethnic and diaspora entrepreneurship. Here, identity formation and identity work across host, home and transnational contexts, have been shown to be crucial to understanding the initiation and development of venture activity (Abd Hamid *et al.*, 2019; Barrett and Vershinina, 2017; Elo *et al.*, 2022; Zhang and Chun, 2018).

Despite these significant developments in the diaspora entrepreneurship literature, there has been an absence of any clear, theoretically informed definition of diaspora entrepreneurship, and it has struggled to differentiate itself in any meaningful way within the broader notion of transnational entrepreneurship. Crucially, existing discussion of diaspora entrepreneurship largely fails to engage directly with what *constitutes* a diaspora and how this informs this particular form of entrepreneurial agency. It is to this issue which we now turn.

Understanding diasporas: context, identity and agency

To move beyond existing under-theorized definitions and typologies of diaspora entrepreneurship requires a conceptualisation of entrepreneurial practice rooted in the theorisation of diaspora, to enable understanding of its defining characteristics and significance to venturing activity and wider institutional change.

Research into diasporas across the fields of international relations, migration studies and political science has produced significant insights into the role that diaspora agency plays within a globalized economy (Adamson, 2016; Bauböck, 2010; Burgess, 2014; Cohen, 2017; Koinova, 2014). Adamson and Demetriou (2007, p. 497) define diaspora as "a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to: (1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and (2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links."

This definition incorporates three interrelated elements central to theoretical understanding of diasporas and which are crucial to understanding the venture activities of diaspora entrepreneurs. First, it emphasizes the core role of the particularities of spatial context rooted in the process of dispersion from a homeland area (Brubaker, 2005; Safran, 1991). Diasporas are constituted by manifold linkages between a homeland, places of settlement and a wider transnational diaspora space. Resultant diaspora identities are embedded in the institutions and linkages that develop within and across places of settlement and the narrative of dispersion from a homeland, real or imagined, which transcends borders (Anderson, 1991; Brah, 1996).

Second, it sets out identity as being at the core of what constitutes a diaspora. Diasporas are collectives of individuals who identify themselves, and are identified by others, as part of an imagined community. As Safran (1991) argues, this identity is bound up with a memory, vision or myth about their original homeland and an eventual return, alongside a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland. Diaspora group consciousness and solidarity are defined by this continuing relation with the homeland and rooted within the role of collective memory, shared lingo-cultural aspects, experience, loyalties and attachments (Brah, 1996). Crucially, as imagined transnational communities which are the product of interactive processes of identification and ascription, diaspora identity is dynamic and contextual (Agnew, 2005; Christou and Mavroudi, 2015; Hall, 1990).

Finally, by viewing diaspora (re)creation as an ongoing social, cultural, political and economic process, the core role of agency is identified. This agency is manifested both in addressing members interests, through various organisations and individuals operating through transnational linkages and shared institutions, as well as through diaspora membership empowering communities and individuals to mobilize support and engage politically to shape change in homeland and settlement contexts (Abramson, 2017; Cohen, 2017; Syrett and Keles, 2019). Research into the role of diaspora agency has focused especially upon the political influence of diasporas upon host and homeland policies and politics (Adamson, 2016; Burgess, 2014; Demmers, 2007; Smith, 2007) and state actors mobilising

diasporas (Ho, 2011; Delano and Gamlen, 2014). However, there is recognition too of how individual "political entrepreneurs" (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007; Koinova, 2014) act to make claims on behalf of their homelands, as well as the critical role played by a range of other transnational non-state actors and institutions, including civil society and religious actors and entrepreneurs, in processes of diaspora engagement, mobilisation and identity development (Faist, 2008; Van Gorp and Smets, 2015; Vertovec, 2009).

Recognition of the role diaspora entrepreneurs can play in advancing the development process in homeland areas through utilising their "inbetween" position to realize business and investment opportunities and generate institutional change, has resulted in actions by homeland states to develop appropriate legal and regulatory regimes which aim to legitimize and control this role (Delano and Gamlen, 2014; Williams, 2018), and policies to promote entrepreneurial activity and mobilize financial resources (Ionescu, 2006; Kuznetsov and Sabel, 2006; Newland and Tanaka, 2010). Research here has highlighted the role diaspora entrepreneurs can play in shaping and catalysing institutional reform, through helping establish liberal market economies and promoting stability and new business cultures in countries undergoing transition, although this role if often neglected within local policymaking (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Riddle and Brinkerhoff, 2011; Williams and Vorley, 2017).

Yet despite this, the mechanisms and processes through which various non-state diaspora actors contribute to influence action in settlement, homeland and transnational contexts, remains poorly understood (Koinova, 2014). The situated, contextual and emergent relation between entrepreneurial strategies and differing diaspora contexts, remains largely unexplored, with little detailed examination of how processes of diaspora development shape, and are in turn shaped by, diaspora entrepreneurial practice. These gaps in the existing literature produce two research questions that this paper directly addresses. First, what are the processes generating varied forms of diaspora entrepreneurship? Second, how can we best understand the diverse strategies of diaspora entrepreneurs and their relationship to an evolving diaspora context?

Methodology

Analysis of migrant entrepreneurship which enables combining micro-level analysis of the individual entrepreneur within meso-level opportunity structures and macro-level institutional structures within which they are embedded, has been extensively developed within studies informed by mixed-embeddedness approaches (Kloosterman, 2010; Bagwell, 2018). To explore the relationship between diaspora (re)production and the development of venture activity, here qualitative biographical analysis was undertaken of ten diaspora entrepreneurs based in London (UK) drawn from the Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish diaspora communities. This small-scale, qualitative biographical approach of a purposively selected population is a well-recognised research method for generating contextually and historically informed conceptual insights and empirical data (Creswell, 2007; Erel, 2007). It is particularly valuable in relation to difficult to access populations and has been widely used in entrepreneurship research (Fillis, 2006; Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019).

For this study, highly active and educated entrepreneurs were purposively selected within these two diasporas on the basis of their entrepreneurial agency across both business and social/political spheres, in order to explore the significance of these entrepreneurial activities and how they related to wider processes of diaspora (re)production. The selected entrepreneurs were engaged in diverse business activities which comprised commercial operations serving particular diaspora markets (e.g. restaurants, travel, property, healthcare) including a number in the expanding media, cultural and communication sector (e.g. television networks, radio stations, magazines, newspapers). The entrepreneurs were also engaged in various forms of social and political entrepreneurship, including business

ventures serving homeland reconstruction (e.g. providing public services, developing infrastructures and supporting job creation and skills development), and other social, cultural and political activities, including involvement in charity organisations, regeneration projects, film festivals and political groups (see Table 1). Although this sample covered entrepreneurs operating in various industries constraining comparison at a sectoral level, critically the sample permitted analysis of entrepreneurial diversity and the relationship between their economic and socio/political entrepreneurial activities.

To allow exploration of how embeddedness within a particular type of diaspora context helped constitute distinct diaspora entrepreneurial activity, cases were selected from the Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish diasporas. These diasporas were chosen as they provided a means to explore how a particular sense of diaspora identity and social solidarity was generated within a very particular context; one of broader political struggle rooted within territorial disputes over statehood. The use of "extreme cases" of this type provides a recognized method for providing wider valuable and generalizable insights (Seawright and Gerring, 2008; Seawright, 2016), here into the study of diaspora entrepreneurship.

The distinctive diaspora context of ongoing or recent conflict within homeland areas created territorial disputes over statehood and a political aspiration to create an independent homeland state. This acts as a powerful driver to the development of diaspora identity and provides a strong basis for social solidarity and political mobilisation (Alinia and Eliassi, 2014; Amarasingham, 2015; Eliassi, 2016; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015; Guyot, 2018; Ragab, 2020). Significantly, states within their respective homeland areas frequently demonstrated active hostility towards these diaspora communities, which shaped state-diaspora relations in a particular way. The absence of any independent homeland state constrained the development of homeland state engagement and mobilisation activities and ensured a significant transnational role for non-state actors, entrepreneurs and institutions (Ayata, 2011; Keles, 2015; Lyon and Ucarer, 2001; Pande, 2017; Syrett and Keles, 2019; Wahlbeck, 1998; Wayland, 2004).

Development in both diasporas since the 1980s resulted mainly from large-scale population displacement from their homeland areas due to conflict and persecution. These commonalities of conflict and exclusion in homeland areas ensured a level of comparability between the selected diasporas. Both had distinct and complex histories and geographies including political refugees settling in Western Europe and North America. The Kurdish population in the UK developed through different phases, reflecting the various conflicts in the wider contested territory of Kurdistan located across the national states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Bezwan and Keles, 2022). The UK Kurdish population, estimated to be around 250,000, is largely based in London and predominantly drawn from Kurdistan regions of Turkey and Iraq. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora resulted from the civil war that took place in Sri Lanka between 1983 and 2009, which resulted in the displacement of an estimated 1.5 million Tamils internally and internationally. The estimated population of Sri Lankan Tamils in the UK is around 170,000 and strongly concentrated in London (Aspinall, 2019).

To ensure commonality of diaspora settlement experience in terms of institutions, policies and practices towards displaced persons, refugees and the integration of ethnic minority groups generally, all case study entrepreneurs operated in the same settlement context of London within the UK. As one of the world's most multi-cultural and ethnically diverse cities, London provides a suitable context for exploring diaspora transnational diaspora entrepreneurship within a highly fluid, diverse and connected global context (Shinnie et al., 2021; Solano et al., 2022; Valenzuela-Garcia et al., 2018). As the UK's major centre of immigration and new arrival enterprise activity, London has witnessed strong absolute and relative growth in migrant enterprise and entrepreneurship. This reflects its dynamic, liberalized and flexible labour market, characterized by relatively low barriers to entry for new business formation and the role different ethnic communities play as initial markets for

Name gender/age	Country of origin	Education	Settlement country (years)	History and diaspora involvement	Business ventures
Radheya – male/61	Sri Lanka	University degree	UK (42)	Came to study in UK due to restrictions on Tamil university study in Sri Lanka (SL). Member of lobby group Tamils for Conservative Party. Post-conflict activities in Tamil region of SL to create employment for those in poverty	Set up travel and estate agency business in the UK. Investments in the Tamil region of SL to reinvigorate Tamil communities through donation of agricultural land production of aloe vera and lime crops for export processing
Ratnakar – male/62	Sri Lanka	University degree	UK (41)	Encountered violence in SL forcing departure. Involved in peace process between Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in 2001. Manages several charity organisations working to empower the war-affected Tamil community and promote reconciliation	Set up recycling company in the UK now employing 25 staff. Involved in post-conflict reconstruction activity in two villages in Tamil region of SL via water supply, industrial estate and training school projects
Muthuvel – male/50	Sri Lanka	University degree	Switzerl'd (9); UK (3)	As journalist attacked by Sri Lankan forces and granted asylum in Switzerland. Activities to promote Tamil language and culture through media activity, support Tamil ex-political prisoners, and recognise diversity within Tamil population	Co-founded Tamil newspaper/television operation in Switzerland. Moved to UK to create transnational Tamil media company (5 TV channels, radio station and newspaper with studios in India and SL. Opened handicrafts workshop and tea factory in SL.
Shyam – male/62	Sri Lanka	University degree	UK (36)	Involved in Tamil student movement in SL. Founded Tamil TV and Radio Network (TTN) to reproduce Tamil culture and engage young people. TTN closed due to pressure from regulators over relationship to LTTE. Founding member of British-Tamil and Global Tamil Forums	Co-founder of first transnational Tamil TV and Radio Network in 1997, operating out of Paris and with UK operation. Also ran an accountancy firm and created a healthcare business providing health centres in the UK.

(continued)

Table 1.
Diaspora entrepreneur
profiles

Name gender/age	Country of origin	Education	Settlement country (years)	History and diaspora involvement	Business ventures
Rajani – male/61	Sri Lanka	University degree	UK (34)	Came to study in the UK and unable to return. Secretary of UK branch of Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Involved in various Tamil charity organisations and trustee of "widows of war" aid organisation	Operates property business in UK. Now focused on ventures in SL to create employment opportunities including a textile factory and handicrafts operation, which employs war widows and female ex-militants to sell products internationally across Tamil diaspora
Heman – male/50	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	UK (24)	Involved in UK party politics and elected official for a London Borough. Extensive networks with Mayors in Kurdistan Region of Turkey and promotes discussion on Kurdish situation in Turkey among UK MPs	Came to the UK to study and train as a pharmacist. Opened business offering healthcare services in various languages within London
Olan – male/41	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	UK (28)	Director of two think-thank organisations operating on Kurds-Turkey relations which are important hubs for the interaction of British, Kurdish and Turkish politicians	Diverse business ventures which include a large restaurant and café business, as well as a community radio station and newspaper in UK and tourist investments in Kurdistan
Arman – male/37	Kurdistan-Turkey	Further Education College	UK (6)	Settled in UK following political persecution. Publishing activities that raise awareness of situation in Turkey/Kurdistan. Organiser of London Kurdish Film Festival and promotes Kurdish language teaching	Created weekly Kurdish and Turkish local newspaper circulating in London and other UK cities. Subsequently developed a digital version read within Turkey/Kurdistan
Amraz – male/45	Kurdistan-Turkey	University study	UK (2)	Moved to UK after marrying a British citizen. In Turkey was active in pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Advertising agency cross-subsidises Kurdish speaking culture and media operations	Opened advertising agency in UK, operating with offices in Istanbul and London. Subsequently started a Kurdish language, left oriented magazine

Table 1.

(continued)

Name gender/age	Country of origin	Education	Settlement country (years)	History and diaspora involvement	Business ventures
Peros – male/36	Kurdistan-Iraq	University degree/PhD	UK (26)	Came to UK as a child following attacks by Saddam Hussein regime. Social activism to promote pluralist politics and debates on sensitive issues such as women and LGBT rights within Kurdistan-Iraq	Qualified as a technology engineer and started radio station, broadcasting in English in Kurdistan-Iraq. First English language radio channel in Kurdistan for audience of returnees, young people and international workers

new business activities (Sepulveda *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, London governance has seen widespread recognition and promotion of multicultural and pluralist approaches which value diversity as central to the vitality and economic competitiveness of London (Syrett and Sepulveda, 2012).

The first phase of the research comprised extensive engagement with institutions and actors across the Kurdish and Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora communities in London. Working through gatekeepers and via a process of snowballing across the two communities, a sample of potential respondent entrepreneurs was identified. The second phase comprised conducting a series of repeat in-depth interviews, conducted in English, with ten diaspora entrepreneurs drawn from the two diaspora groups. The interviews required the respondent to talk widely across their diaspora activities including political engagement, which was often a sensitive issue. Consequently, considerable time was invested in developing trust-based relations so respondents fully understood the purposes and intended uses of the research for academic publication and the procedures adopted, including the use of pseudonyms and the anonymization of data, to ensure confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews gathered data on the background of the entrepreneur, the factors driving the development of their business ventures and other social and political activities over time, and the types and strategies which characterized their diaspora entrepreneurial activity. Key characteristics of the entrepreneurs interviewed are detailed in Table 1. Respondents ranged from 35 to 65 years and were first generation migrants born in Sri Lanka and the Kurdistan regions of Turkey and Iraq. The majority arrived in the UK as adults, although two respondents came with their families as refugees as children (aged 10 and 14). Predominantly respondents were forced to leave their homeland because of the political situation and the political activities of themselves and/or their families, and came direct to the UK. Most (eight) were established long-term residents of the UK of between 20 and 42 years, and all but two were now British citizens. All the entrepreneurs were well-educated, predominantly to university degree level and above, and had a level of prominence within their diaspora communities due to their business and other diaspora-related activities. The absence of women entrepreneur cases reflected the constrained scope for women's participation in business activities within these diaspora groups.

Interpretative analysis sought to maximise the conditions for validity and reliability in multi-case study research (Yin, 1994). Figure 1 shows the three main stages of the analysis. Analysis proceeded initially through a first-order coding process to account for themes and patterns in informant accounts, which was carried out independently by two researchers (Boyatzis, 1998; Saldaña, 2016). The two coding systems were then compared and a common
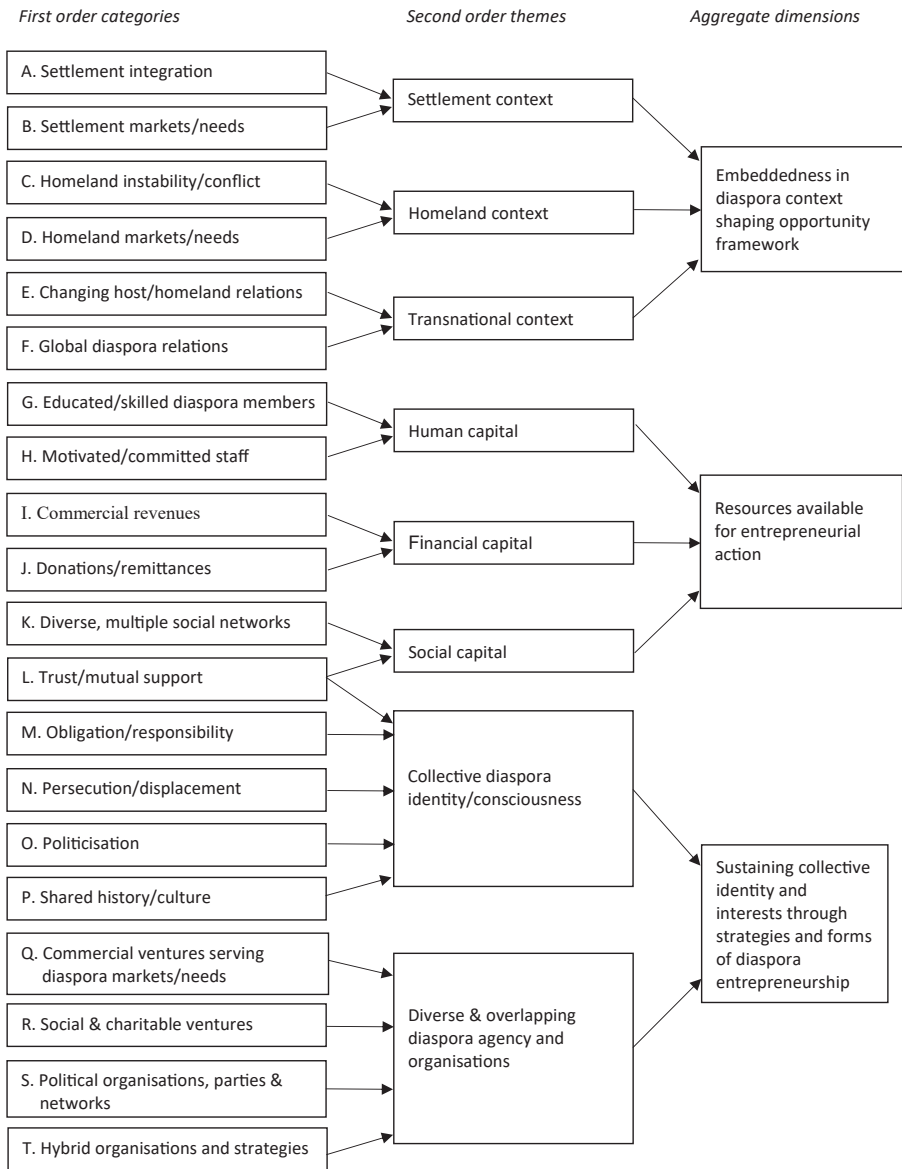
First order categories

Second order themes

Aggregate dimensions

A. Settlement integration

B. Settlement markets/needs

Settlement context

C. Homeland instability/conflict

D. Homeland markets/needs

Homeland context

Embeddedness in
diaspora context
shaping opportunity
framework

E. Changing host/homeland relations

F. Global diaspora relations

Transnational context

G. Educated/skilled diaspora members

H. Motivated/committed staff

Human capital

I. Commercial revenues

J. Donations/remittances

Financial capital

Resources available
for entrepreneurial
action

K. Diverse, multiple social networks

L. Trust/mutual support

Social capital

M. Obligation/responsibility

N. Persecution/displacement

O. Politicisation

P. Shared history/culture

Collective diaspora
identity/consciousness

Sustaining collective
identity and
interests through
strategies and forms
of diaspora
entrepreneurship

Q. Commercial ventures serving
diaspora markets/needs

R. Social & charitable ventures

S. Political organisations, parties &
networks

T. Hybrid organisations and strategies

Diverse & overlapping
diaspora agency and
organisations

Figure 1.
Analytic structure for
coding, thematic
analysis and theory
development

set of first-order categories generated to capture all key elements. A second phase of fine-grained reading of the data in relation to the literature identified patterns of convergence/divergence and relationships between the categories to derive a set of second-order themes (Gioia *et al.*, 2012). The relationship of these second-order themes to existing theorisation of diaspora development and entrepreneurial agency, led to the identification of three aggregate dimensions related to how diaspora entrepreneurship was embedded within particularities of diaspora context which shaped opportunity frameworks, resource mobilisation and the (re)production of social collectivity.

Findings: dimensions shaping diaspora entrepreneurship

Findings from the qualitative analysis identified three core dimensions embedded within particularities of diaspora context; opportunity frameworks, resource mobilisation and the (re)production of social collectivity (see Figure 1). These dimensions interacted to shape how entrepreneurs generated and pursued their venture activities.

Diaspora context shaping opportunity frameworks

The existing literature on migrant entrepreneurship has examined in detail the complex relationship between evolving opportunity structures and migrant entrepreneurial activity, particularly within host communities (Evansluong *et al.*, 2019; Hagos *et al.*, 2019; Kazlou and Klinthall, 2019; Lasalle and McElwee, 2016), but more recently also transnationally, across multiple places (Solano *et al.*, 2022). Embedded within the specific temporal and spatial formation of the diaspora context, findings here demonstrated how the opportunity frameworks for entrepreneurial action were shaped by the interaction of three factors; the nature and extent of integration within host countries, the degree of economic and political stability in homeland areas, and the political relations between host and homeland areas across the wider diaspora space.

As a global, liberal, multicultural urban centre containing multiple diaspora communities, London provided a settlement context facilitative of new venture creation and the development of multiple transnational linkages to diaspora communities. Both the UK Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish communities were well-established in London and diaspora entrepreneurs operated within existing and evolving markets and institutions. The majority of business ventures operated initially to serve a local diaspora market. As Radheya, explained for his travel and real estate business:

> Well, I mainly started with our community, our Tamil community . . . my business was mainly within our community . . . So as a businessman, I needed the engagement

But with further integration into the settlement and diaspora context, the entrepreneurs developed their ventures to other diaspora communities and homeland markets and wider non-diaspora markets.

Venture start-up and development in the cases studied took advantage of the liberal and diverse economic environment. Notably the liberal political environment enabled the development of media and publishing ventures alongside oppositional socio-political activities that would have been impossible in homeland areas. Muthuvel, who was involved in creating a number of media ventures, contrasted how journalists in Sri Lanka were "assassinated and restricted from reporting crimes committed by Sri Lankan forces in Tamil regions", with the journalistic freedom enjoyed by his media businesses based in the UK, observing:

> We have got freedom [in the UK], because we are in a democratic country . . . we are utilising the freedom to do good journalism.

Baran, who left Turkey to settle in the UK in 2008 and established a weekly Kurdish and Turkish local newspaper serving UK and Turkey/Kurdistan markets, similarly stated:

> I do not have a fear that the state will shut down our newspaper in the UK. Moreover, journalists often censor themselves in Turkey out of fear or threat from the state, security forces, judiciary or politicians. But If I write my article or news I do not need to self-censor myself in the UK. . . I can write freely here

For media and communication ventures, location in host countries provided entrepreneurs an opportunity to access rapidly developing media technology and broadcast news from a Kurdish or Tamil perspective in their languages, outside of Turkish/Sri Lankan coercive state power.

Simultaneously, it provided entrepreneurs with the chance to contribute to the construction of diaspora political and cultural identities (Keles, 2015; Syrett and Keles, 2019).

The changing homeland context was a key factor driving the nature and scale of entrepreneurial activity. Shyam, who operated health centres in the UK and India was initially unable to expand this business into Sri Lanka:

> It was very difficult to set up business in Tamil Region of Sri Lanka because of the Sir-Lankan government and Sri-Lankan army strictly control the region. If there is not stability, law of order, respect for law and human rights, it is difficult to invest in Tamil region.

Homeland entrepreneurial diaspora engagement required the cessation of conflict and a level of political stability and constitutional recognition of the rights of Kurds and Tamils. Where these conditions were absent. homeland investment was difficult or impossible to pursue. In periods of tense and oppositional homeland-diaspora relations, entrepreneurs were constrained by government restrictions and a lack of institutional trust. Conversely, when diaspora-homeland relations improved and homeland areas were in need of reconstruction and investment, new market opportunities and possibilities to influence institutional change became available to diaspora entrepreneurs.

In Sri Lanka, the gradual re-emergence of greater Tamil participation in Sri Lankan politics in the post-conflict period (after 2011), opened new channels for diaspora involvement in homeland areas. Engagement in economic and social actions to reconstruct Tamil towns and villages in the north and east of Sri Lanka was apparent in the entrepreneurial activities of Radheya, Ratnakar, Muthuvel and Rajani. Ratnakar described his homeland venture engagement:

> I am in touch with Tamil diaspora in Australia, Canada, France and the UK. . . I regularly go to Sri Lanka, at least twice a year. I am involved in the socio-economic empowerment of the Tamil Community which lost everything in the war. Now we are giving economic opportunities to the Tamil community there . . . We have started industrial estate, private schools, IT schools, Sewing School in two villages in East Providence.

For Kurdish entrepreneurs, ongoing conflict in homeland areas and the hostility of the Turkish government, continued to constrain the possibility for direct venture activity in homeland areas. When conditions permitted, ventures were developed. This was evident during the period when the de facto state of Iraqi-Kurdistan emerged, enabling Peros to launch a more liberal style radio station, and in sectors with growth potential across the Kurdistan region:

> We need to export, not import. We need an independent economy for an independent Kurdistan. We need to develop and invest in sectors other than gas and petrol. We need to rely on our natural resources, agriculture, tourism, telecommunication. That is why I have decided to invest in the tourism sector here (Olan).

A striking feature of the results was the constantly shifting and uncertain nature of the external environment shaping the opportunity frameworks for diaspora entrepreneurial action. The significance of this temporal dimension was evident in the host UK context, most notably in relation to policy moves which over time created an ever more hostile environment towards illegal immigration and aspects of immigrant political and economic activity. However, it was most strongly evident within the homeland areas of the two diasporas, where ongoing political and economic instability led to major shifts in the possibilities for homeland engagement. For example, the development of the de facto Iraqi-Kurdistan state within a highly volatile regional political landscape, produced rapidly and constantly changing possibilities for diaspora entrepreneurial engagement, as market and investment opportunities at certain times exhibited greater openness only to be followed by

subsequent periods of restricted market access. The inherent instability affecting entrepreneurial opportunity frameworks reflected the ongoing territorial disputes over statehood for these diaspora groups and linkages to wider political struggles and economic insecurity. Importantly, this ongoing instability was the norm over time, rather than the exception; a situation increasingly common for many diaspora groups given rising global levels of political and economic volatility.

Mobilising available resources
The precise range of resources available to diaspora entrepreneurs reflects the transnational diaspora context within which they are embedded, as previous studies have demonstrated (Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019; Hagos *et al.*, 2019; Kitching *et al.*, 2009; Nazareno *et al.*, 2019; Wang and Warn, 2018). Here, findings showed how the variations in stocks of human, social and financial capital across the two diasporas, reflected contextual differences in nature, size, maturity and geographical expression of the diasporas, as well as the ability of the entrepreneurs to take advantage of these resources with respect to their own social class and levels of skills, education, knowledge and access.

A defining characteristic of the cases studied was the high level of human capital evident within these individuals and the members of the diaspora community they interacted with. All entrepreneurs had high levels of formal education attainment combined with extensive economic and political experience (see Table 1). Furthermore, as high profile and respected figures within their diaspora communities, they had access to a relatively wide pool of human capital for venture development. Crucially these human resources interplayed with resources of social capital in terms of both social networks and levels of trust and reciprocity rooted in the shared identity and consciousness of diaspora members. In line with findings from other studies (Portes and Martinez, 2020; Samaratunge *et al.*, 2015; Sepulveda *et al.*, 2010), this social capital was crucial in providing resources, cross-border knowledge and information and market opportunities to enable the emergence of different types and forms of entrepreneurship.

The diaspora entrepreneurs routinely drew upon their high social position and access to diverse transnational networks and sources of social capital to pursue social and political ventures alongside economic ones:

> I have access to the Kurdish business people in the UK who can provide a certain amount of money for Kobani and Sengal's [Kurdish cities] re-construction (Peros)

Heman, similarly brought together his extensive business contacts with those from his political networks in the UK and the Kurdistan region in Turkey to raise awareness among UK Members of Parliament about the Kurdish situation, and Muthuvel deployed his extensive economic and political contacts to develop organisations supporting Sri Lankan Tamil ex-political prisoners. In this way social capital generated in one sphere was appropriated for use in other forms of diaspora activity. In all cases specific social networks were deployed by the entrepreneurs in the initiation and development of their diaspora activities, and used to access human capital, markets and financial capital within their homeland and/or within settlement communities of the wider diaspora and homeland areas.

Bringing together diverse diaspora social networks and the solidarity they generated was a key resource for entrepreneurs. Baran explained how his London based Kurdish newspaper acted as:

> A bridge between the Kurdish community organisations and Kurdish diaspora by informing about the political, cultural, and economic developments in the UK, Kurdistan and Turkey.

The diaspora community acted here as both "consumers" and "comrades", facilitating the mobilisation of diaspora advertising to support this venture. This consumer/comrade

dimension enabled entrepreneurs to access financial capital within the diaspora settlement economy through commercial business ventures, sponsorship and financial donations.

Notable with regard to mobilising resources was how individual entrepreneurs – generally well educated and with a degree of social standing – combined the use of strong and weak ties in the development and use of their overlapping social networks for varied venture activity. Strong social ties producing bonding social capital were rooted within global diaspora communities, and particularly intense where individuals had collectively endured political oppression and forced displacement. However, in developing their venturing activity, entrepreneurs combined this bonding social capital with bridging and linking forms of social capital, through utilisation of weaker social ties across a range of non-diaspora business, political and social organisations within host and homeland areas. As noted in other studies (Evans and Syrett, 2007), it is this combination of forms of bonding, bridging and linking social capital, which is critical in enabling economic and social ventures to develop beyond the constraints of particular localities and ethnic and other social groupings.

Sustaining collective identity and interests

As Elo *et al.* (2022) observe, diaspora entrepreneurs can have multiple "formal" identities, as residents, citizens or entrepreneurs (context-defined) as a result of their socio-economic engagement in multiple countries, as well as their own personal social and culturally rooted identities (self-defined). Consequently, the complex development of immigrants' entrepreneurial identities as they pursue venture activities across host, home and transnational contexts, has been shown to be central to the nature of the entrepreneurial activity and their evolving relations with wider ethnic and diaspora groupings (Abd Hamid *et al.*, 2019; Barrett and Vershinina, 2017; Zhang and Chun, 2018).

Our results showed how entrepreneurial actively served to sustain collective identity and address diaspora interests. Collective identity for the Sri Lankan Tamil and Kurdish entrepreneurs was reproduced through their ties within diaspora communities and to their homeland, and embedded within shared culture, memory and language. Notably, diaspora entrepreneurial identities were often rooted within traumatic situations related to being forcibly expelled and/or escaping from their homeland as a result of ethnic discrimination, political persecution and displacement by a dominant ethnic-centric state. For those entrepreneurs who experienced personal trauma and persecution (e.g. Ratnakar, Muthuvel, Arman) and no possibility for homeland return in the foreseeable future, forcible displacement with its resulting loss of employment, income, citizenship and status, was a major formative experience in their identity development.

> I was a victim of the war in Sri Lanka. I had to escape from the conflict. I personally encountered and experienced the violence of 1977. We had to run for life. We lost everything that we had. (Ratnakar)

For those who had not personally suffered direct persecution, either because they had moved as children with their families (e.g. Peros, Olan) or left their homeland to study in the UK (e.g. Radheya, Rajani, Heman), the process of political displacement remained highly influential, mediated through shared experiences with parents and other family, refugee and diaspora community members.

> My father was a Peshmerga [Kurdish guerrilla], fighting against Saddam Hussein's regime. When Saddam's army came to Kurdistan, we left Kurdistan and went to Syria and then we moved to the UK in 1991 with the help of the UN (Peros)

Memories of discrimination and displacement played a central role in giving meaning to the present, providing a basis for remembering who they were and maintaining group solidarity across generations and borders of nation states. Rajani explained:

because I have come here, I am settled here. I cannot really say, "oh, I am ok now. That is too selfish, because I came from there [Sri Lanka], I am concerned about my community. When they are crying, I cannot be laughing. So, I have to take part in their cry. I have to look after them. I have to sympathise [with them].

Engagement in entrepreneurial and other diaspora activities provided a means through which respondents expressed and developed their sense of personal self-identity alongside a wider sense of collective diaspora identity. For both Kurdish and Sri Lankan Tamil entrepreneurs, the evolving collective diaspora identity rooted in histories of conflict and homeland displacement was frequently highly politicized. Entrepreneurs reported complex and often intense feelings towards their homeland areas, including a strong sense of responsibility and moral obligation towards those remaining in conflict affected homeland areas, allied for some, with guilt about having left.

I cannot save myself from a psychological feeling as if I had left all my family and friends in the hell there and saved myself. I feel a terrible feeling of guilt because of this . . .. One of the reasons for publishing the Telegraf is that it is due to the sense of guilt and responsibility. (Baran)

I came [to the UK] for survival. I educated myself . . . I stayed here, lived my life. But that does not mean I could forget our people . . . there are people who died for a cause, and those left behind. That's why I want to go and help them (Radheya).

Entrepreneurial identities were embedded in a wider sense of collective identity that extended across their settlement locality and their ties to the homeland and other diaspora communities located in the UK, Europe, North America and elsewhere. This identity although not dependent on homeland return included a sense of obligation towards the homeland and, in some cases, a desire to return once liberated. This provided motivation to pursue venture activities that promoted and sustained the development of a cohesive collective diaspora identity, through agency promoting language, culture, a shared history and worldview, often alongside political campaigning for a homeland state.

As a councillor and business person, I give interviews to the newspapers, talk to the British MPs in regards to the anti-democratic policies and practices . . . For this reason, I lobby the British MPs . . .. for me, politics is passion and business for me is to fund my political passion (Heman)

By drawing upon the trust-based relations within diaspora communities, the entrepreneurial agency evident here contributed to the development of diverse local, national and transnational organisations and networks (see Table 1), addressing varied collective diaspora political, social and cultural interests. Significant here was the interlinkage between individuals and organisations to form a complex mosaic of entrepreneurial practice, which is discussed further in the following section. Interesting too were generational differences evident across the entrepreneurs, which were reflected in their differing and multiple identities. These identities were manifested in the varying relationships apparent between entrepreneurs of different generations with host, homeland and diaspora communities. For example, compared to those that came to the UK as adults, entrepreneurs largely brought up within the UK, exhibited a differing sense of host and homeland identification. This was reflected in their social networks and approach to venture development, which made greater use of weak ties through commercial enterprises, professional organizations and state bodies, particularly within the host community, and resulted in the pursuit of ventures informed by wider economic and political opportunities, not only restricted to the diaspora context.

Discussion: entrepreneurial strategies and (re)producing social collectivity

These findings, informed by the wider literature on immigrant entrepreneurship and diaspora (re)production, provide the basis for developing a model of the process generating

diaspora entrepreneurship as set out in Figure 2. Findings demonstrated how the particularities of context were fundamental to understanding the agency of the diaspora entrepreneurs studied. These demonstrated an embeddedness simultaneously territorial and relational, rooted in the evolving relationships between settlement communities, homeland and a wider transnational diaspora space over time (Bagwell, 2018; Brubaker, 2005; Davis, 2017; Solano *et al.*, 2022; Verver *et al.*, 2019). For the entrepreneurs, the economic context arising from these relationships was central, but the associated political and social context was similarly highly significant in shaping diaspora venture activity. The political dimension was particularly prominent to issues of identity and agency given the generation of both diasporas through conflict, displacement and homeland persecution (Syrett and Keles, 2019).

Diaspora entrepreneurs adopted a number of heterogeneous and hybrid entrepreneurial strategies which emerged from, and actively shaped, the evolving diaspora context, in the pursuit of varied economic, social and political objectives (Cohen, 2017). Alongside commercial operations serving particular diaspora markets (e.g. restaurants, travel, property), case analysis demonstrated the multifaceted relationship that existed between entrepreneurial ventures and diaspora engagement through heterogeneous and hybrid business strategies that combined commercial and non-pecuniary objectives. The combination of an emotional connection and solidarity to a homeland combined with feelings of responsibility and obligation (Abramson, 2017; Brah, 1996), provided a basis for diaspora entrepreneurship rooted in altruistic and philanthropic behaviours alongside traditional business concerns (Nielsen and Riddle, 2010). Critically, through their ventures, diaspora entrepreneurs not only took advantage of market and resource opportunities
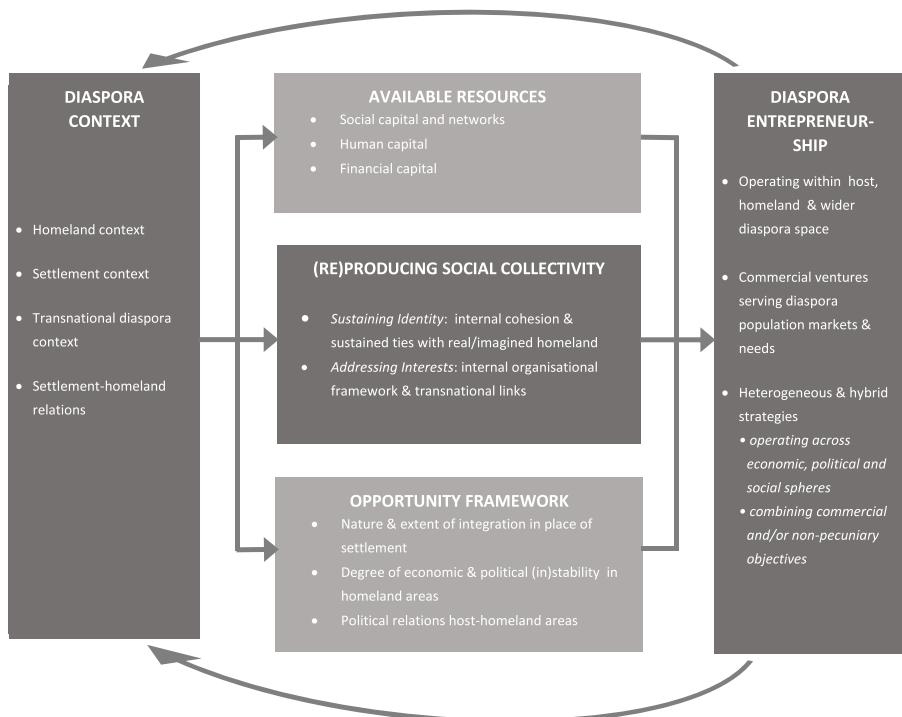
Figure 2.
Analytical model of the generation of diaspora entrepreneurship

(Kloosterman, 2010; Lasalle and McElwee, 2016; Solano *et al.*, 2022) but also contributed to their development within the diaspora context.

In seeking to understand how entrepreneurs combined economic and socio-political objectives and actions to reproduce social collectivity, three distinct strategies were apparent, although these were not mutually exclusive, and entrepreneurs often adopted more than one of these.

First, entrepreneurs developed business ventures which directly promoted diaspora identity and mobilisation. In these cases, the business venture served to explicitly advance the wider social and political objectives of the entrepreneur to enhance collective diaspora identity, mobilisation and engagement (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007; Christou and Mavroudi, 2015; Cohen, 2017). This was most strongly evident in ventures rooted in the media, cultural and communication sector across both diasporas, including television networks, radio stations, magazines, newspapers and cultural events (e.g. Muthuvel, Shyam, Solin, Olan, Arman, Amraz and Peros). A strong degree of coincidence between commercial market interests and sustaining the wider diaspora collectivity, created considerable overlap in the use of social networks, markets and human and financial resources. Economically, these ventures were a response to the growing demand from large and growing diaspora populations for cultural and communication industries reflecting diaspora identity and culture (Keles, 2015). These ventures enhanced diaspora engagement and mobilisation via the greater circulation of news, information and current political debate within the diaspora and in relation to the political institutions and actors operating in homeland and settlement areas. They also served to reproduce diaspora identity more broadly, through the preservation and promotion of language, culture and history.

Second, enterprise activity generated resources and finance capital to support social and political purpose ventures. Here the economic ventures and other diaspora activities of entrepreneurs were largely separate, but with finance, human and social capital generated from business activities used to support social, cultural and political activities within the UK settlement context, homeland areas and transnationally. Commonly, the main business activity of the entrepreneur was used to cross-subsidize engagement in other social, cultural or political purpose diaspora ventures. In the case of the Tamil entrepreneur Shyam, for example, resources generated from his media and health businesses were used to found a UK-based Forum uniting the voice of Sri Lankan Tamils. A similar strategy was adopted by Kurdish entrepreneur Olan, who used finance and social networks generated from a successful restaurant business to finance the creation and running of successive think-tank organisations which raised awareness in the UK and internationally of Kurdish oppression in homeland areas. In these cases, the relative success of business ventures permitted the entrepreneur to expand and develop other diaspora-related venture activities requiring financial support. Alongside finance, entrepreneurs used their knowledge of customers, the social networks they had built up in business, and their social standing within the diaspora community, to develop a diaspora framework of diverse social and political organisations.

Third, a number of social purpose ventures were developed, most notably to serve homeland reconstruction. Homeland areas experiencing political conflict or post-conflict adjustment generated multiple socio-economic reconstruction needs (e.g. provision of public services and infrastructures, job creation, skills and market development) and an absence of state and private investment. As other studies have demonstrated, a personal mission to enable social or ideologically motivated altruism and augment social status, can be a key driver of social entrepreneurship across these and other homeland contexts (Bolzani *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen and Riddle, 2010; Stirzaker *et al.*, 2021).

Entrepreneurs responded to the improved post-conflict situation and state recognition of Tamils, to provide support to war affected Tamil regions in North and East of Sri Lanka. As early external investors into this area, these entrepreneurs variously used their management

skills, business knowledge, networks, access to finance, and roles within charity organisations, to develop socio-economic activities and institutional conditions necessary to attract in other investors. In contrast, the absence of homeland conditions conducive to Kurdish diaspora investment limited Kurdish entrepreneurs' involvement in reconstruction activities and created a stronger focus upon media and communication businesses, predominantly based within settlement communities to serve homeland areas.

Conclusions

This paper has argued for the importance of a conceptualisation of diaspora entrepreneurship that engages directly with what constitutes a diaspora, in order to distinguish it as a particular and significant form of transnational entrepreneurship. In so doing, it contributes to the development of a wider apprehension of the connecting processes between entrepreneurship and migration (Honig, 2020; Vershinina and Rodgers, 2019). Central here is an understanding of how entrepreneurial activity constitutes a diaspora through its reproduction as a social collectivity that exists across state borders, both through sustaining a sense of identity via internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland, and addressing collective interests through an internal organisational framework and transnational links (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007).

Understood in this manner, diaspora entrepreneurial activity is embedded within particular spatially and historically constituted diaspora contexts and develops through its intersection with processes of collective diaspora development. Operating within a diaspora consciousness and identity provides a particular entrepreneurial worldview and motives for action. These can include a desire to develop the diaspora economy, connect and support homeland development and promote particular forms of social and political affiliation, engagement and mobilisation across the diaspora context (Brinkerhoff, 2016).

Diaspora entrepreneurs develop and operate business ventures within a context that crosses settlement communities, homeland areas and the wider transnational diaspora space and display multiple affiliations and social embeddedness that enables them to effect institutional change. As this diaspora context evolves though time, diaspora identities, resources and opportunity structures also change to shape, and be shaped by, diaspora entrepreneurial activity. Conceived in this way, diaspora entrepreneurship represents a distinctive form of transnational entrepreneurship rooted in understanding of both diaspora development and immigrant entrepreneurship.

By advancing a theoretically informed conceptualisation of diaspora entrepreneurship through an extreme case analysis, the paper contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, the notion of diaspora entrepreneurship requires us to develop our understanding of context and specifically notions of transnational embeddedness and associated notions of identity (Elo *et al.*, 2022). Contextually, diasporas require thinking simultaneously in terms of both territorial *and* relational based theorisations of space (Davis, 2017); physically located within particular places and territories but able to sustain a sense of collective identification beyond these, even in the absence of any prospect of homeland return. As such, incorporation of a transnational dimension requires recognition of the highly fluid, diverse and connected nature of context, space and identity, rather than a static and physical view often apparent within mixed-embeddedness analyses (Bagwell, 2018; Solano *et al.*, 2022).

Understanding entrepreneurial agency within a theorized context (Welter, 2011) is central; one theorized here in terms of the construction and sustaining of a transnational social collectivity where identity is a central construct (Agnew, 2005; Safran, 1991). Rather than a fixed, homogenous and coherent notion of identity, this is an evolving, multifaceted and contested identity, constantly being created as an ongoing process which draws upon past memories to shape current circumstances and ways of being (Christou and Mavroudi, 2015).

Coming from a certain country of origin does not therefore confer diaspora membership, a point much writing on diaspora entrepreneurship often fails to recognize.

Second, it contributes to the development of a wider understanding of everyday entrepreneurship which recognises diversity in entrepreneurial action and the need to move beyond simple dichotomies between social and economic enterprises. Embeddedness within the diaspora context produces particularities in processes and forms of immigrant entrepreneurship, which as Verver *et al.* (2019) observe, are often significantly different to those set out within the existing literature. Rather it identifies an entrepreneurial process characterized by its range of overlapping and hybrid activities operating across economic, social and political spheres (Welter *et al.*, 2017).

Our findings show the significance of entrepreneurs in the construction of diasporas, operating as key non-state actors whose activities, both commercial and those pursued for non-pecuniary objectives, shape institutional environments across settlement, homeland and wider transnational contexts. The venture activities of diaspora entrepreneurs are fundamental to both the realisation of their diverse economic, social and political aspirations and practices and to the active construction of their individual and wider collective diaspora identities. Findings from the conflict-generated Kurdish and Tamil diaspora contexts studied here demonstrate how the development of highly politicized collective identities were integral to any explanation of why and how these entrepreneurs engaged in venturing activities. The role the political dimension plays within identity formation, opportunity structures and resources has been little considered within existing entrepreneurship research (Ozasir Kacar and Essers, 2019), although it is apparent across all diaspora groupings to varying extents.

Limitations and opportunities for further research
In seeking to understand the complex relationship between entrepreneurial activity and migratory flows, this study adopted an in-depth qualitative method. As a result, the results presented here relate to the entrepreneurial activities of a very specific group of high profile, well-educated diaspora entrepreneurs operating within a particular type of conflict generated diaspora context. In this context, these diaspora entrepreneurs acted as "minority elites" (Bauböck, 2010) using their business capacities, financial means and social position to promote a homeland-related social, cultural and political project in settlement countries and in their conflict homelands, as well as enhance their own social status locally and transnationally.

Such an approach has limitations relating to the empirical scope of findings in relation to diaspora entrepreneurs and the types of venture activities they pursue across varied contexts. However, the model of diaspora entrepreneurship generated in this study provides a basis for research extending across different diaspora contexts. In order to study the interrelationship between entrepreneurial practice, identity and politics, and their impacts across different homeland and settlement places and territories, there is considerable scope for further qualitative and quantitative study. This includes research into different strategies of diaspora venture activity across a full range of entrepreneurs at different stages in their life cycles. Key areas for further investigation comprise how diaspora entrepreneurship is embedded within particular diaspora identities and contexts, how it evolves across different generations and further understanding of how it differentially impacts upon diaspora construction.

Implications for policy and practice
Understanding diaspora entrepreneurship as a social process has profound consequences for policy and practice thinking within diaspora communities in homeland and settlement regions. In homeland areas, the in-between position of diaspora entrepreneurs can make them highly significant to processes of socio-economic development, and key players in areas of

past and ongoing conflict (Brinkerhoff, 2016). As entrepreneurs often play vital roles in how such development processes unfold, critical analysis of what these roles are in practice is essential in order to promote this agency and pursue institutional alignment and policy co-ordination to maximise its positive impact (Williams, 2018). This policy and practice agenda similarly needs to avoid uncritical assumptions that the diaspora entrepreneur role is necessarily always a positive and progressive one. As well as positive impacts in relation to reconstruction and conflict resolution, diaspora entrepreneurial activity can provide a barrier to development and act to sustain conflict through the pursuit of particular economic and political interests and social status that reproduce existing power asymmetries (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Guarnizo *et al.*, 2003: Van Hear and Cohen, 2016; Smith, 2007).

In settlement areas, the ineffectiveness of many ethnic incorporation policies, including those in relation to economic inclusion and entrepreneurship, has resulted from a recurrent failure to understand the relationship between diaspora identity, socio-economic integration and immigrant agency. Integration policies have been frequently rooted within simplistic notions of identity which are unable to recognise the reality of multiple, dynamic and transnational identities and how these relate to immigrant agency. Despite the fact that diaspora entrepreneurship is often dynamic and vital within settlement areas, the failure to understand the transnational embeddedness and identity of immigrant entrepreneurs has meant that interventions designed to support such venture activity and promote greater economic inclusion have routinely failed to engage diaspora populations. Such diaspora populations are often suspicious of host state policy agendas surrounding nationality, citizenship and identity and feel marginalised by dominant political narratives. In order to develop effective policy interventions in settlement, homeland and transnational contexts that simultaneously promote progressive elements of diaspora entrepreneurial practice and minimize any negative consequences, these need to be rooted from the outset within a contextualized appreciation of the particularities and realities of agency, identity and politics of different diaspora populations.

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