Diasporas, agency and enterprise in settlement and homeland contexts: Politicised entrepreneurship in the Kurdish diaspora

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ABSTRACT

Through its focus on state-diaspora relations, existing research has given limited consideration to the role of non-state entrepreneurial actors in understanding diaspora politicisation. This paper addresses this research gap by examining the contextually embedded relationship between diaspora politicisation and entrepreneurial activity within diaspora settlement and homeland spaces. Findings are presented of original qualitative research with Kurdish diaspora entrepreneurs based in Europe operating in the media and publishing industries. Results demonstrate how the intersection between diaspora identity, opportunity frameworks and available resources generates forms of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship, and how these venture activities contribute to the transnational (re)production of diaspora identity and the mobilisation of locally rooted diaspora populations. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to enhancing current understanding of diaspora entrepreneurship and the significance of non-state actors within the diaspora politicisation process, and their relevance to policy thinking across homeland and settlement contexts.

1. Introduction

The role of diasporas influencing the politics and policies of their host and home countries has generated a growing body of literature. Whereas the established role of certain diasporas as political actors is well documented (Shain & Barth, 2003; Smith, 2000), recent studies have demonstrated how a wide range of diaspora communities are now actively engaged in the political process across a range of spatial contexts, from democratic states to conflict and post-conflict zones (Adamson, 2016; Burgess, 2014; Cohen, 2017; Shain & Barth, 2003; Smith, 2007). Studies have particularly focused upon the active role of states in mobilising diasporas (Ho, 2011; Délano & Gamlen, 2014) and this has often been at the expense of analysis of the practice of non-state actors. However the political practice of a range of transnational institutions, entrepreneurs and civil society actors can play a central role within specific diaspora contexts, as for example in diasporas generated through conflict situations (Adamson & Demetriou, 2007; Koinova, 2014).

In seeking to better understand the role of non-state actors in diaspora politics, the realm of entrepreneurship and venture activity has been largely neglected in existing research. An emerging body of research into diaspora entrepreneurs has identified how they exploit their strong social networks within diaspora communities and homeland

areas to pursue interests that extend beyond business into the social and political spheres (Elo, 2016; Gillespie, Riddle, Sayre, & Sturges, 1999; Nielsen & Riddle, 2010; Riddle, Hrivnak, & Nielsen, 2010). However, this research has rarely considered how this diaspora entrepreneurship is distinct from other forms of transnational entrepreneurship, and critically, how this venture activity relates to the political processes that (re)create and (re)produce diaspora identity and mobilisation rooted within the political context of particular host-homeland relations.

It is this gap in our current understanding of the interaction of diaspora entrepreneurs with processes of diaspora politicisation embedded within settlement localities and diaspora and homeland spaces, that this paper addresses. By drawing together insights from the international relations literature on diaspora politics and agency (Adamson, 2016; Burgess, 2014; Koinova, 2011) with the business literature on transnational entrepreneurship (Honig & Drori, 2010; Portes, Haller, & Guarnizo, 2002; Riddle et al., 2010), the paper focuses upon the intertwining of political and business action by diaspora entrepreneurs operating in transnational channels, to better understand the motivations and practices of these key non-state actors.

In order to address this neglected area of study we develop the notion of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship, an original concept that extends the scope of the existing study of diaspora politics and entrepreneurship through broadening theoretical and empirical

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understanding of the role of these non-state actors. Embedded within specific socio-political contexts characterised by the presence of different actors with different objectives and capacities, a fuller understanding of the part that business entrepreneurs play in diaspora politicisation processes enhances understanding of both diaspora entrepreneurship and diaspora political agency. Specifically the paper seeks to answer two questions. What are the processes driving the development of forms of politicised diaspora entrepreneurial activity? And how does such diaspora entrepreneurial activity contribute to the spatially embedded processes of diaspora politicisation?

To explore the relation between diaspora entrepreneurs, business development and the (re)production of diaspora identity and mobilisation, a contextualised analysis of the particularities of homeland and host areas in shaping politicisation and business processes is developed. Here a particular context is considered; that of a conflict generated diaspora lacking a homeland state. For 'stateless' diasporas, the absence of a homeland state is fundamental in shaping the nature of diaspora politics and the context for entrepreneurial action (Adamson & Demetriou, 2007; Koinova, 2014). In these contexts, non-state actors may perform crucial transnational roles in both sustaining conflicts as well as promoting peace and reconstruction and hence are of considerable relevance to policy development (Adamson, 2013; Beyene, 2015; Shain, 2002; Smith and Stares, 2007). Specifically, this research focuses upon entrepreneurs from the stateless Kurdish diaspora - one generated via a series of conflict situations within the homeland area since the 1970s and settled in localities across European states - who operate in media and publishing industries strongly associated with the development of diaspora identity and engagement.

This paper starts with a consideration of current theorising of diaspora politics, politicisation and diaspora entrepreneurship and their relationship with particular host-homeland contexts, particularly in relation to conflict generated diasporas. The subsequent sections set out the study methodology and context before moving on to present results from original primary data. Analysis of in depth interviews with Kurdish entrepreneurs, purposively selected due to their simultaneous political engagement and development of publishing and media business ventures, identifies key factors driving the emergence and development of different forms of politicised entrepreneurship. The conclusion of the paper considers the implications of the notion of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship for current conceptions of diaspora entrepreneurship and understanding the significance of non-state actors within the politicisation process, as well as for future research agendas and policy development.

2. Politicising diasporas, entrepreneurial action and space

The large scale and complex migrant flows of recent decades have resulted in the presence of numerous diaspora communities globally, each characterised by multiple linkages between settlement and homeland areas and constituted within a wider transnational space. Adamson and Demetriou (2007: 497) state that: "A diaspora can be identified as a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to: (1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and (2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organisational framework and transnational links". Building on this definition, recent scholarship has demonstrated how diasporas are constantly being created, recreated and actively constructed in terms of their identities and their organisations and linkages (Abramson, 2017; Adamson, 2013; Christou & Mavroudi, 2015; McConnell, 2013). This processual view of diaspora development militates against considering diasporas as fixed, homogeneous entities, instead recognising they are routinely comprised of varied and indeed competing groups, and that coming from a certain country of ancestral origin does not automatically confer diaspora membership.

Understanding of what constitutes a diaspora also recognises the spatially embedded nature of diaspora identities, linkages and institutions that are developed across places of settlement and identification with a real or imagined homeland. The construction of diaspora collective identification is rooted in a narrative of dispersion from a homeland, shared memories and myths, and a homeland attachment that exists beyond borders (Brah, 1996; Brubaker, 2005; Safran, 1991). Although physically rooted in specific territories and places, diasporas are able to sustain a sense of collective identification across and beyond localities which is not dependent on homeland return (Georgiou, 2006). At the same time, diaspora identification co-exists with other senses of identity related to areas of settlement, often in complex ways (Smith, 2003; Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner, & Nagel, 2012).

2.1. Diasporas politics and politicisation

Although initially in academic analysis diaspora communities were often portrayed as victims or passive actors, it has become recognised that membership of a diaspora implies potential empowerment, based on its capacity to mobilise support and influence across settlement, homeland and global space (Butler, 2001; Cohen, 2008). The agency of diasporas to effect political change is well evidenced across a variety of democratic and non-democratic contexts (Koinova, 2011; Smith, 2007; Vertovec, 2005). Studies have demonstrated how diasporas play an increasing role in homeland politics (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016; Burgess, 2014; Kapur, 2010) and are often directly involved in high profile conflicts, peace building and campaigns for homeland recognition of stateless groups (Demmers, 2007; Fair, 2005; Koinova, 2014). Central to this process has been the ever-widening availability of communications technologies, enabling cheap and routine connectivity within the diaspora across host and homeland spaces (Keles, 2016).

Study of the process of diaspora politicisation increasingly recognises the importance of the spatially embedded interaction between the dimensions of diaspora identity and diaspora engagement/mobilisation (Abramson, 2017; Fischer, 2017; Van Hear & Cohen, 2017). Diaspora identity, engagement and mobilisation are politically constituted through a complex interrelation between a homeland area (both real and imagined) and multiple dispersed places, located in distinct settlement contexts (Demmers, 2007; Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003). Together these form a wider diaspora space in, and through which, host-homeland interactions take place, with a diaspora's political claims often developed in a larger transnational context (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016; Lyons & Mandaville, 2012).

Research into the political processes of diaspora engagement and mobilisation has tended to centre upon state-centred channels and mechanisms (Délano & Gamlen, 2014). Such research has explored processes of lobbying and other political actions influencing host state foreign policies, and homeland state engagement practices aimed at accessing the skills and resources of diaspora communities or embracing members back into the homeland state political system (Collyer, 2014; Gamlen, Cummings, Vaaler, & Rossouw, 2013; Ragazzi, 2014). Yet much current theorising has failed to set out how the causal processes for diaspora politicisation are jointly affected by conditions in the homeland *and* settlement localities, and state-centred approaches on their own remain unable to explain variant patterns of diaspora mobilisation across all host-homeland contexts, as Koinova (2014) has demonstrated in relation to conflict generated diasporas.

2.2. Non-state actors and diaspora entrepreneurs

To understand diaspora politicisation fully requires consideration of the role of 'non-state' actors and institutions operating through transnational channels to engage and mobilise diaspora communities. Beyond the nation state an array of civil society, religious and business sector actors and institutions operate transnationally to influence the nature and scale of diaspora social exchanges (Faist, 2008; Vertovec,

2009), yet the study of their role in diaspora politicisation remains underdeveloped. Some research has considered the role played by diaspora organisations in constructing diaspora identities, building communities and acting as mediators between locations, people and institutions (Fischer, 2017; Van Gorp & Smets, 2015). Other studies have identified the important role of individual, non-state, diaspora activists; that is those who make claims on behalf of their original homelands and act in response to global and local opportunity structures (Adamson, 2013; Koinova, 2014; Smith & Stares, 2007). Here the term 'political entrepreneur' has been applied (Adamson & Demetriou, 2007; Koinova, 2014), although the notion of the 'entrepreneur' is used in its generic sense, relating to individuals who exhibit qualities of action orientation and opportunity recognition, and not in the specific sense of individuals pursuing business venturing activity.

Within the business literature, the term diaspora entrepreneurship is seen as a particular form of the wider phenomenon of transnational entrepreneurship. The notion of transnational entrepreneurship relates to entrepreneurs with multiple affiliations to cultures and places realising opportunities arising from increased economic globalisation and cross-border activities (Drori, Honig, & Wright, 2009; Honig & Drori, 2010; Morawska, 2004). Transnational entrepreneurs operate in complex cross-national domains with dual cultural, institutions and economic features, which enable entrepreneurial strategies that seek to exploit business opportunities in both host and homeland areas (Drori, Honig, & Ginsberg, 2010). Within this wider focus upon transnational entrepreneurs, Riddle et al. (2010: 398) define diaspora entrepreneurs as: "migrants and their descendants who establish entrepreneurial activities that span the national business environments of their countries of origin and countries of residence". The emphasis here is upon the important role diaspora entrepreneurs and communities can play in shaping transnational flows of capital, commodities, labour, knowledge and business activities (Portes et al., 2002; Riddle et al., 2010).

Study of transnational diaspora entrepreneurship has demonstrated how high trust relations and shared social norms enable economic linkages and reduce transaction costs (Yeung, 2004), whilst diaspora networks provide varying levels of resources, cross border knowledge and information, and market opportunities (Kitching, Smallbone, & Athayde, 2009; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Sepulveda, Syrett, & Lyon, 2010; Terjesen & Elam, 2009). Existing studies have also examined the economic and social development consequences of homeland states political mobilisation of transnational diaspora economic resources and entrepreneurial activity (Brinkerhoff, 2016). These studies have centred upon processes mobilising financial resources in relation to migrant remittances, foreign investment and humanitarian aid, as well as promoting entrepreneurial activity, skilled labour migration and the wider establishment of liberal market economic activities (Brinkerhoff, 2008; Ionescu, 2006; Kuznetsov & Sabel, 2006; Newland & Tanaka, 2010; Syrett & Sepulveda, 2011).

However studies of diaspora entrepreneurship (e.g. Elo, 2016; Riddle et al., 2010; Sharma & Montes, 2013) have to date largely failed to specify how it is distinct from other forms of transnational entrepreneurship and critically, how it relates to the particularities of what constitutes a diaspora. Research has demonstrated that diaspora entrepreneurs display different motivations and practices in that they invest in their countries of origin for more than just pecuniary reasons (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Gillespie et al., 1999; Nielsen & Riddle, 2010; Riddle et al., 2010). However, these studies have not explored in detail the reasons for this, and specifically how these differences in entrepreneurial practice relate to membership of a social collectivity that exists across state borders to sustain both a particular identity and an ability to address collective interests. An understanding of diaspora development that emphasises the constant (re)creation and construction of diaspora identities, linkages and organisational forms, requires that diaspora entrepreneurship is understood in relation to these ongoing processes.

This failure to conceptualise diaspora entrepreneurship in these

terms explains why the relationship between entrepreneurial activity and processes of diaspora politicisation has remained largely unexplored. Furthermore, despite recognition that diaspora entrepreneurs operate within complex cross-national domains, only limited attention has been given to the broader political context within which such activities are embedded. Yet the political context matters. The nature and extent of transnational linkages, both formal and informal, and the opportunities provided for engagement between diaspora communities and homeland areas are shaped by a range of factors related to the particularities of host-homeland contexts (Ahmadov & Sasse, 2016; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Kapur, 2010). Politicised identities are largely developed within places of settlement (Clifford, 1994). In liberal democratic countries, diaspora communities can benefit from recognition of multicultural rights that allows the pursuit of ethnic identities and homeland-oriented claims, whilst their degree of inclusion/exclusion within host communities influences the nature and extent of homeland orientation (Burgess, 2014; Demmers, 2007).

2.3. The political context of conflict generated diasporas

The importance of political context is especially apparent in the case of conflict generated diasporas, where the particularities of homeland and host contexts are strongly apparent in driving the diaspora politicisation process (Adamson, 2013; Adamson & Demetriou, 2007; Smith & Stares, 2007). In these contexts of struggle and conflict, highly politicised identities frequently emerge and become consolidated (Demmers, 2007; Lyon & Uçarer, 2001), playing important roles in spreading as well as moderating conflict situations (Kaldor-Robinson, 2002).

Central to the politicisation of collective identification in relation to conflict generated diasporas is shared trauma resulting from episodes of persecution, conflict and displacement, accompanied by strong feelings of guilt and/or shame for leaving or 'abandoning' the homeland (Koinova, 2016a; Ramanathapillai, 2006). The resulting shared histories provide an associated collective sense of responsibility and moral obligation for action to improve homeland conditions (Eyerman, 2004; Koinova, 2011) and a source of resentment and anger that drives political action to redress past wrongs (Alexander, 2004; Vollhardt, 2009).

For conflict generated diaspora communities settled in liberal democratic states, processes of political engagement and mobilisation are realised through both state based and other transnational channels (Koinova, 2014, 2016b). However in relation to homeland engagement, conflict generated diasporas display quite different characteristics of governmentality, particularly where the diaspora lacks its own homeland state. Volatile homeland central and subnational states exhibit competition for institutional control (Raleigh & Linke, 2018), often creating active hostility to elements of 'stateless' diaspora communities in settlement countries. In such situations, as Adamson and Demetriou (2007: 505) argue, it is "non-state political entrepreneurs" rather than state political elites, who are central to the construction of diaspora identity and transnational practice. Where state engagement policies are absent, ineffective or hostile to diaspora communities, business entrepreneurs can play an influential role in mobilisation and identity development, using the human, financial and social capital they mobilise and exploit transnationally for business purposes, for political ones too.

To date there has been no in depth study of these politicised diaspora entrepreneurs, the term we use here to draw together and extend understanding of the 'political entrepreneur' and the 'diaspora entrepreneur' within the existing academic literature. The rest of this paper addresses the interrelationship between transnational diaspora entrepreneurs and processes of political engagement, mobilisation and identity formation within a particular context; that of a conflict generated, stateless diaspora. Through developing the notion of the politicised diaspora entrepreneur, we seek to capture and explore the practice of those entrepreneurs who are operating in transnational

channels in the pursuit of both economic and political objectives within a given diaspora context. In so doing, we aim to extend existing conceptualisation of diaspora entrepreneurship, and develop our understanding of the significant role of non-state actors in processes of diaspora politicisation.

3. Research method

The embedded nature of the relation between diaspora entrepreneurial practice and politicisation processes requires a contextually informed understanding of action rooted within a diaspora space constituted by multiple places across settlement and homeland areas. The focus of study are entrepreneurs who form part of the Kurdish diaspora settled in Europe, and operate in the media and publishing sector. The Kurdish diaspora is a 'stateless' one, with an ongoing history of political struggle in the absence of a homeland state, and a well-established set of diverse diaspora communities within Europe as well as globally, which display a degree of common experience and established political and economic links. The media and publishing industries provides a particularly insightful context for exploring the relationship between processes of diaspora politicisation and entrepreneurial practice. The ongoing growth of diverse media and communication related businesses that facilitate routine and everyday knowledge exchange across diaspora space, play a highly influential role in diaspora mobilisation and the construction of diaspora identity.

The research method comprised two elements. First an analysis of existing secondary sources to understand the politicisation of the Kurdish diaspora and the development of media and publishing industries within the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and their relationship with state authorities in homeland and settlement areas. Second, in depth qualitative study of the actions of a select number of politically engaged Kurdish entrepreneurs operating within the media and publishing sector, active across settlement places in Europe and their homeland areas. The focus upon the entrepreneur provided the opportunity to examine their role as key non-state political actors. Primary research comprised a first phase of identifying and conducting initial discussions with Kurdish entrepreneurs operating across Europe, in Sweden, Germany and the UK, and Kurdistan, in order to gain an understanding of differences between settlement contexts. This was followed by a second phase comprising a series of in depth interviews with nine politically engaged Kurdish entrepreneurs identified through known gatekeepers and a process of snowballing within Kurdish communities across Europe.

Participating entrepreneurs were purposively selected on the basis of their involvement in the setting up and running of business ventures in the media and publishing sector and their political engagement. Key characteristics of these entrepreneurs are set out in Table 1. Respondents comprised eight men and one woman, a consequence of the low number of women entrepreneurs operating within the sector. They were aged between 36 and 56, reflecting that participants had established business ventures and political careers. The entrepreneurs were predominantly educated to university degree level and a number had active links within the intellectual Kurdish diaspora class. The majority originated from Kurdistan-Turkey with two respondents from Kurdistan-Iraq. Most were long term residents of over 20 years in Germany, the UK and Sweden, although three had settled more recently.

A major challenge of this research was to gain access to research subjects. At the time the research was conducted (2016–2017), the Kurdish homeland context was highly politicised as a result of the war against the Islamic State, human rights abuses in the Kurdistan Region of Turkey, and political developments in Kurdistan-Iraqi and the Kurdistan Region of Syria. Kurdish entrepreneurs were highly suspicious of researchers due to reports of the Turkish state using so-called "researchers" or "journalists" to collect information about opposition figures living in Europe (Guardian, 2017). As a result, those involved in the re-production of alternative political opinions were extremely cautious over who they would speak to. The sensitivity of the topic area required building trust-based relationships with entrepreneurs over time in order for them to agree to participate in the research and necessitated focus on a small number of in depth cases. Those interviewed were involved in broader Kurdish diaspora politics but not directly in party politics. Research participants were fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research for academic publication. Procedures were adopted to ensure confidentiality, which included the use of pseudonyms and the anonymisation of data. Interviews were conducted in Kurdish and recorded by hand rather than tape recorded, and subsequently translated into English.

The semi-structured interview schedule gathered data on the entrepreneur, their business activities and political engagement, and how their political and business activities developed over time. Interview transcripts were analysed to capture the key factors that had driven their development of entrepreneurial activity and its relation to their particular engagement with the development of a collective form of Kurdish identity and diaspora politics. Qualitative analysis involved the development of a coding guide to facilitate cross-case thematic analysis of the transcripts of the nine entrepreneurs. The initially identified parent nodes were then consolidated into three key themes in a second stage of analysis. All data were coded by two researchers to ensure reliability and consistency. Interview data were supplemented with data gathered through interviews with a number of key informants within the various Kurdish communities. These data were used to ensure a full understanding of the local context, confirm the main themes identified, and triangulate research findings.

4. Kurdish diaspora politicisation and the media and publishing industries

The homeland area of Kurdistan is situated within the national jurisdictions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria and is home to an estimated 35 million Kurds. The ethno-centric nation-building projects pursued in these four nation states have routinely denied the Kurds their identity, culture, homeland and political representation, often via force of arms.

Table 1
Entrepreneur characteristics.

Entrepreneur (Gender/Age)	Country of Origin	Education	Settlement country/Length of residency	Type of business venture
Zana (male/56 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	Germany/1 year	Newspaper & TV station
Adar (male/56 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	Germany/22 years	Publisher
Sanar (male/44 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	Germany/23 years	TV production & monthly local magazine
Roni (male/41 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	UK/28 years	Community radio & newspaper; think-tanks; food industry
Solin (female/45 years)	Kurdistan-Iraq	University degree	UK/21 years	Online magazine and quarterly journal
Baran (male/37 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	Further Education College	UK/6 year	Weekly local newspaper
Alan (male/45 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	University study	UK/2 years	Radio station, magazine & advertising agency
Shwan (male/36 years)	Kurdistan-Iraq	University degree/PhD	UK/26 years	Radio station
Azad (male/55 years)	Kurdistan-Turkey	University degree	Sweden/35 years	Publishing & printing

The subsequent instability in the region has generated mass displacement and refugee flows (Keles, 2015; Vali, 1998).

Although large scale Kurdish immigration to Europe started in the 1960s in the form of work migration from the Kurdish region of Turkey (Keles, 2015), subsequent Kurdish migration has been predominantly generated by discrimination, persecution and war in the wider contested territory of Kurdistan. From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, the intensive war between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) created a significant Kurdish influx into Europe. Further major flows of Kurdish migrants to Europe came from Iraq, as result of displacement and mass killing of Kurds, and the suppression of Kurdish armed insurrections in Iraq and Turkey (van Bruinessen, 2000). Together with refugee flows from Iran and most recently Syria, these varied migrations have created a large and diverse Kurdish diaspora in Europe. However the statelessness of Kurds has led to their relative invisibility officially within settlement countries (Holgate, Keles, & Kumarappan, 2012; King, Thomson, Mai, & Keles, 2008). In the absence of reliable statistical information, the total European Kurdish population is estimated at over 1.5 million, with the majority from the Kurdistan Region of Turkey, and the largest settlement populations in Germany, the UK, Sweden and France.

As political conflict and discrimination in homeland areas has continued, the majority of this Kurdish diaspora has abandoned plans for return. In this context, politicisation has been driven by the construction of a collective Kurdish identity across the diaspora and an increased orientation and engagement with the homeland, enabled by communication technologies and the development of diaspora institutions and networks. As van Bruinessen (2000: 2) notes: "It was exile that transformed Kurdistan from a vaguely defined geographical entity into a political ideal". The arrival of a growing number of refugee Kurdish intellectuals from the 1970s led to the formation of associations and networks across Europe. The intensification of the war between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish state led to the spread of the conflict to Europe and heightened politicisation within the Kurdish diaspora (Curtis, 2005; Keles, 2015; van Bruinessen, 1999). This process was further strengthened by the Saddam regime's attacks on the Kurds in Kurdistan-Iraq, and subsequent ISIS attacks on Kurdish Yezidis and Kurds in Rojava/Syria. The result of these varied conflict situations are diverse diaspora communities and competing influences upon the transnational construction of Kurdish diaspora identities.

The combination of ongoing conflict situations and a condition of statelessness, has consistently constrained possibilities for institutional access through state channels to homeland areas. In consequence, non-state actors and institutions have been the primary drivers for the production of a collective Kurdish identity and provided the transnational channels for increased mobilisation. The Kurdish intellectual refugee population played a key role in the renaissance of Kurdish cultural production that spread to other parts of the Kurdish diaspora and back to homeland areas (Institut-Kurde de Paris, 2002; Izady, 1992); a process enabled by liberal policies in Western settlement countries. Kurdish diaspora communities have increasingly become the voice for the Kurds; lobbying for their homeland, increasing international awareness of the Kurdistan question, and providing financial support for various Kurdish humanitarian, cultural and political organisations.

The emergence of a range of Kurdish owned media, publishing and communication enterprises across Europe has played a crucial role in the construction of collective Kurdish identities through the production of language, culture and news, to counter the hegemonic state discourses in their occupied homeland, and providing transnational channels for engagement and mobilisation (Keles, 2015; Romano, 2002; Sheyholislami, 2011). Initial development in the 1970s centred upon the emergence of a number of book and newspaper publishing ventures, first in Sweden, with the creation of a Kurdistan Press newspaper and a number of Kurdish publishing houses (*Firat, Nudem, Welat, Reya Teze, Roja Nu* and *APEC*) with more developing subsequently in Berlin in the

1990s. Publication of the Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Politika* (Free Politics) started in Germany following bombings of its Istanbul offices in 1994, and the Kurdish daily newspaper *Yeni Özgür Politika* has been published here since 2006.

Hassanpour (1998: 53) noted how the first Kurdish language TV channel (*MED TV)*, launched in 1995 in London and Brussels, transcended: *"the international borders which since 1918 have divided the land in which Kurds live. The channel allowed the Kurds, for the first time in their history, to establish a powerful mode of communication among themselves, and undermine the state-centred geopolitical order that has reduced them to the status of helpless minorities."* *MED TV* subsequently evolved through a number of incarnations across different European countries (UK, Belgium, France, Denmark) and new Kurdish TV channels have subsequently been established by the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, with ten transnational channels currently operating across the cultural, political and religious spectrum. Recent years have seen the development of new digital media, communication and IT industries, including the development of the first Kurdish language search engine, started in 2014 by a Swedish based Kurdish entrepreneur.

The creation and development of many of these media businesses has often been a highly politicised process in the face of active contestation by homeland and sometimes host state authorities. For example there have been consistent attempts to restrict Kurdish TV broadcasting by the Turkish state both within Turkey as well as in settlement countries, with the result that broadcasting licenses for certain Kurdish TV channels have been revoked in a number of European states on the basis of stated security fears.

5. Understanding the development of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship

To understand the evolving practice of diaspora entrepreneurs across place and space, in depth research centred on nine Kurdish entrepreneurs based in Germany, Sweden and the UK. A brief profile of the respondents as business entrepreneurs and political activists is set out in Table 2. All had business ventures in the media and publishing sector and were politically engaged, although the nature and extent of this engagement varied. All enterprises operated transnationally across places of settlement, the wider diaspora space and homeland areas, albeit again to varying degrees. Business ventures were predominantly created initially to serve either the Kurdish market within the settlement context and/or the wider Kurdish diaspora communities settled across European states (e.g. Germany, Sweden, UK, Netherlands, France, Belgium). From this base, a number expanded to serve homeland populations in Kurdistan when circumstances allowed. However, the TV station and newspaper business set up by Zana and his colleagues was from the outset created to serve homeland and diaspora communities, and the radio station launched by Shwan was developed to broadcast in Iraqi-Kurdistan.

To understand the processes driving politicised diaspora entrepreneurial activity, interview analysis identified three key themes: a developing politicised diaspora identity, resource availability and opportunity frameworks across host-homeland areas. Within the specific context of enterprises operating within the media and publishing sector, the presence and interplay between these three elements was crucial in understanding how and why entwined entrepreneurial and political practice emerged and developed, and how this contributed to processes of diaspora identity construction, engagement and mobilisation.

5.1. Politicised diaspora identity

Central to understanding the development of these actors' entrepreneurial activities was the nature of their evolving politicised identities within the Kurdish diaspora. Pre-migration political engagement and traumatic experiences of repression and conflict were fundamental in shaping these entrepreneurs personal political identities

Table 2
Entrepreneur Profiles.

Zana was imprisoned for his political activities and was a founding member of a Kurdish political party and cultural foundation He moved to Germany in 2017 and co-founded an internet based newspaper and TV company for Turkish and diaspora audiences to oppose the Turkish government.

Shwan came to the UK in 1991 at 10 years old following attacks on Kurds by the Saddam Hussein regime. Qualified as a technology engineer, in 2009 he started an English language radio station in Kurdistan-Iraq for an audience of returnees, young people and international workers.

Azad was involved in Kurdish political movements in Turkey in the 1970s and became a refugee to Sweden in 1982 after the declaration of martial law. He established a publishing and printing business in Sweden in 1987, and in 2012 a publishing house in Kurdistan/Turkey.

Baran left Turkey to settle in the UK in 2008 following political persecution. He became a publisher of a weekly Kurdish and Turkish local newspaper that circulates in London and other UK cities, plus a digital version read in Kurdistan/ Turkey.

Sanar was arrested due to his political activism in Turkey and moved to Germany in 1994. He worked for a range of Kurdish based media organisations before launching a monthly cultural magazine in Kurdish and German in 2015, whilst also producing TV programmes for Kurdish TV stations.

Solin came to the UK in 1996 from Kurdistan-Iraq following the civil war where she had a leadership position within the Iraqi Communist Party. In London, she created an online feminist, cultural and political magazine in Kurdish and English and a quarterly journal published in Kurdistan-Iraq.

Alan was the local chairperson for the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) when he moved to the UK in 2016. Here he re-launched his advertising agency to operate between Istanbul and London and created a Kurdish radio station and, leftist oriented Kurdish magazine.

Adar became involved in the Kurdish political movement in Turkey following the 1991 attacks on Kurds by the Saddam Hussein regime. Forced to leave, he moved to Germany in 1995 where he founded a printing business in 2002, and later two publishing houses.

Roni arrived in London with his family in 1989 as a refugee aged 14. Roni's various entrepreneurial ventures include a community radio and newspaper, think-tank organisations and restaurants used to cross finance these other ventures.

and motivations. In six of the cases, individuals had fled their home in Kurdistan-Turkey and Iraq due to their experiences of direct state persecution as a result of their involvement in political activity across a period ranging from the 1970s to the time of study in 2016/17. In other cases, respondents had moved as children with their families fleeing direct political persecution as part of a family re-union. Common personal experiences of trauma, displacement and becoming a political exile and part of developing diaspora networks, fostered strong shared emotions. These, combined with an emergent sense of common identification with a Kurdish homeland and culture rooted in the absence of their own Kurdish state, together provided the basis for a developing group consciousness. In addition the entrepreneurs reported a sense of obligation and responsibility to act given their relative freedom to do so, which translated politically into active support for promoting Kurdish identity and culture, both across the wider diaspora space and their homeland region.

This political commitment manifested itself through two interrelated fields of entrepreneurial action; that of support for the preservation and promotion of Kurdish culture and language, and the dissemination of knowledge, information, news and debate about the Kurdish condition. A number of the entrepreneurial ventures were committed to the advancement of Kurdish culture, and particularly the Kurdish language. Adar, for example, had through his German based publishing house published over 300 books on Kurdish literature, language and culture, selling these across the diaspora in Europe as well as to universities in the Kurdistan regions of Turkey and Iraq. These ventures not only served business interests but were also conceived of as a political act; one which sought to fight against the persecution of the Kurds in homeland areas, and promote the idea of creating a homeland Kurdish state. As Adar stated:

"Our reproduction of the Kurdish culture can be interpreted as a political and patriotic position and a response against those countries which deny

the Kurdish existence and their self-determination and language."

And Azad, who runs a publishing business in Sweden, expressed a similar sentiment:

"The culture we produce is a political stance against those who forbid our language. It was impossible to produce Kurdish culture in our own country. Our language is still banned by the Turkish state"

This strong commitment evident to Kurdish language and literature as central to the Kurdish identity reflected the background and social position of a number of these entrepreneurs. As university educated refugees, a number of whom formed part of the wider Kurdish refugee intellectual community, a strong, shared commitment was evident in recognising the importance of language, literature and the ability to express ideas as central to notions of Kurdish identity, as well as the need to pass this on to subsequent generations:

"If the Kurdish language disappears, the idea of establishing a Kurdish state will die too. The idea of having a state closely depends on the existence of a language. Therefore we spend our money and time to keep our language alive"

For some respondents, their political mission went beyond just promoting the Kurdish language, and extended to pursuing its critical development. The case of Solin exemplifies this position, with her viewing her feminist magazine ventures as providing a platform to address prevailing patriarchy and sexism within Kurdish culture.

The second interrelated element of politicised entrepreneurial practice was a commitment to providing up to date news and information on the condition of Kurds both within homeland areas as well as within the places of settlement, through newspapers, magazines, websites and television channels. Critical here was an identified need to counter the dominant discourses arising from the states in the homeland areas (Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran), to present a Kurdish viewpoint and 'worldview'. Although the principal audience was Kurdish populations in host and homeland areas, these ventures also served to inform non-Kurdish media and political audiences in settlement countries and homeland states, to advance the ongoing struggle for greater political recognition. Baran, whose digital version of his weekly newspaper provides up to date news on political developments to audiences in Turkey/Kurdistan, noted:

"The Kurdish media and TV channels have been shut down by the Turkish government again. Journalists are arrested. In this context, we do not only provide news to the Kurdish diaspora, but we inform the Kurdish people in Kurdistan via the internet from the Kurdish perspective."

Zana, who runs a TV and newspaper venture in Germany, set out a similar commitment, albeit one that looked beyond serving only Kurds:

"we provide objective news to the peoples of Turkey including the Kurds … to create an intellectual discussion platform for writers and columnists with the different political backgrounds to contribute to the struggle for peace and democracy in Turkey".

Across the entrepreneurs, a political commitment to action was apparent that was actively producing politicised identities, which shaped, and were in turn shaped by, their business practice. Complex, multiple identities were evident here. These reflected the personalities, political and ideological positions and experiences of individual actors from different part of Kurdistan, as well as the particular histories and geographies of different host and homeland communities and their generational and gendered experiences. Multiple identities, political positions and aspirations were informed by a common political commitment to Kurdish culture and identity and enhancing knowledge of the condition of Kurdish communities. Yet whilst for some their common political identity was strongly ethnically focused, and linked to the creation of a homeland Kurdish state, for others it was more

outward looking, seeking to engage Kurdish self-determination with wider political socialist or liberal agendas. These contrasting political projects were reflected in the nature of their business operations. Shwan, through his radio station within Iraqi-Kurdistan, broadcasted programming supportive of a liberal, pluralist political agenda. In the UK, Roni's think-tank organisations brought together diverse stakeholders to discuss Kurdish issues and seek to develop common positions, whilst Solin's feminist journal and online magazine provided a bridge between diaspora and homeland activists to challenge the existing patriarchal status quo within Kurdish society.

The cases of these politicised entrepreneurs demonstrated how the operation of their media and publishing ventures provided a mechanism for constructing collective identities and a means of political engagement and mobilisation, both transnationally and locally within settlement communities in Sweden, Germany and the UK. Through their ventures, these entrepreneurs have played a significant role in constructing a collective Kurdish identification across European diaspora communities and homeland areas, by strengthening the use of the Kurdish language, celebrating Kurdish culture and developing a shared historical narrative and worldview. Simultaneously they have provided vital channels to communicate and develop this identity and engage diaspora communities locally as well as transnationally, using social networks and mobilising human and financial resources to identify and pursue opportunities for action.

5.2. Available resources of human, social and financial capital

The entrepreneurs' pursuit of their business and political activities was reliant on their ability to draw upon a mix of human, social and financial capital. Fundamental to the development of all these ventures was the availability of highly qualified and culturally active human capital. The entrepreneurs themselves were characterised by their high level of education, quite distinct from many other Kurdish immigrant entrepreneurs, and their links to an educated class within the Kurdish diaspora. As a result, their businesses were able to draw upon the presence of a highly educated workforce, either locally or across the diaspora, to develop media and publishing activities requiring high-level language and writing skills. Commitment to a shared political position meant members of the diaspora were willing to contribute their skills on a voluntary basis. As Azad, pointed out with regard to his book publishing venture:

"I think we have built up strong human capital in our community in Sweden … Four Kurdish teachers and writers help me on a voluntary basis to translate and proofread the books we published in Kurdish. They have spent their lives, like myself, contributing to the reproduction and development of the Kurdish culture, language and literature."

The presence of different forms of social capital was fundamental to the creation and subsequent development of all these entrepreneurial ventures. Shared histories of oppression provided strong bonding social capital between displaced individuals, and effective business operation frequently required the presence of high trust relations in the face of hostility from homeland states. Notably all the business ventures built upon a variety of existing political, social and business related social networks. The network of an intellectual political refugee class was central to supporting Azad and Adar's respective Swedish and German book publishing ventures. In the cases of Baran's newspaper and Alan's radio businesses, these built directly upon their extensive political and economic networks across Kurdish diaspora community organisations and entrepreneurs in the UK and beyond. To launch his radio station, Shwan mobilised networks of returnees to Iraqi-Kurdistan, and Zana used networks created through involvement in a pro-Kurdish political party in the Turkish Parliament and left-oriented social organisations in Turkey, to develop his TV and newspaper ventures. These business activities also actively fed into an ongoing process of political networking, as exemplified by the influential think-tanks set-up by Roni in

London, which became key centres of interaction between British, Kurdish and Turkish political actors concerned with Turkey and Kurdistan relations.

The financing of these ventures drew principally upon financial resources within the diaspora settlement communities. A number of the entrepreneur's media businesses were financed through advertising revenue largely derived from other businesses within the Kurdish diaspora, as was the case for Zana, Sanar and Baran's enterprises. However, the markets they served were of growing interest to non-Kurdish businesses and organisations too, as Sanar observed:

"Generally, this type of business relies on their ethnic group. However, we also receive advertisements from non-Kurdish businesses and even from the political parties during the election campaigns. For example, the German Left (die Linke) advertised its election manifesto in our magazine to reach Kurdish-German citizens in Berlin".

Evident in a number of the entrepreneur's business models was a degree of cross-subsidisation from voluntary support, donations, or their other more financially viable business ventures. Roni, for example, used his large and profitable restaurant and café businesses in London to support his community newspaper business and think-tank organisations, while Alan used his London/Istanbul based advertising agency to finance his Kurdish Radio station in the UK to: "continue our struggle in and from the diaspora". Similarly, Azad's printing business in Sweden supported the activities of his publishing house, which produces books of limited revenue generating potential, and has enabled him on occasions to distribute books free of charge to reach target markets in homeland areas. Access to a committed volunteer workforce was crucial to the viability of many of these businesses. Zana's newspaper and TV company in Germany drew upon over 40 commentators and columnists who provided unpaid contributions in addition to the core staff of 30. A number of businesses had also benefited from donations from other business owners and members of the diaspora supportive of their promotion of Kurdish culture, news and information.

The resources of human, social and financial capital which enabled these entrepreneurs to pursue their media and publishing ventures were primarily rooted within the diaspora and mobilised through common identification, not only around a business project but also a political one. As entrepreneurs and their businesses became more embedded within the settlement contexts, these diaspora based resources were increasingly complemented by other forms of business support drawn from outside of the diaspora. The intertwining of the entrepreneurs' businesses and political activities served to produce a set of transnational human, social, cultural and financial resources, which were supportive of Kurdish diaspora politicisation processes extending across national borders and into homeland areas.

5.3. Opportunity framework across settlement and homeland contexts

The final element identified from the interview data crucial to understanding how the entrepreneur's had developed their politicised business ventures, was the evolving opportunity framework for action apparent across settlement and homeland spaces. In this respect, fundamental to all the ventures development was the rapid advance in information and communication technologies, which enabled transnational operation. For some, such as Zana's German based internet TV venture with Turkey as its major market, these technologies were at the centre of the business model, whereas for others, they played a key role in enabling routine operation across diaspora and homeland communities, thus extending the markets, scope and financial viability of these business activities.

The varying political and economic conditions within places of settlement were particularly crucial to understanding the evolution of these Kurdish diaspora business activities. The prevailing liberal policies of Western countries in relation to multiculturalism, citizen's rights and press freedom, permitted Kurdish communities to (re)

produce Kurdish culture, language and news coverage away from the coercive state policies of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Entrepreneurs were able to accumulate economic resources too, even though their settlement communities were often socially marginalised, and in some cases subjected to political interventions in response to security fears. Although there were significant differences in the specificities of host states' policy environments, dominant liberal-democratic traditions meant business ventures enjoyed a commitment to press freedom not available in homeland areas:

> 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 follow the journalistic ethic and professional code of journalism. So, I can write freely here (Baran, UK based newspaper publisher).

The Swedish case serves to exemplify how the particularities of host contexts enabled politicised diaspora venture development. Swedish multicultural policies of the 1970s supported the reproduction of ethnic culture (Cederberg & Anthias, 2006), which saw the promotion of Kurdish culture and the teaching of the Kurdish language in Swedish schools actively encouraged. This led to the creation of a Kurdish linguistic elite in Sweden who became influential in the creation of a number of transnational media production and publishing ventures in response to growing market opportunities. The expansion in the size and number of Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe, and elsewhere (e.g. US, Canada, Australia), along with a growing sense of Kurdish homeland identity, provided emerging markets for news, media and cultural businesses, initially in settlement countries and subsequently within homeland regions. As Azad, who initially worked as a teacher on arrival in Sweden, explained with regard to the start-up of his business in Sweden in 1987:

> "I noticed that there was a growing demand for books in the Kurdish language. To meet this need, I established both a printing house and a publishing house …. Kurdish children were learning their mother tongue at the Swedish Schools, but there were no Kurdish children's books to teach the Kurdish language."

The broadening of markets in settlement states has provided a further opportunity for the development of a number of the entrepreneurial media and publishing ventures. Generational change and evolving identities related to diaspora and settlement contexts, along with a political motivation to engage more widely across nationalities and generations to avoid the production of a narrow and inward looking ethnic Kurdish identity, has created new market opportunities. This was apparent in both Zana's TV and internet based newspaper ventures, launched in Germany in 2017, which from the outset aimed to serve both Kurdish and Turkish markets, and Sanar's market strategy for his magazine launched in 2015, to publish in both the Kurdish and German languages, which, as previously noted, has attracted non-Kurdish advertisers.

Market opportunities for media and publishing products and services have grown in homeland areas too. However, here market and political conditions have remained volatile, not least as a consequence of ongoing regional conflicts. As a result, political relations between state authorities and Kurdish diaspora communities have experienced periods of improvement and deterioration, acting to constrain development opportunities. Both Azad and Adar took advantage of a period of improved Turkish state-Kurdish relations between 2009 and 2015 to develop their businesses within Kurdistan-Turkey. However, the subsequent deterioration in relations made these businesses difficult to operate, and the bookstore opened by Adar in Kurdistan-Turkey was eventually forced to close following persecution by Turkish military forces. In Kurdistan-Iraq, the establishment of a de facto Kurdish state provided new business and political opportunities, although these have

been limited by subsequent conflict in the broader region. Shwan's English speech radio venture, started in 2009, and Solin's feminist journal, both responded to the opportunities provided by a period of greater political stability and pluralism in this homeland region. In these cases, increased political diversity and liberalism, combined with the growth of return migrants and international workers and increased openness to Western ideas and cultures among young people and women, combined to provide new prospects for transnational diaspora media and publishing businesses, both in terms of a profitable business operation and to contribute to shaping homeland political development.

6. Discussion and conclusions

To advance current conceptualisation of diaspora politics a fuller understanding of the role of non-state actors, alongside that of state actors and institutions, is required in order to develop a dynamic understanding of governance rooted in diverse social relationships and avoid an over theorisation of the role of the state. Diaspora entrepreneurs are one such key non-state actor. Yet to date the political dimension of their business activity and its relationship to diaspora identity has been largely ignored within the entrepreneurship literature. Through advancing the distinctive notion of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship, this paper focuses attention upon both the economic and political actions of these entrepreneurs, in order to illuminate the varied ways in which business venture activity and politicised engagement are realised and intertwined. In so doing the paper challenges existing limited conceptualisations of diaspora entrepreneurship, which have largely failed to understand such venture activity in relation to diaspora as a processual social phenomena, to focus upon the central relationship between the (re)production of collective diaspora identities and mobilisation, and entrepreneurial practice.

Study of the politics of diasporas requires bringing together territorial based theorisations of space with more relational ones (Davis, 2017). Analysis of the practice of politicised diaspora entrepreneurial activities illustrates the manner in which evolving politicised identities are translated into individual and collective actions that are in some respects deterritorialized, yet also simultaneously rooted in particular, places, neighbourhoods and territories. The findings of this study demonstrate entrepreneurial practice embedded within the particularities of a host-homeland context; one of a stateless and conflict generated diaspora. Here, entrepreneurs drawn from a well-educated politicised class have developed business ventures in the media, publishing and communication industries, which have contributed to the articulation of Kurdish identity and its political mobilisation. This context of statelessness and conflict provides few, if any, possibilities for homeland return, Critically non-state actors living outside of homeland areas have acted as the strongest drivers of the political ideal of Kurdistan. Entrepreneurs operating through media and communication ventures play a particularly important role in developing diaspora culture, language, history and political thinking that is fundamental to the production and mobilisation of a collective diaspora consciousness and identity within Kurdish settlement communities and homeland areas.

Whilst recognising the particularities of the diaspora and sectoral context which inform the findings of this study, forms of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship are embedded in all diaspora contexts, albeit varying greatly in extent, nature and significance. In recognising politicised diaspora entrepreneurship as a context-dependent phenomenon, this notion provides a lens through which to examine the different mechanisms by which venturing activities are actively involved in the ongoing political construction of diaspora identities and the mobilisation and engagement of diaspora communities across different diaspora contexts and economic sectors. These entrepreneurial activities and their associated institutional forms are central to achieving a fuller understanding of the modes, conditions and causal mechanisms of diaspora politicisation as realised across host and homeland areas.

Operating in a spatially uneven manner across the host-homeland nexus, they reflect not only the particular histories and experiences of displacement and conflict of entrepreneurial actors and the diaspora communities within which they are embedded, but also their evolving sense of belonging to places of settlement and the changing political conditions within homeland areas.

Given the absence of existing study of politicised forms of diaspora entrepreneurship there is considerable scope to develop the findings here concerning the interaction between an entrepreneurs politicised identity, evolving opportunity frameworks and the availability of appropriate resources operating across the host-homeland nexus. Further comparative research across conflict and non-conflict generated diaspora contexts, those with and without homeland states, and the full range of economic sectors within which diaspora entrepreneurs operate, has the potential to further develop understanding in this field.

Empirical research of this type is challenging and raises difficult ethical issues. Yet study here has the potential to provide further insights into political and cultural activism through which diaspora entrepreneurs pursue particularistic claims and political agendas. These political agendas are in reality highly diverse, ranging from those reinforcing the hegemony of neo-liberal and existing state systems to those advocating more radical and extreme positions. Improved understanding here has significant implications for existing policy thinking, particularly in relation to politically unstable homeland areas and places of settlement. There is considerable policy and practical experience of seeking to use diasporas as positive agents of change in homeland territories (Horst et al., 2010). Yet evidence from existing diaspora studies illustrates how diaspora interventions can sometimes be conflict sustaining rather than conflict resolving. Certain forms of politicised diaspora entrepreneurship might provide a policy mechanism to promote moderate and progressive forms of political engagement. Yet such interventions need to be informed by a contextualised understanding of the embeddedness of entrepreneurial actions within the particularities of settlement and homeland places, state territories and transnational spaces, which is too often currently lacking.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.05.008.

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