

## ARTICLE

# **New wars and diasporas: suggestions for research and policy**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Diaspora organisations are significant, and increasingly politicized players in today's global world. In order to understand diaspora support for homeland conflicts we have to study the interplay of distinct processes tied to both homeland and host country contexts. The new nature of war and concomitant centrality of identity groups has brought diasporas to the fore as important sources of outside support for parties in conflict. However, diaspora activism should not be understood as a mere response to the 'Homeland Calling'. Rather, the host country context can be seen as a distinct source of diaspora mobilization and, as this article shows, turns out to play a highly complex and ambiguous role in diaspora strategies of identification and political action.

## Introduction

In the pre-dawn of 1 April 2007 the Parisian police, acting under instructions of the ant-terrorism directorate SDAT, swooped down on suspected activists belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Thirty-nine persons were taken into custody for questioning. During the days that followed the police continued their crackdown. La Chapelle, a 19<sup>th</sup> century neighbourhood behind Gare du Nord, known as “Little Jaffna” was cordoned off and alleged members of the LTTE network were interviewed, photographed and videotaped in their homes. Materials and products connected to the LTTE like papers, CD’s, DVD’s, videos, books and photos were seized. Tamil owned businesses were searched and owners, employees and customers were quizzed. Twenty persons were taken in for interrogation, eighteen of them released the same evening. In the end, fourteen Tamils were placed in judicial custody on multiple charges including “extortion”, “physical violence and illegal confinement against Tamils settled in France”, “financing terrorism” and for being part of a “criminal association with a terrorist enterprise.”<sup>2</sup>

Although France has known earlier instances where alleged “terrorists” were arrested with a bang, the scale of the operation –targeting an entire neighbourhood- in La Chapelle was unprecedented in any Western country. The French crackdown illustrates the growing attention to diaspora activism. Diasporas are increasingly recognized as significant players in – depending on the labels used- insurgencies, rebellion, war and terrorism. This idea has become mainstream since the World Bank in 2003 claimed that “if a country which has recently ended a conflict has a large diaspora in the USA, its risk that the conflict will resume is sharply increased” and that “diasporas tend to be more extreme than the populations they

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<sup>2</sup> The LTTE is a proscribed terrorist organization in France since the May 2006 ban of the European Union (Council of the European Union 9962/06 P 078/06).

have left behind.”<sup>3</sup> A 2006 Human Rights Watch report<sup>4</sup> on LTTE intimidation and extortion in the Tamil diaspora added to the image of diasporas as radical hard-liners with a pro-violence and conflict perpetuating impact.

Over the past decade, both governments and NGOs have set up ‘diaspora programmes’. On the governmental level two reactions can be discerned. First, in line with the La Chapelle crackdown, governments have attempted to curb diaspora involvement in war by freezing assets of individuals and organizations often under the auspices of new anti-terrorism legislation. Second, governments increasingly have incorporated diasporas into their foreign policy strategies, as happened with both Afghan and Iraqi Americans. On a much smaller scale, peace-building NGOs have targeted diasporas as potential peace builders and have looked for ways to transform “hawks into doves”. Over the past decade a range of ‘Diaspora Dialogues’ have been set up, many of which failed.

The problem with both the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ reaction to diaspora politics is that it does not go beyond a rather shortsighted, and moralistic view on diasporas. As happens so often in the post 9/11 public and policy debate, groups and their acts are assessed in terms of their immediate objective relation to “good” or “evil”. The hard reaction calls for eradicating “the dogs of war”; the soft reaction pleads for turning “evil” into “good”. In both reactions there is no eye for the underlying and structural causes of diaspora conservatism and radicalism, and too much focus on changing behaviour: as if diasporic positions are merely irrational or the result of communication failures. I argue that we need to thoughtfully examine even the most

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington: copublication of the World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 85-86.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Funding the “Final War”: LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2006).

extreme violent cases, and try and understand the functions and interests served by diasporic discourses and practices of war and peace. Simple answers are simply not available here. Rebellions and insurgencies result from a highly complex array of factors and events. This complexity of course does not go well with the quick-fix agendas of both counter-terrorist government agencies and peace-NGOs. This makes academic research on the formation, mobilization and action of diaspora all the more important.

Drawing on a number of case-studies<sup>5</sup> and my own findings on the Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora in Paris, this article aims to explain why the size, visibility and impact of diasporas within the international system is on the rise. Secondly, it attempts to map the young field of ‘diaspora and conflict’ studies, and give a number of explanations for diaspora involvement in contemporary conflict. Based on this, recommendations are given.

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<sup>5</sup> I gathered documentation on cases of Croatian, Kurdish (PKK), Albanian Kosovar (KLA) and Albanian Macedonian (NLA), Sri Lankan Tamil (LTTE), Palestinian, Chechen and Moluccan diaspora. Clearly, and regrettably, information on the important topic of African diasporas is missing here.

## **New Wars and Diasporas**

There is nothing new about diasporas offering support to the homeland parties in conflict. We are all familiar with stories about the “Israeli lobby” in America, the support that the Irish abroad offered to the IRA, and the importance of the Armenian diaspora. There are, however, reasons to believe that the political weight of diaspora politics has increased significantly throughout the late twentieth century. An important explanation for the prevalence of diaspora in the current international system is the changing nature of war and in particular the centrality of the identity group in contemporary conflict. Although there are a great variety of views on the causes and supposed ‘newness’ of contemporary conflict, most authors acknowledge the centrality of the identity group.

One of the first scholars to recognise this was Azar, who argued for a radical revision of Clausewitzian ideas by claiming that it was the identity group –ethnic, religious, cultural and other- and not the nation-state that was at the core of most contemporary conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Although today the ‘extra-state’ wars conducted by the US and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq attract the lion’s share of media attention, Azar’s claim is still supported by evidence: in the 1989-2004 period 94 per cent of worldwide violent conflicts were intra-state wars revolving around inter-group or group-state disputes.<sup>7</sup> This implies that any meaningful analysis of contemporary conflict should involve the study of identity group formation, mobilization,

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Dartmouth: Aldershot, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Of the 118 armed conflicts counted by Harbom & Wallensteen in the period 1989-2004 only seven were categorized as interstate. The other 111 were categorized as intra-state (90) or internationalised intra-state (21), Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, “Armed Conflict and Its International Dimensions, 1946-2004”, *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 42, no. 5 (2005), pp. 623-35.

dynamics of interaction and collective action. In today's globalized world, these processes are increasingly subject to internationalisation and 'deterritorialization'.

Kaldor-Robinson aptly remarks in his article on the Albanian Kosovar and Croatian diasporas that '... [A]s globalisation increases interconnectedness and at the same time strengthens feelings of alienation, which in turn increase the popularity of fundamentalist ideologies, whether religious or ethno-nationalist, it is likely that diasporic networks will be of increasing importance both as actors in the "new wars" and in changing national narratives'.<sup>8</sup> Hence, from an analytical point of view, the study of contemporary conflict (e.g. the onset, duration and termination of war) is impossible in the absence of close attention of diasporic dynamics. There are two other rather obvious contextual reasons to include the diasporic component in the understanding of contemporary conflict dynamics. First, since identity groups in conflict lack formal international representation such as membership of the United Nations and a diplomatic corps, they largely depend upon their dispersed members for (the mobilisation of) external support. Second, the withdrawal of super power support after the Cold War forced insurgency movements that previously depended on Moscow or Washington for survival to turn to diaspora support. Of course, this is not to say that Russia and the US (and let us not forget China) are no longer involved at all. They do not advertise their support, for example the US has been supporting warlords in Somalia in order to stave off power by the Union of Islamic Courts. What remains clear though is that the new nature of war and concomitant centrality of identity groups has brought diasporas to the fore as important sources of outside support for insurgencies and parties in conflict.

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<sup>8</sup> Kaldor-Robinson, Joshua, "The Virtual and the Imaginary: The Role of Diasporic New Media in the Construction of a National Identity during the Break-up of Yugoslavia", *Oxford Development Studies* vol. 30, no. 2 (2002), p. 185.

## Defining diaspora

So far, I have used the term diaspora in a matter-of-fact kind of way, as if to describe a clear-cut bounded group of people. Indeed, many NGO reports take a primordialist stance when it comes to diaspora, seeing them as ‘that segment of people living outside the homeland’<sup>9</sup>, unintentionally essentializing concepts of diaspora, and seeing migrants as naturally rooted and belonging to places of origin. In practice, diasporas, much like ethnic groups, are imagined (transnational) communities, and the product of interactive processes of identification and ascription. People identify with certain diasporic imaginations of community for a plethora of reasons, and with a variety of degrees of commitment. As with all identifications, diaspora-identity is dynamic and contextual. Certainly, not everyone living in the US with Croatian ancestors will see him or herself as part of the Croatian diaspora. Specific events or developments, however, may trigger such identification (the so-called “diasporic turn”). This constructivist understanding of identity implies seeing diasporas not as automatically resulting from migration, but as the product of discursive constructions of community. As Sökefeld points out, the discursive construction of ‘the community’ is an abstraction which is not directly mirrored in social organisation.<sup>10</sup> There is a range of different degrees of commitment and engagement: from fulltime activists and organisations (the well-known names such as the Tamil Tigers, Kosovo Liberation Army, Kurdish Workers Party-PKK), to the larger audiences they claim to represent. Although a dialectical process, some agents have more power than others in the construction of diasporic imaginations. The LTTE for instance, has been quite successful in silencing ‘dissident’ voices in the diaspora. The boundaries of the community are constructed by the way it is imagined: different

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<sup>9</sup> *New Routes*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2005), p.3.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Sökefeld, “Mobilizing in transnational space: a social movement approach to the formation of diaspora”, *Global Networks* 6, 3 (2006), p. 268.



imaginings imply different audiences. As a result, diasporic audiences can shrink and widen: at times Indian Tamils are included and indeed actively participate in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora supporting the struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam. Likewise, many Albanians took part in diasporic networks related to the liberation of Kosovo in the late 1990s. The Palestine diaspora is perhaps the most overstretched of all contemporary diasporas, and is seen as an icon of identification by diverse groups of marginalized youth in many places around the world.

But where do we draw the definitional line? How can we for instance distinguish worldwide political activism in support of the Zapatistas from diasporic action? Should we consider Richard Gere as a representative of the Tibetan diaspora? Who is, and who is not part of a diaspora? Definitions tend to be either too broad ('imagined communities'<sup>11</sup>; a 'category of practice'<sup>12</sup> or too narrow (Safran's 6 point checklist).<sup>13</sup> I therefore suggest defining diasporas as collectives of individuals who identify themselves, and are identified by others as part of an imagined community that has been dispersed (either forced or voluntary) from its original homeland to two or more host-countries and that is committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland. I put emphasis on defining diaspora as an *identification* with dispersal (and not so much dispersal itself); as presupposing *global* dispersal (as opposed to transnationalism); and as having a *homeland orientation*: the image of the homeland, of original soil and roots lies at the symbolic centre of diasporic imaginings.

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<sup>11</sup> Sökefeld, *Mobilizing in Transnational Space*, p. 267.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "The "diaspora" diaspora", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2005), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Safran uses a rather strict definition of diasporas, defining them as expatriate minority communities (1) that are dispersed from an original 'centre' to at least two 'peripheral' places; (2) that maintain a memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland; (3) that believe they are not-and perhaps cannot be-fully accepted by their host country; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relation with the homeland. William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", *Diaspora* vol.1, no. 1 (1991), pp. 83-83.

## **Diasporic action**

Examples of diasporas playing an active role in contemporary conflict are readily available. The remarkable upsurge in strength of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) during the summer of 1998 was clearly connected to the fundraising efforts by the Albanian diaspora. The Croatian diaspora was quite effective in helping swing the international community behind the Croats in their conflict with the Croatian Serbs in the mid-1990s. Furthermore, the Tamil diaspora in Canada and Western Europe has been active in funnelling financial support to the Tamil insurgents fighting the Sinhalese government forces in Sri Lanka. Other enterprising diasporas are the Oromo, Eritreans, Kurds, Jews, Armenians, Palestinians and Chechens.

Diasporas are primarily engaged in political lobbying and fund-raising. For instance, Moluccan groups in The Netherlands persistently pressured the Dutch government to use its membership of the UN to call for humanitarian intervention in Indonesia. Likewise, the Albanian American Civic League actively lobbied the US government during the war in former Yugoslavia. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) even have a quasi-diplomatic structure consisting of a large number of pressure groups, which worldwide harness and integrate political support for an independent Tamil Eelam. Financially, diasporas are often indispensable to societies in conflict: diaspora remittances make an important share of income in war-zones. Although diaspora donations to warring parties are hard to trace, the case-information available is telling. Croatians in the diaspora reportedly provided \$4 million towards Franjo Tudjman's electoral campaign and were rewarded 12 of 120 seats in recognition of their key electoral role.<sup>14</sup> The parallel government of the Kosovo Albanians of the 1990s was financed through a 3 per cent tax on all

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<sup>14</sup> Ivana Djuric, "The Croatian Diaspora in North America: Identity, Ethnic Solidarity, and the Formation of a 'Transnational National Community'", *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol.17, no.1 (2003), pp. 113-130.

income both within Kosovo and amongst the Albanian diaspora abroad. A recent survey estimated that remittances provided 45 per cent of Kosovo's annual domestic revenues during the war of 1998-1999.<sup>15</sup> A World Bank estimate indicates that Tamil diaspora organisations raised around \$450 million per year during the 1990s. Although most people contribute voluntarily to the homeland organisation, incidences of forced donations and even extortion are also reported. The PKK and the LTTE are alleged to use violence against 'non-cooperative' diaspora community members.<sup>16</sup>

Diaspora organisations are often involved in activities to increase public awareness about the homeland conflict, and play an important role in framing conflict issues; they are known to be engaged in arms trafficking as well.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, they develop social networks to accommodate newcomers and find housing, jobs, and asylum. They often form religious groups, set up language courses, and are engaged in all sorts of social events to celebrate national holidays, rituals and ceremonies. The colourful Chariot Festival (a tribute to the Hindu deity Ganesh), for instance, organised by the Sri Manicka temple in Paris' 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, has become an important annual procession, staging Tamil identity and attracting thousands of onlookers. Similarly, the much more politicised, and LTTE controlled, 'Heroes Day' is celebrated annually throughout the entire Tamil diaspora.

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Balaj, "Kosovo's Albanian Diaspora: Blessing or Curse on the Economy?" *Transition Newsletter*, The World Bank Group, January 2001: pp. 15-16. Nicholas Wood, "Albanian exiles threaten to escalate war", *The Guardian*, 21 May 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Funding the "Final War"*.

<sup>17</sup> During the late 1990s, Florin Krasniqi, an American-Kosovar Albanian from New York, managed to gather \$30 million among the Albanian diaspora in the United States, the money was spent on arms for the KLA. Frustrated by the lengthy negotiations on Kosovo's status he again started to supply insurgents fighting for an independent Kosovo during the course of 2004 (see documentary *The Brooklyn Connection*, 2004). For LTTE arms trafficking see Daniel L. Byman *et al.*, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, RAND Corporation (2001), pp. 117-122.

## **Diaspora Conflict Studies: a research agenda**

One of the main findings of the young research field of ‘diaspora and conflict’ is the importance of context. As is discussed above, diasporas are collectively self-identified groups, and the homelands that lie at the symbolic centre of diaspora communities are products of the imagination of deterritorialized groups. Since diasporic and homeland groups live in distinct contexts they have different interests in maintaining the ‘homeland’ as a collective identity, and a source of cultural reproduction. National histories are shaped along notions of national interests and threats to national security. Both diaspora and homeland actors put their own ‘spin’ on the national narrative and live out their shared identity in its own way.<sup>18</sup> Diasporas and homeland discourses of war and peace are produced in different settings and contexts and are shaped by local structures of domination, signification and legitimation. Hence, diaspora and homeland discourses of war and peace play different roles, and are at times directed at different constituencies, audiences, and powers. The different priorities, functions and meanings assigned to the homeland by diaspora versus homeland actors can lead to tensions over war and peace policies. It is therefore crucial for the young field of ‘diaspora and conflict’ research to study the contest between homeland and diaspora over national identity and national interest, and to understand how that contest influences conflict dynamics and potential peace deals.<sup>19</sup> This implies dividing the study of diaspora involvement in war into two areas of research: 1) the study of *diasporic imaginations*; and 2) the study of *dynamics of interaction* of ‘diaspora actors’ and ‘homeland actors’ and their respective political strategies and practices in conflict.

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<sup>18</sup> Yossi Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation and Resolution”, *SAIS Review* vol. 22, no. 2, (2002) pp. 115-44.

<sup>19</sup> Shain, “The Role of Diasporas”.

The first area of study deals with the formation and mobilization of diaspora. Relevant questions in this respect are: how do certain diasporic imaginations of the nation arise? (How) are they resisted, and are competing imaginations of community proposed? How is this played out? What is the political and cultural message contained within these imaginations? What is protected, what is seen as threatened? What are the perceptions of the causes and nature of the homeland conflict? Do diasporas see themselves as (historical) victims of the current enemy? Who are the main agents of diasporic imagination? How are people mobilized to join in? And, most importantly, what *functions* and *interests* are served by specific imaginations of the homeland conflict, and enemy? In what way will reconciliation ‘at home’ influence these functions and interests? This terrain of research helps us to understand *why* people are involved in homeland conflict. A growing body of literature now deals with these issues, and the number of case studies increases steadily.

The second –far less developed- area of study sheds light on *how* diasporic actors are involved in ‘homeland wars’ and on the impact of diasporas on conflict cycles and dynamics, in particular on the processes of issue and actor transformation during conflict. Here we study the balance of power between diaspora and homeland actors: the issue of contested leadership. As we claimed above, diaspora and homeland actors have different interests in maintaining the homeland, and these differences at times lead to clashes over who is entitled to define national interest and security, and consequently, who decides on strategies of war and peace. This balance of power depends on the relative strength of the parties, and qualitative and quantitative asymmetries (in terms of resources, monetary flows, political lobbies, leadership, media exposure, international networks). The dynamics of interaction

between diaspora and homeland actors is an important, but relatively unexplored terrain of study.

In constructing an analytical framework for research and comparison, I argue that we need to treat diasporas as independent actors exerting influence on conflict. Although parties at war often pressure their members overseas for support, diaspora involvement is not triggered by the “Homeland Calling”<sup>20</sup> alone. Instead, the genesis of diaspora mobilization can be traced to the interplay of distinct independent processes, grounded in two contexts: (1) *the ‘homeland’ context*, and in particular processes related to the new nature of war and concomitant centrality of identity groups; and (2) *the ‘host country’ context*, as both a facilitating and constraining environment for diaspora strategies of identification and political action.<sup>21</sup> This interplay is accommodated by the high mobility of people and new communication technology characteristic of the contemporary world. In particular television and the Internet have allowed for instantaneous interconnectedness between societies of origin and settlement. Although not a source of diaspora mobilization in itself, new media greatly influences the quantity and quality of diasporic political action.

In the second half of this article I will focus on the ‘host country context’ as a source of diaspora mobilization.

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<sup>20</sup> The “Homeland Calling” is a Kosovar Albanian diaspora network based in Switzerland.

<sup>21</sup> The use of the terms ‘homeland’ and ‘host country’ is problematic because they suggest a ‘true’, longed for, place of residence (‘home’) versus a temporary arrangement (‘host’). For the sake of clarity and due to a lack of more precise terms I nevertheless continue to use the terms.

## **Understanding the diasporic condition**

In order to gain insight into the multitude of interests and functions served by diasporic discourses and practices of war and peace, and in what way structural and contextual conditions in the ‘host context’ shape diasporic imaginations, mobilization and collective action, I will here discuss four possible explanations that I have come across during my research. I aim to show that diasporic imagination and action is constituted both negatively and positively. Positive: in the way that the room for political mobilization (resources, political opportunity, freedom of expression) in many countries in the West is an incentive to lobby for the home country. Negative: in the way that social exclusion, exploitation, discrimination and loss of social status encountered abroad are reasons to support a homeland organisation. This pattern finding exercise provides us with sensitising concepts and may be useful in formulating directions for further (case-study) research and theory building.

*Fear for peace.* Diaspora communities are sustained by narratives of violence and trauma. The ‘being’ of diaspora is inextricably bounded up with histories of war and violence in the homeland. Ironically, war and catastrophe in the home country justify diasporic life. At the same time, ‘narratives of return’ form a central part of the diasporic discourse: the ancestral home is seen as a place of eventual return, when the time is right. However, when peace becomes feasible, these ‘narratives of return’ clash with reality. Contemporary wars are protracted and diaspora communities consist often of at least two generations. Generally, diasporas have built up a reasonably stable life in their host country, found jobs and education for their children (who sometimes were born in the host country). It is the dilemma of wanting to return home and not wanting to give up a relatively secure future, which creates a ‘fear for

peace' among diaspora communities. Peace brings uncertainties. Peace can take away one's moral justification to live abroad. At the worst, peace might mean the end of one's residence status. Many war-generated migrants in the EU have an unclear residence status for a medium time frame under the so-called 'temporary protection' model.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore not surprising that diaspora groups often treat peace processes and negotiations with suspicion. For instance, opinions expressed on the Internet reveal the alarm voiced by (certain segments of) the Tamil diaspora community at the Norwegian peace initiative, particularly after the Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim met with LTTE leader Prabhakaran in November 2000. There is another reason why diasporas may resist peace: they construct different narratives of victimhood and 'Chosen Trauma' than "those who stayed behind".<sup>23</sup> If a homeland government decides to pursue reconciliation with a historical enemy, diaspora communities may feel their identity as historical victims of that same enemy is under threat. The case of Armenia is the clearest example of this. As Tololyan and Beledian remark: "The diaspora...has the Genocide as its point of departure. It clings to the memory of the Catastrophe: the more distant the memory becomes, the more the diaspora seems to write about it".<sup>24</sup> If now the Armenian state chooses to de-emphasise the genocide because of its rapprochement with Turkey, it is by implication devaluing diaspora Armenians as part of the Armenian imagined community. In sum, although most diasporas will hope for peace and reconciliation, at the same time this might conflict with their interests of securing legal and social status and identity. Clearly, within home and host country contexts 'war' and 'peace' have different meanings.

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<sup>22</sup> The concept of temporary protection emerged in 1992, in the early days of the war in Yugoslavia, as a way for the EU member states to deal with 'situations of influx'. The idea is to afford practical assistance to war refugees without giving them any expectation of permanent settlement in the EU. At times, temporary protection to Kosovo refugees was extended in the form of a residence permit conditionally renewable every year.

<sup>23</sup> Shain, "The Role of Diasporas", p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Kachig Tololyan and Krikor Beledian, interview by Arpi Totoyan in *Haratch* (Paris), 2-3 July 1998.



*Political mobilization.* ‘Exile is the nursery of nationality’ Lord Acton stated as early as 1860 (in Anderson 1992). A substantial share of people who flee from contemporary conflict areas migrate to liberal democracies and western countries. In some cases, these new contexts allow for the manifestation and celebration of nationalist sentiments (long-distance nationalism). A large amount of Kurds that fled Turkey, for instance, only ‘discovered’ their ‘Kurdishness’ in Germany, where they could express their culture, language and organise themselves without repression. Or as Lyon and Uçarer noted, “[T]here have always been Kurds among the Turkish guest workers and refugees, but most of them did not discover their “Kurdishness” until they came to Europe”.<sup>25</sup>

Separatist-nationalist movements such as the LTTE, KLA, NLA (National Liberation Army), PKK, but also less well-known Sikh and Kashmiri organizations, for an important part blossomed in the diaspora. The LTTE network straddles the globe and has offices in 54 countries, including Burma and Botswana. Furthermore, both the KLA and the NLA were founded in the diaspora by political exiles from the United States, Germany and Switzerland. The PKK main overseas offices are based in Germany and The Netherlands.

One way of explaining why separatist movements emerge among diaspora communities is by applying a model of group mobilization. The model used by Lyon and Uçarer to study Kurdish separatism in Germany rests on the premise that separatist movement mobilization is the product of three general forces: consolidated and politicised identity, political opportunity and operational resources. Their model first explains how the formation and then the politicisation of

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<sup>25</sup> Alynna J. Lyon, and Emek M. Uçarer, “The Transnational Mobilization of Ethnic Conflict: Kurdish Separatism in Germany” chapter presented at the International Studies Association annual meeting, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 1998.

an identity group provide the foundation for ethno-nationalism. Secondly, political opportunity must be present to lend both support and optimism to the movement's formation and potential success. And finally, the building of resources (including financial and organizational) is mandatory to the movement's viability. These three components of mobilization are often present in western liberal democracies but absent in countries such as Turkey, Sri Lanka or Indonesia. Despite the serious constraints that diasporic movements have encountered since 9/11 this still seems to be the case.

There is another side to this story as well. Apart from being a facilitating environment to diasporic separatist movements, liberal democratic societies have also offered room for the rise of diasporic counter-voices and 'third space standpoints'. Cheran, for instance, describes how in the context of Toronto 'multiple forms' of Tamilness emerged that played a healthy role in countering the vicissitudes of Tamil nationalism.<sup>26</sup> Equally, one of the Tamil respondents from the Dutch Tamil diaspora in Verhallen stated:

In the Netherlands people look at both sides of the conflict. Both parties have to cooperate and compromise. In Sri Lanka there is censure. Both parties turn happenings to their advantage. When you are a Tamil, you only believe in the 'Tamil truth', and when you are a Singhalese, you believe in the 'Singhalese truth'. Here in the Netherlands you do not only have an A (Tamil) and B (Singhalese) side of the story, but also a lot of C-stories, stories in between. This is new for me.<sup>27</sup>

*The exile condition: identity and exclusion in the host country.* In his study on political diaspora Shain explains that to assess diasporic make-up and political tendencies one must take into

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<sup>26</sup> R. Cheran, *The Sixth Genre: Memory, History and the Tamil Diaspora Imagination*, (Colombo: Marga Institute, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Tessa Verhallen, "Living Apart Together: The Dutch Tamil Community", unpublished MA thesis, Utrecht University, The Netherlands (2004), p.99.

account the size, composition and distribution of diasporas, but also their identity in the host country, degree of assimilation, and issues such as the host society's changing perception of ethnic diversity.<sup>28</sup> The above explanations of diasporic politics all include understandings of the host country as a facilitating environment for diasporic action: offering (identity) security, political opportunity and operational resources.

In his in-depth study of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, Fuglerud, however, shows a very different interplay between the host society context and diasporic politics.<sup>29</sup> He explains how social devaluation, and the loss of dignity that migrants encounter abroad in combination with high expectations and demands from their families back home can indeed turn migrants into LTTE supporters. The fundamental contradiction pertaining to Tamils in the diaspora is that the LTTE draws support from people who have fled to get away from their dictatorship in Sri Lanka, and have relatives still suffering under their rule there. Paradoxically, large sections of the Tamil diaspora have come to look upon the LTTE as a source of regeneration in exile existence. Fuglerud tells the story of P. who, having fled from the LTTE in Sri Lanka, increasingly is drawn to support the homeland organisation after years of frustration, family problems and hardship in Norway. Here the close connection between exile and nationalism comes to the fore. While undermining social forms formerly taken for granted, exile reinforces the felt need for a cultural basis of identity. The question is where to find this basis. According to Fuglerud, in constructing their self-identity Tamils in exile draw on two different communal narratives: the traditional and the revolutionary. The first centres on the invariant nature of kinship obligations and caste hierarchy, whereas the second revolves around revolutionary

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<sup>28</sup> Yossi Shain, "Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy", *Political Science Quarterly* vol. 109, no. 5, (1994) pp.811-41.

<sup>29</sup> Oivind Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside: the Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

nationalism and self-determination. Tamils try and cope with the loss of status that they encounter in places such as Oslo and Paris (washing dishes in restaurants, cleaning toilets) by investing in family prestige deposited at home. Playing an important role in the arrangement of sisters' weddings, for example, becomes one of the few ways of clinging on to a position of self-respect as defined by traditional values. These family obligations, however, also cause tremendous (financial) problems and constant worry. Tamil brothers in the diaspora often pay as much as \$35,000 for their sister's dowry, money that is often used to pay for the (illegal) journey to the West. This suffocating social pressure helps to explain the attraction of the revolutionary communal narrative embodied by the LTTE, which strongly condemns traditional principles such as caste, the dowry system and the institution of arranged marriage. 'And while many refugees have fled the LTTE, the organisation may still represent to them a secret wish to take possession of the future, of throwing off the burden of tradition'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed a large share of the LTTE's power to control Tamil population both at home and in the diaspora lies in their successful rhetoric. The organisation combines revolutionary messages of self-determination with a rejection of both Tamil tradition and ethnic pluralism and Western cosmopolitanism, giving expression to feelings of exclusion and negative attitudes towards people with (North) African backgrounds among for instance certain sections of the Tamil diaspora in Paris. Local leaders at the Comité de Coordination des Tamouls (CCT) office in Paris for instance showed sympathy for the mono-ethnic dream of 'France for the French' of the National Front of Jean Marie le Pen.<sup>31</sup> 'What revolutionary nationalism does in exile is to provide a name for individual nostalgia and shared exclusion from the host society'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside*, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> Interview of the author with representative of the Comité de Coordination des Tamouls (CCT), Paris, France, on 1 April 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside*, p. 153.

In search for a secure cultural identity and self-worth the diasporic person ambiguously carries out his 'bricolage', alternatively drawing on traditional and revolutionary narratives. Taking into account these complex coping strategies helps to explain why the LTTE and Tamil communities continue to hold each other in such a suffocating embrace. It would be interesting to explore whether Fuglerud's model can be applied to other cases of diaspora support for ethno-nationalist separatism. Seen in this way, the nature of diaspora support for ethno-nationalism is explained by taking into account the 'exile condition', in particular the complexity of collective coping strategies in contexts of exclusion and humiliation.

*Diaspora lobbying and foreign policy.* A fourth element that is relevant to explain diaspora activism is the interplay between the host government's domestic or foreign policy strategies and the organisational capacity of diaspora movements. Traditional and well-documented examples are of course the Jewish American (in particular the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and Armenian American organisations in the US. They are widely considered to be the most effective at advocating their priorities in the U.S. political system. Undoubtedly in part as a result, Armenia and Israel are the largest per capita recipients of US foreign aid.<sup>33</sup> Diasporic lobbies have long been part of the US political system. The nature of American politics, particularly the power of the individual congress member is the primary reason for the success of diasporic lobbies. Diasporic lobby groups' main leverage lies with their capacity to mobilize the 'ethnic vote' and contribute to electoral campaigns. In return, US decision-makers try to commission diaspora leaders to promote US interests in their homelands, and US preferences for the way the homeland's violent conflict is dealt with.<sup>34</sup> Both the Iraqi and Afghan diasporas

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<sup>33</sup> See: John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy", Faculty Research Working Papers Series, Harvard University and John F. Kennedy School of Government, March 2006; Shain, "The Role of Diasporas".

<sup>34</sup> Shain, "The Role of Diasporas".

have been instrumental to US foreign policy strategies vis-à-vis their respective homelands. Afghan diaspora members were given key positions in the newly formed administration at the end of 2001.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Iraqi exiles in the US, Europe and Middle East opposing Saddam Hussein were financially supported and received combat training by the Bush administration.<sup>36</sup>

There are ample examples of cases where the host government foreign policy has been *constraining* to diaspora mobilization. We only have to compare the organizational capacities of the Palestinian diasporas in Lebanon and Iran to understand the importance of host government foreign policy strategies as severely limiting or enabling diaspora politics. An example of how foreign policy strategies are at times combined with domestic political agendas is the crackdown on the LTTE in Paris. Although explained by French authorities as part of the EU counter terrorism policy, critics labelled the massive crackdown as a showcase of the well-known French anti-terrorist examining magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguire, who in the run up to the 2007 elections wanted to clear his name as anti-Islamist, by hitting on “Hindu-terrorism”.<sup>37</sup>

A clear illustration of the complex interplay between a host country government foreign policy and diaspora activism is the upsurge in the strength of the KLA in 1998. The beginnings of the KLA are obscure, some authors trace the movement’s emergence to Macedonia in 1992, and others claim it was founded in the early 1980s in Germany and/or Switzerland. What remains clear though is that from the start the KLA represented an insurgency movement whose aim it

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<sup>35</sup> Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation”, *Berghof Occasional Paper* no. 26, September 2004, (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004); Nicholas Van Hear, “From “Durable Solutions” to “Transnational Relations”: Home and Exile among Refugee Diasporas”, Centre for Development Research Copenhagen, CDR-Working Paper 02.9.

<sup>36</sup> Karen de Young and Daniel Williams, “Training of Iraqi Exiles Authorized”, *Washington Post* 19 October 2002, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Bruguire planned to run for a seat in the legislature in June 2007 as candidate for the Sarkozy’s Union for a Popular Movement.

was to achieve, by means of violence, Kosovo's secession from Serbia, and the creation of either an independent state of Kosovo or a Greater Albania. There are many reasons behind the rise to power of the KLA in the course of the 1990s. During the first half of the 1990s, the Albanian diaspora had largely supported the policy of non-violent resistance of Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo, and had contributed financially to its parallel system of governance. It is often claimed that Rugova's position began to be undermined when Kosovo was left off the agenda at the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. Another important event was the sudden availability of small arms in the region due to the disintegration of Albania after what became known as the 'pyramid schemes' in December 1996, adding to the rapid militarization of Kosovar society. It is, however, the widely screened Drenica massacre of February 1998 which was decisive to the rise to power of the KLA, when both diaspora support and US foreign policy turned in favour of the insurgency movement and away from Rugova's DLK. Having earlier labelled the KLA a terrorist organization, the US by May 1998 initiated high-level contacts with the KLA.<sup>38</sup> It was KLA leader Hashim Thaci and not Rugova who headed the Kosova delegation at the Rambouillet negotiations in 1999. Although the Albanian American Civic League claims it played a decisive role in the turnabout in the US commitment from supporting Rugova to fostering the KLA, others stress a "mix of general beliefs and perceptions" as more important, such as "No Second Bosnia", an ever-growing willingness on the side of the US to resort to military intervention, and the need to use the KLA as ground troops. Either way, the turnabout in US foreign policy importantly legitimised diasporic support for the KLA.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In 1997 the KLA was included on the US State Department's list of terrorist organizations. In February 1998 it was removed again.

<sup>39</sup> Andreas Heinemann-Grüder and Wolf-Christian Paes, *Wag the Dog: The Mobilization and Demobilization of the Kosovo Liberation Army* (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2001); Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Stacy Sullivan, *Be Not Afraid, For You Have Sons in America: How a Brooklyn Roofer Helped Lure the U.S. into the Kosovo War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004).

Clearly, diaspora politics has been impacted by the War on Terror paradigm. After 9/11 the word terrorism has gained new meaning. Not so much in definitional terms (the concept remained vague and imprecise), but primarily in terms of what are considered to be legitimate responses to terrorism. This combination of definitional vagueness and the legitimising power of ‘counter-terrorism’ strategies have turned the frame into the master cleavage of today. In fact, successfully ascribing or resisting the label of terrorism has emerged as the most important ideational objective in the international arena.<sup>40</sup> Hence, a large share of diasporic politics today is dedicated to fighting a discursive battle over image, the justification of violence, and political legitimacy, passionately countering and contesting terrorist labelling.

### **Policy lessons?**

The task of conflict analysis is to unravel the complex dynamics of interactive processes in order to understand how and why people resort to violence. The task of peace studies is to determine ‘how to build peace’. Ideally, the latter draws upon the former: peace-building policies derive from in-depth conflict analysis. However, in practice there is not much of a dialogue between the two domains of expertise. A combination of pre-set political agendas and lack of time, resources, skills and communication often result in ad hoc policy-making, and misreading. Both government agencies and NGOs in general do not analyse the position and impact of diasporas in conflict. What have the above observations to offer peace builders? First of all, it is crucial to include diasporas in levels-of-analysis approaches and multi track interventions. The notion that contemporary conflicts are multi-levelled and multi-issued is by now adopted by most scholars and policy-makers, as is Rupesinghe’s claim that conflict resolution should always involve multi-track and multi-level interventions. This implies bringing in diaspora as a new actor, on an

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Bhatia, “Fighting words: naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005).



“in-between” level: something between an internal and external actor, affecting the conflict both directly and indirectly (through exerting pressure on third parties). Just as is the case with other actors, we need to carefully map the diasporic component in conflict by asking questions such as: who are the diaspora parties? What are their internal sub-groups and on what constituency do they depend? What are the respective diaspora positions, interests and needs and fears? What are the relationships with other conflict parties? Are there qualitative or quantitative asymmetries? What are the various perceptions of the causes and nature of the conflict?

In particular, before encountering on any kind of policy formulation we need to gain insight into what functions and interests related to identity, status and power are served by diasporic discourses and practices of war and peace. And, importantly, in what way reconciliation ‘at home’ will influence these functions and interests.

## **Conclusion**

Diasporas have become significant, and increasingly politicised players in today’s global world. In order to understand diaspora support for homeland conflicts we have to study the interplay of distinct processes tied to both homeland and host country contexts. The new nature of war and concomitant centrality of identity groups has pushed diasporas to the fore as important sources of outside support for insurgencies and parties in conflict. However, diaspora activism should not be understood as a mere response to the demands and calls of group members in the home country. Rather, the host country context can be seen as a distinct source of diaspora mobilization and, as is shown in this article, turns out to play a highly complex and ambiguous role in diaspora strategies of identification and political action. By trying to understand the diasporic condition from a case-study approach this article explored a number of possible

explanations for diaspora engagement in homeland conflict: a fear for peace, room for political mobilization, foreign policy and the exile condition. The complexity of the connection between exile and nationalism is exemplified by pointing at the host country context as an environment both *facilitating* diasporic action: offering (identity) security, political opportunity and operational resources, and *undermining* social status and self-worth. We have seen how due to feelings of social exclusion and humiliation certain sections of diaspora communities have come to look upon their 'homeland organisation' as a source of regeneration.

Clearly, more in-depth case-study research is needed to draw conclusions on the activities and motives of diasporas and, eventually, their roles in contemporary conflict. What is of importance to this kind of research is to further explore the diasporic condition from a disaggregated view, carefully analysing the complex interplay of host and home country contexts and specificities. In doing so, we should be careful not to take the 'groupness' of diaspora(s) for granted but explore how diasporic imaginations emerge, and how identity group boundaries are drawn, contested, maintained, and policed. This implies making a distinction between the small minority of politically active diaspora organisations on the one hand, and the large majority of people who they claim to represent on the other. It also implies making a distinction between intra-diaspora community dynamics and the dynamics of war in the homeland. Although diasporic action is both informed and motivated by discourses and ideologies produced at the homeland 'centre', diasporas should not be treated as passive, manipulated actors but as agents with distinct identities, interests, and motives, pursuing diverse goals. It is the interplay of these distinct spheres that counts.