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Defining diaspora: Expanding upon process-oriented analysis of diaspora engagement

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Abstract

This paper follows the work of Rogers Brubaker (2005) to argue that definitional clarity of the term diaspora allows for a process-oriented analysis of diaspora engagement. Diaspora formation is not a natural consequence of displacement, but rather it is a political process predicated on a desire to *remake* the homeland. This paper argues that it is important to recognize that framing diaspora from both external (etic) and internal (emic) perspectives can influence and legitimize political mobilization. This calls for an understanding of 'diaspora as practice', a theory which postulates that we must evaluate claims, actions, and practices to have a realistic appraisal of how different migrant groups will affect political processes. This will help evaluate if a particular group is being framed by outside actors to help pass externally driven initiatives, or if the group can act as an independent 'third level' mediator that blends external knowledge of international peace-building norms with local customs to foster stability. Diaspora as practice can be used to evaluate individual cases of displacement to differentiate competing interests found in peace- and state-building processes.

Keywords

Diaspora, hybrid peace, migration, peace-building, state-building

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1. Introduction

Rogers Brubaker stated in 2005 that the meaning of diaspora 'has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted', often projecting clarity at the expense of nuanced realities. While early historical use of the term was mainly confined to Jewish dispersal from the homeland (Cohen 2008: 1) diaspora has been reinterpreted by academics and leveraged by political entrepreneurs, governments, and numerous international organizations to provide an expanded role for diaspora groups in the international political arena. Steven Vertovec also noted in 2005 that the 'shift in the adoption and meaning of "diaspora" has undoubtedly caused some confusion and stimulated debate' (Vertovec 2005: 2).

Brubaker and Vertovec offered these insights more than a decade ago. A review of the literature, or even a conversation with an English speaker, will reveal that confusion about the term persists and debate over the meaning of diaspora endures. The dissonance afflicting diaspora can even be observed in authoritative publications such as International Organization for Migration's World Migration Report 2018. The report references diaspora more than 50 times and provides an appendix noting the term's contested nature yet defines it in the broadest possible terms, explaining that diaspora generally refers to 'a country's nationals or citizens abroad and their descendants' (IOM 2018: 304). When the definition of diaspora fails to distinguish itself from the definition of migrant, its analytical utility ceases to exist.

This paper argues for the importance of distinguishing diasporas as a unique type of migrant group. Categorizing diasporas as a distinct subset of migrants allows for a more nuanced evaluation of the potential impacts these groups have on political and social spheres. The influence of diasporas can best be evaluated by adding a layer of complexity, rather than allowing a perpetual drift toward nebulous and vague interpretations of the concept that depict 'diaspora' as interchangeable with 'migrant'. This paper sets out to define diaspora in two parts to relate why definitional clarity is important for understanding the role of diasporas in matters of peace- and state-building.

The first part of defining diaspora in this paper establishes an argument for 'diaspora as practice', which both borrows from and expands upon essentialist conceptions of diaspora. Diaspora as practice means that not only do people need to be dispersed, have a vision of the homeland, and retain collective identity to be considered a diaspora, but they must also be actively attempting to realize their vision of *remaking* the homeland (Brubaker 2005). Evaluating specific diasporic practices allows for a clearer picture of the aims and goals of particular migrant groups (Kleist 2008b).

The second part evaluates the difference between the term diaspora being adopted or ascribed for different political purposes, and how internal and external frames impact a groups' practices. Robin Cohen notes that distinguishing between the emic (the participants' view) versus the etic (the observers' view) is an important tool for informing how diaspora groups are created and mobilized in certain circumstances (Cohen 2008: 16). Differentiating emic and etic perspectives is central to recognizing the political motive behind how and why diaspora is being used to legitimize political stances and actions.

Definitional clarity allows for a more complete evaluation of how diasporas affect peace- and state-building processes. Eva Østergaard-Nielsen has provided a three-step approach to process-oriented analysis of migrants' political practices by positing the need to identify a group's 'a) process of mobilization (the 'why'); b) strategies of participation (the 'how'); and c) the impact of migrant transnational practices on democratic processes in the host country and the country of origin (the 'then what')' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 765). Analyses of diaspora engagement often seek to answer the 'then what' without digging into the 'why' and 'how'. In this vein, diaspora involvement in peace- and state-building is typically examined on a binary scale that prioritizes end results to determine if groups should be considered 'peace makers' or 'peace breakers'. Placing diaspora groups at one of two poles not only reduces the procedural role of these groups in ongoing peace developments, but also fails to recognize that competing actors in peace- and state-building processes can measure success differently. Acknowledging that a range of actors attempt to influence the 'how' and 'why' of diaspora engagement through various, and often competing, emic and etic frames to achieve disparate goals encourages a more nuanced analytical discussion that better informs the 'then what'. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this paper is developed to address how the framing of specific migrant groups (diasporas) from internal (emic) and external (etic) perspectives influences their formation, mobilization, and/or impact on peace- and state-building processes in their homeland.

The purpose of this exercise follows from Terrence Lyons' proposition that if we can reframe and make their perspectives more complex, the role of diasporas in conflict may be changed (Lyons 2004: 12). I argue the framing of diaspora has real world impacts and questioning how these groups are framed will provide better analysis concerning the impact they can have in conflict settings. Framing, a central concept to this argument, will be understood as 'fashion[ing] a shared understanding for a social movement by rendering events and conditions meaningful and enabl[ing] a common framework of interpretation and representation' (Sökefeld 2006: 269-270). These frames 'are ideas that transform certain conditions into an issue, that help to define grievances and claims, and that legitimize and mobilize action' (Sökefeld 2006: 270).

The paper will be constructed in four parts. First, it will provide an analysis of the various interpretations of diaspora in academia before expanding on the understanding of diaspora as practice and the importance of emic and etic frames. Second, it will use the two-part definition to analyze the place of diasporas in peace- and state-building. Third, it will evaluate empirical examples from the 'Somali diaspora' that underscore how etic frames can influence emic conceptions of diaspora, and subsequently influence (in)action. Finally, it will propose that this framework can be used as an analytical tool to project the political impact of displaced migrant groups in conflict and post-conflict settings.

2. Defining Diaspora

Diaspora is derived from the Greek word *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over) to signify Greek expansion and settlement throughout the Mediterranean region between 800-600 BCE (Cohen 2006: 40). The positive conception of diaspora, as it was originally implied, contrasts with the negative meaning of the term connoting 'victim', derived from historic instances of trauma experienced by displaced Jewish communities (Cohen 1996: 508). Jewish communities would often establish themselves independently from the broader society because of unease and mistrust caused by the weight of historical trauma, which in turn would produce suspicion and hostility from the communities in which they lived (Cohen 1996: 512). The social distance between the two contingents produced a distinct identity for the Jews, making it easier for Jewish communities to turn inward and concern themselves with in-group preservation and idealistic notions of the homeland. Unique identity formation as a product of the relationship migrant groups have with their host society influenced early study of the term diaspora and is a feature observed in modern diasporas, especially among youth who decide to (re)engage with the perceived homeland due, in part, to feelings of social exclusion.

The first phase of diaspora studies outlined the 'prototypical' diaspora and set a base understanding of diaspora as a group that was dispersed due to trauma and retained a unique identity with a collective memory of the homeland (Cohen 2008: 4). The second phase of diaspora studies came about in the early 1990s with an expansion and clarification of the markers of a diaspora group, notably influenced by the work of William Safran.

Safran's features of a diaspora included: 1) Dispersal from a single origin to two or more foreign areas; 2) Retention of a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original 'homeland'; 3) Uneasy relationship with the host society; 4) Desire to return to the 'homeland'; 5) Commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the 'homeland'; and 6) Continual relationship with the 'homeland' through ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity (Safran

1991: 83-4). This typology has been widely referenced as it brought further form to the concept of diaspora through an analytical frame that provided room for deeper reflection on what constituted a diaspora and why it should be considered a unique type of migrant group.

The third phase of diaspora studies is defined by social constructionist critiques that 'sought to deconstruct the two core building blocks of diaspora, home/homeland and ethnic/religious community' (Cohen 2008: 9). These perspectives challenged the first two 'essentialist' phases of diaspora studies by asking if they overlooked specific groups or neglected what were perceived to be changing forms of mobility. Yasemin Nuhoglu Soyal argues that the essentialist conceptions of diaspora misrepresent evolving transnational identities. She states that 'the concept of diaspora effortlessly casts contemporary population movements as perpetual ethnic arrangements, transactions and belongings' therefore ascribing fixed characteristics that are not reflective of contemporary 'practices of citizenships, which are multi-connected, multi-referential and postnational' (Soysal 2000: 13).

While I would argue that constructionist critiques underplay the importance of ethnicity (see Sheffer 2003) and affinity for the homeland, they advanced the conversation and challenged the assumptions of a term that by all accounts was losing meaning. Amusingly, Robin Cohen states that constructionist authors essentially saw the term diaspora as 'irredeemably flawed' (Cohen 2008: 11), but that did not stop the term from being used or debated further. This led to the fourth phase of diaspora studies labeled as 'consolidation' and it is the phase I primarily draw from to develop my argument for diaspora as practice.

Diaspora as Practice

The first two phases of diaspora studies established a stable foundation for how to conceptualize diaspora. The third phase critiqued and contested these notions due to both their perceived shortcomings and ubiquity. I would argue this process of refinement produced a reworked understanding of diaspora that offers greater analytical value than it did during the essentialist phases. While there is still not a commonly agreed upon definition of diaspora and some believe it may have reached a point of 'saturation' (Van Hear 2017), there have been efforts to pull together the disparate strands of diaspora studies to discern meaning from the term. The consolidation phase can be perceived as an attempt to reconcile these two differing viewpoints on diaspora (Sökefeld 2006).

As previously noted, in 2005 Rogers Brubaker argued that applying diaspora loosely to so many groups stretched the term to the point of uselessness (Brubaker 2005: 3). To cut through the debate over what constitutes a diaspora, Brubaker argued for three essential traits

of a diaspora including dispersion from the homeland, homeland orientation through some form of connection to a real or imagined homeland, and boundary maintenance through the 'preservation of a distinctive identity vis-à-vis a host society (or societies)' (Brubaker 2005: 5-6). Brubaker uses these essential features to argue they are necessary components of a diaspora but alone are not enough to capture the full meaning of the term. Instead, Brubaker proposes that diaspora should first be seen as a category of practice and then it can be used as a category of analysis (Brubaker 2005: 12). This means that rather than viewing diaspora as a predetermined entity or bounded group, there is a need to evaluate how it is used 'to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties' (Brubaker 2005: 12). Therefore, diaspora can be used as a categorical term to refer to people who meet the three essential criteria, but only with the recognition that it is more than simply descriptive. It is a term that indicates an active political position and is not neutral or impartial (see Horst 2013).

Martin Sökefeld advances the understanding of diaspora as practice by stating that diaspora formation 'is not a "natural" consequence of migration but that specific processes of mobilization have to take place for a diaspora to emerge' (Sökefeld 2006: 265). Sökefeld suggests the definition of diasporas should be *'imagined transnational communities*, as imaginations of community that unite segments of people that live in territorially separated locations' (Sökefeld 2006: 267, italics original). This definition is an extension of Benedict Anderson's (1983) 'imagined communities' used to refer to a community of people who feel a common sense of nationalism by being part of an imagined group. Sökefeld says, following the work of Anderson, that just because a group is imagined does not mean it is 'fictitious or unreal' (Sökefeld 2006: 266). The imaginations that bring together the community are cultivated, or mobilized, through responses to specific events, agents or animators, and/or strategies and practices of mobilization. This could be responding to critical events in the homeland, such as the Indian Army storming of the Golden Temple in 1984 strengthening Sikh diasporic identity (Dhillon 2007); elites mobilizing 'the diaspora' against authoritarian rule from afar, such as the case of Zimbabweans being animated by South Africans to contest elections between 2003-2008 (Betts and Jones 2016); or independence movements, such as the declaration of an independent Somaliland, supplemented and given weight by calling on the participation of 'the diaspora' to protest in their host states (Kleist and Hansen 2007).

These brief examples shed light on how diaspora is formed through actively galvanizing around particular claims, actions, or goals. However, active participation as a prerequisite for earning the distinction of diaspora could be considered restrictive and calls into question if there

can be such a thing as a 'latent' diaspora (see Van Hear 1998) or if we can refer to core, passive, and silent members of the diaspora (Shain and Barth 2003). While I recognize certain groups are more likely to mobilize based on shared identities and contextual factors, I would argue that describing groups that may exhibit characteristics of a diaspora as *de facto* the same as groups explicitly stating positions and advancing goals produces categorical confusion and undermines important distinctions between the groups. Therefore, when a group fails to demonstrate their position and pursue specific goals, they fail to be a diaspora. Sökefeld describes this formation as needing to fulfill both a subjective (self-identification) and objective (outside observer) criterion whereby a given collective can be categorized as a diaspora (Sökefeld 2006: 267). Both must be recognized because, as Cohen argues, 'not everyone is a diaspora because they say they are' (Cohen 2008: 15).

Emic and Etic Frames: Molded in Who's Image?

Sökefeld's evaluation of subjective and objective views is closely related to Cohen's distinction of emic and etic perspectives and their importance for understanding how diasporas can form and become mobilized. The desire to produce specific outcomes based on emic and etic framings of diaspora can be used to show how diaspora formation and mobilization are not neutral or apolitical. As Betts and Jones argue, 'one of the defining features of diasporas, as distinct from other groups of migrants, is that it is an inherently political stance; it is to have political business with the homeland' (Betts and Jones 2016: 3). Diasporic claims are made (emic) or ascribed (etic) because it is often beneficial for the framer to fashion a shared understanding of identity to render certain events and conditions meaningful.

The influence of framing is best understood through the work of Ian Hacking who states, 'if new modes of description come into being, new possibilities for action come into being in consequence' (Hacking 1986: 231). This is given further weight by his quip that 'people spontaneously come to fit their categories' (Hacking 1986: 223). Accepting diaspora formation as a natural consequence of displacement ignores the influence different actors have in 'making up' these groups by offering frames that can help legitimize action and mobilize people around certain claims to advance the framer's goals.

Emic and etic perspectives can be congruent but can also be divergent or shaped by each other through public discourse and reinterpretations of what constitutes the diaspora group in question. An example of this complexity is seen with the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Despite outside observations of a unified group, LTTE's positions concerning the homeland were not only criticized for not being in line with those of people in

Tamil Eelam, but that there were also 'social and political cleavages within the diaspora' (Brun and Van Hear 2012: 72). Noting this is not meant to undermine the recognition of LTTE as a diaspora, but to indicate that the perception of diasporas as clearly defined monolithic entities is not always accurate.

Emic and etic perspectives can also shape and be shaped by each other when certain actors provide expectations for how 'the diaspora' is supposed to act. Nauja Kleist shows how this can happen through a conversation with the Somaliland Minister of Repatriation, Return and Reintegration who states that 'the diaspora' is welcome back if they have a project or can contribute, but should not come back without skills or resources (Kleist 2008b: 1133). Countries such as the Philippines and Turkey have historically provided etic frames through diaspora engagement policies to ensure nationals living abroad feel compelled to maintain a connection to the homeland and contribute to the country's economy and development (see Baser 2017; Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2016). By providing an etic frame of diaspora that influences migrants' actions, as well as their conception of self, countries can cultivate an emic understanding of diaspora that result in outcomes aligned with national political goals.

There are two final points I would like to make concerning this framework. The first is that the motivations for providing emic and etic frames are not always perfectly clear, as can be observed with etic framings from academia, a field that is ideally neutral and impartial. However, I argue that these frames have real world impacts, even if there is not an obvious political motive. Different actors, such as influential academics, should be cognizant of how the frames they project can influence government policy, as will be covered in the following section.

The second point is that this framework could be interpreted as implying that every individual claim from dispersed peoples would constitute a unique diaspora. Diaspora as practice is not meant to get lost in the superfluous details of slightly variant claims, but to recognize there are observable differences within what seem to be homogenous groups. This is evidenced in Somali dispersal where people originating from Somaliland, Puntland, or Mogadishu could have wildly disparate claims and goals, yet all be categorized as the 'Somali diaspora'. The concept's main purpose is to move beyond assumptions that present all people dispersed from the same country as a single, bounded entity in order to reveal the possibility of competing political aspirations within seemingly homogenous groups (Vertovec 2005). Diaspora as practice helps identify why a particular stance is adopted and what the claims and actions imply (Kleist 2008b: 1130), providing greater insight into the group's potential influence on matters of peace- and state-building.

3. Peace Breakers or Peace Makers?: Moving Beyond the Binary

Jennifer Brinkerhoff argues that, because diasporas are often typecast with little analysis, there is a lack of grounded empirical understanding in policy discussions of how they can contribute to peace and security - or they are left out altogether (Brinkerhoff 2011: 135-6). In practice, diasporas have been shown to not only contribute to peace processes and mediation for reconciliation (Faist 2008: 34) but they have also fueled violence (Byman et al. 2001), earning, by some, the label of 'long distance nationalists' (Anderson 1992). Collier (2000) and Collier and Hoffman (2004) augmented the 'long distance nationalist' discourse by arguing that larger diasporas are more likely to fuel violence in their homeland by providing finances and publicity to sustain rebel fighting. As a rebuke, Feargal Cochrane critiqued these works, crucially in light of the contradictory findings that 'diasporas significantly reduce post-conflict risks' (Collier et al. 2008: 472), by noting that while diaspora groups have the capacity to contribute to violence, that 'to identify diasporas as the dependent variable in the existence or even repetition of violent political conflict carries a risk of confusing cause and effect' (Cochrane 2016: 52-3).

However, the 'peace-breaker' literature is voluminous and argues contextual and temporal factors can determine the nature of diasporic (re)engagement with homeland politics. Forced migrants, understood as 'individuals or communities compelled, obliged or induced to move when otherwise they would choose to stay put' (Van Hear 1998: 10), are projected as more likely to mobilize as people 'from countries emerging from conflict may possess strong feelings of duty and obligation to the origin country' (Nielsen and Riddle 2009). This is argued to occur because people dispersed by conflict 'cultivate a specific type of linkage where homeland territory takes on a high symbolic value' (Lyons 2007: 545) and episodic violence in the homeland facilities calls to mobilization as it strengthens diaspora identity (Brinkerhoff 2011: 124).

The temporal dimension of dispersal is also regarded as a factor for mobilization. It is argued distance from the original conflict can make it 'easier for subsequent generations to think of [conflict] not in nuanced shades of gray, but rather in starker black and white terms' (Lyons and Mandaville 2012: 20) and that 'diaspora groups created by conflict and sustained by memories of trauma tend to be less willing to compromise' (Kapur 2007: 102). It has been noted that in ongoing crises, such as in Somalia, 'some youth in the diaspora have been recruited into the militia groups that have sustained bloody conflicts in the country' (Kubai 2013: 180) as marginalized youth in host societies can be easier targets for mobilization (Sheffer 2003, 2007; Abdile and Pirkkalainen 2009 as cited in Kubai 2013).

This dichotomy has been covered in volumes such as *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?* (2007) which concludes that diasporas can be either, depending on contextual factors. Some argue that to promote positive engagement these groups must be more involved in peacebuilding processes (Smith 2007; Brinkerhoff 2011; Hautaniemi and Laakso 2014) while others question the co-opting of these groups as political assets to push top-down peacebuilding initiatives that favor Western agendas (Bendaña 2005; Turner 2011).

Regardless of the outcome of their involvement, Jolle Demmers says that there is reason to believe diasporas have greater impact on intrastate conflict based on new types of conflict and improved communication systems (Demmers 2002: 96). The shifting nature of conflict is covered in greater detail by Mary Kaldor (2001) and Mark Duffield (2001) who posit that 'new wars' are replacing traditional wars due, in part, to transnational practices such as providing financial, political, or economic support from abroad (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Terrence Lyons argues that due to a proliferation of transnational actors, 'it is increasingly difficult to understand political outcomes in many countries by looking exclusively at actors operating within the territory of that state' (Lyons 2007: 532). This indicates that diaspora engagement is not simply 'good' or 'bad', but an integral part of evolving political processes that can have a wide variety of outcomes. Whether or not these interventions are viewed positively becomes largely dependent on perspective (see Østergaard-Nielsen 2006).

The theoretical framework of diaspora as practice that probes emic and etic frames best fits into this changing political climate as it recognizes that evaluating claims, practices, and actions reveals important nuances within seemingly homogenous groups. Changing conditions on the ground in conflict or post-conflict settings could influence how or why particular groups are mobilized, and which actors favor spurring mobilization. The extension of the two-part definition of diaspora to peacebuilding theory proves to be the final component for understanding the possible impact that these groups have on peace- and state-building processes.

Autonomous Actors and Political Assets

Peacebuilding theory outlines the rationale for cultivating liberal peace to bring stability to war torn societies by building formal institutions (Paris 1997, 2010; Richmond 2006). However, in practice, peacebuilding initiatives have been criticized for exploiting the 'failed state' discourse (see Nay 2013) to justify intervention and institute top-down projects that prioritize economic considerations and the private sector over the common good of people on the ground (Pugh 2006). It has been argued this suppresses bottom-up processes that could allow for local

ownership of reconciliation and reconstruction by favoring the free market and international corporations (Bendaña 2005; Pugh et al. 2011).

An emerging trend in peacebuilding literature is the recognition that, in practice, foreign intervention becomes hybridized by incorporating both 'liberal' and 'non-liberal' spaces, practices, and subjects into conflict resolution strategies (Laffey and Nadarajah 2012). This has been labeled 'hybrid peace', which can be understood as a combination of formal practices, such as market stabilization or democratic institution building, with informal institutions such as hereditary, ethnic, or traditional rule to foster social and political stability (Jarstad and Belloni 2012). Roger Mac Ginty (2010) notes that hybrid peace requires a negotiation of top-down and bottom-up practices in post-conflict settings due to the trade-off between 'order' and 'liberty'. Oliver Richmond calls this a 'juxtaposition between international norms and interests and local forms of agency and identity' (Richmond 2015: 50). Hybrid peace, Richmond argues, 'cannot emerge without hybrid politics and some sort of basic order following an encounter between local and international agencies' (Richmond 2015: 60). This seemingly provides a space for migrants to challenge the distinction between 'liberal and non-liberal worlds [by] inviting engagement with subjects and practices situated simultaneously in both' (Laffey and Nadarajah 2012: 405).

Yoshi Shain states that diasporas can occupy a 'third-level' between interstate and domestic peacebuilding and can have 'a significant impact on the sovereign decision-making of states with respect to the questions of peace and war' (Shain 2002: 137). This proposition comes from the idea that migrant groups create a 'third-level' in peace negotiations by not fitting into the 'two-level' categorization of 'domestic' or 'international' (Shain 2002: 120). Instead, they can function as autonomous actors within the host state while also personifying the 'homeland' while abroad (Shain 2002: 118). Shain posits this position as 'third-level' mediators provides diasporas an opportunity to have important influence over matters of peace- and state-building.

A possible rebuke to Shain's optimism is that rather than being autonomous actors, these groups can become co-opted as 'hybrid subjects'. Hybrid subjects can become useful political assets as 'international security practices act *on* and *through'* them (Laffey and Nadarajah 2012: 405, italics original), thus directing their actions and impacting their autonomy. Rather than being independent actors, they are used to provide legitimacy for external peace- and state-building initiatives by projecting the image of empowering native perspectives and bottom-up processes. The term 'hybrid subjects' is not meant to define a specific category of actors nor their actions, but rather to note how certain migrant groups can have their autonomy compromised by asymmetric power relations.

These distinctions underscore the relevance of emic and etic frames by relating how competing conceptions of diaspora can be leveraged from the outside or strengthened from within. This is not to say that diasporas fall into one of two camps of being fully independent or co-opted by external agents, but rather they exist on a continuum, whereby competing actors attempt to exert power to achieve political goals. Østergaard-Nielsen's process-oriented analysis is instructive here, pointing to the importance of the 'how' and 'why' of diaspora engagement for understanding the 'then what'.

The following section pulls together the various arguments in this paper to make sense of how the two-part definitions of diaspora influences real world political process. Definitional clarity allows for a tracking of the process-oriented approach to diaspora engagement that allows for an examination of the motivations groups have for acting, the channels they attempt to act through, and the result of their efforts. The following example specifically relates how etic frames can shape Somali migrant groups' emic conception, resulting in disproportionate control over diaspora groups' (in)action.

4. Diaspora (In)action: Co-opted by Etic Framing

International conferences on Somalia have been criticized for focusing on externally driven solutions (Long 2012) that prioritize top-down processes of peace- and state-building (Menkhaus 2007). Diasporas working with states or international organizations can become driven by external initiatives that act *on* and *through* them, thus limiting their autonomy and ceding influence to their powerful partners. This follows from the understanding that host states prefer to shape the formation of diaspora organizations through etic frames as it engenders a degree of loyalty to the host state and makes the groups easier to monitor (Sheffer 2003: 127). A result of this process is the framing diaspora as apolitical, neutral, and impartial (Horst 2013). But as noted earlier, this etic frame is inherently political as it can be used to legitimize specific policies through the guise of empowering local voices and supporting bottom-up peace processes or minimize dissenting opinions.

This section will look at three interconnected examples of diaspora engagement and etic framing to show how external actors can diminish the autonomy and political impact of diaspora groups. The first example will show how a diaspora organization can reinterpret etic framings for personal benefit, the second will look at a series of conference communiqués from international conferences on Somalia that frame 'the diaspora' in particular ways, and the final example will briefly examine World G18 Somalia, a diaspora group that met the conditions of 'impartial' and 'neutral' but was still excluded from meaningful forms of political engagement.

Cindy Horst states that 'donors often facilitate the creation of umbrella organisations as one of the main ways of dealing with concerns about diaspora fragmentation' (Horst 2013: 234). Umbrella organizations can be mutually beneficial for both donors and disparate groups as 'Somali organisations have struggled to compete for institutional funding' (Ullah 2012) and coming together can make it easier to receive funding as 'host governments find it more convenient and efficient to deal with organized diasporas' (Sheffer 2003: 127). However, the formation of umbrella groups raises the issue of representation as claims made in the name of 'Somali diaspora' could come from only a few political elites (Brubaker 2005; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006; Horst 2013). Furthermore, the formation of these groups could suppress dissenting opinions and limit opportunities for dialogue that could be an important step toward compromise and mediation (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006: 12). These concerns led Horst to observe that umbrella organizations are often unsuccessful due to 'largely [being] driven by the diaspora's efforts to respond to the requirements of donors rather than by a genuine wish to cooperate beyond existing differences' (Horst 2013: 234).

Nauja Kleist's fieldwork observing a conference for The Development Organization of East Africa (DOEA) offers important insight into the formation of an umbrella organization and how etic frames can influence what claims these groups make. One of the central aims of the conference was 'to establish DOEA as a transnational umbrella organisation to coordinate support from "the diaspora"' (Kleist 2008a: 311). The conference included topics such as 'bridging clan divides' and establishing 'cooperation, effectiveness, and cogency between associations in the West' (Kleist 2008a: 311). However, Kleist notes that despite attendees praising the conference as a 'meeting between intellectuals' and lauding the establishment of an umbrella organization, nothing more seemed to come of it (Kleist 2008a: 320). The conference appeared to be more about the political positioning of elite Somalis and impressing Western donors than improving the functioning of local associations (Kleist 2008a: 311). Kleist's observations from the conference show how emic projections of diaspora can be influenced by a reinterpretation of the etic, as adopting the etic frame be personally or politically beneficial.

Evaluating instances of etic framings of diaspora by powerful actors can lend greater insight into why groups like DOEA adopt particular stances and how external actors view the role of expatriate Somalis in peace- and state-building processes. The London Conference on Somalia 2012 and the follow up Istanbul Conference on Somalia 2012 were two events sponsored by the international community to address the challenges caused by instability in Somalia. The official communiqué for each conference included brief mention of 'the diaspora' but offered little more public information about who was envisaged as 'the diaspora' or who

represented these groups at the conferences. The reason for mentioning 'the diaspora' in the communiqués was to highlight the financial contribution they could make in Somalia by developing 'livestock, fisheries and other sectors' (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2012) and that there was a need to tap into the skills and capacity of the 'Somali Diaspora' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). Kleist notes how these types of reports can provide a frame that has 'explicit expectations of both economic support and continued loyalty towards Somalia' (Kleist 2008b: 1132).

The framing of 'the diaspora' as development actors (see Gamlen 2014) at these two conferences is notable in comparison to the widely leaked draft of the communiqué for the London Conference on Somalia 2012 that came out a week before the actual event (McConnell 2012). The leaked draft stated:

> '4. We recognised the important role played in Somalia by the diaspora and by civil society, which are critical actors in the political, economic, security and humanitarian affairs of Somalia. Although attendance at the conference was reserved for governments and international institutions, Somali views, including those of the diaspora, were sought in advance of the event. Looking forward, we agreed to work together with Somali diaspora communities and civil society to help shape a better future for Somalia'
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> (Somaliatalk.com 2012).

This statement contrasts with the official final communiqué, as well as the one from Istanbul, as both portrayed 'the diaspora' as neutral, external actors rather than important partners who could contribute in multiple sectors of Somali political and social life. This reflects a desire to use externally driven solutions that act *on* and *through* diaspora groups, or to not engage with them at all, rather than to provide meaningful channels of engagement predicated on cooperation.

The follow up Somalia Conference 2013 did not have any mention of diaspora in the official communiqué (Department for International Development et al. 2013) and was criticized for not empowering Somali stakeholders as well as 'complicating rather than facilitating Somalia's state-making project' (Balthasar 2013). The London Somalia Conference 2017 made a concerted effort to provide a more prominent role for diaspora groups at the conference by hosting a side event on diaspora and civil society contribution on 10 May 2017, a day before the main conference. The side event released an official statement that provided several highlights, most notably detailing that the meeting was attended by 30 Somali diaspora and civil society leaders and that the meeting was concluded with a commitment to continue dialogue 'in recognition of

the important contribution of civil society and diaspora in supporting Somalia's ongoing peace and development' (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development 2017).

The side event's report was ambiguous regarding the attendees who supposedly 'represented a diverse range of issues, interests and geographical regions; from across Somalia, to host countries in Africa, Europe and North America' (Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development 2017). A report from the U.K. government notes that the main groups involved in shaping the side event were a Somali diaspora organization called the Anti-Tribalism Movement and the Council of Somali Organisations, an umbrella organization representing more than 80 Somali groups (Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2017). I am highlighting these groups not to question their work, but to comment on how the only two groups officially recognized were an umbrella organization and a group that stresses core values that include 'impartiality' and being 'non-partisan' (Anti-Tribalism Movement 2017). The inclusion of these groups gives weight to Horst's (2013) and Sheffer's (2003) assertions that donors prefer to work with umbrella organizations and/or diaspora groups that claim to be neutral and impartial. Furthermore, the meeting between these two groups and Africa Minister Tobias Ellwood in preparation for the event was reported to be a 'one-way street, with the minister outlining expected Conference outcomes' (Wardrop 2017). This raises questions about room for dissenting opinions and if the autonomy of these groups was compromised, forcing them into a subjugated position rather than being integral partners in peace- and state-building proposals.

The London Somalia Conference 2017 produced greater public commitment from the international community, but it remains to be seen how much independence will be provided to actors to initiate bottom-up processes rather than follow top-down initiatives. Østergaard-Nielsen commented on this limitation by recognizing 'that diasporas seldom make a government adopt a policy unless that policy is also in the national interest of the country' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006: 10). The ebb and flow of commitment to diaspora groups demonstrates not only the importance of etic framing, but also how contingent these groups are on the political will of powerful external actors. This final point will be demonstrated with a brief look at diaspora group World G18 Somalia and their experience working with the U.K. government.

World G18 Somalia is an umbrella organization that aims to unify the Somali diaspora through points outlined in a joint statement that 'has been signed by representatives of the Somali Diaspora' in numerous Western states (World G18 Somalia). World G18 Somalia worked with the U.K. government by providing evidence of piracy off the coast of Somalia

combined with a proposal to foster peace through development and alternative economic opportunities to piracy in six coastal Somali villages (Foreign Affairs Committee 2012). In the same report that contained the group's evidence and proposal, the U.K. Foreign Affairs Committee recognized the World G18's critique that the channels the U.K. government uses to provide funding for development in Somalia lacked meaningful engagement with Somalis and the Somali diaspora (Foreign Affairs Committee 2012).

There appeared to be a desire to address the lack of meaningful engagement when then Foreign Office Minister Henry Bellingham stated that the U.K. government was set to commit '£2M to community engagement and economic development projects in coastal regions' of Somalia (Bellingham 2011). World G18 Somalia had an understanding that their proposed bottom-up development programs, which had been negotiated with clan elders in the coastal villages, were going to be funded through this government initiative (Wardrop 2017). However, David Wardrop notes that World G18 Somalia watched 'with embarrassment' as the full £2M was allocated to a UNDP project, causing the group's credibility to be severely damaged in Somalia (Wardrop 2017).

This final example demonstrates that even when a group meets the seemingly projected ideal of a neutral and impartial umbrella organization, and is publicly recognized as an important group in the 'Somali diaspora', they can still be left out of meaningful forms of political engagement.

5. Conclusion

Using the theoretical framework of diaspora as practice to probe emic and etic framings allows researchers to better evaluate how diasporas affect peace- and state-building processes. Privileging the 'how' and 'why' to the same extent as the 'then what' in the process-oriented approach of diaspora engagement both contextualizes outcomes and reveals the motives underwriting them. It shifts understanding diaspora formation as a natural consequence of dispersal to a recognition that particular actors must offer opportunity structures, engage in mobilizing practices, and provide certain frames in order for diasporas to emerge (Betts and Jones 2016: 26). Diaspora, therefore, has strong normative implications: 'it does not so much *describe* the world as seek to *remake* it' (Brubaker 2005: 12, italics original).

Diaspora as practice could be particularly instructive in evaluating ongoing crisis such as displacement caused by the Syrian Civil War. More than 5.4 million people have fled Syria between 2011 and 2018 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2018), with Syrian citizens displaced to a variety of countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the

Americas. Not all Syrians will have a shared vision of how to rebuild the country or what governing structures will best serve peaceful reconciliation. Mapping the plurality of opinions and competing claims and actions of Syrians displaced abroad will be integral for projecting the impact diaspora groups can have on homeland political processes. Following from Brinkerhoff's analysis, there is a need to provide grounded empirical analysis of diaspora groups to understand how they can affect matters of conflict and security. In Syria, there are particularly strong geopolitical implications with multiple foreign actors vying for influence over the fate of the Syrian Arab Republic. As diaspora groups attempt to *remak*e the homeland in whatever way, large or small, it will be crucial to question why the group has formed, what their claims and actions imply, what channels they use to exert influence, and whether they retain some semblance of autonomy or if they are conduits for external policies to act *on* and *through.*

The framework presented in this paper is not meant to provide a rigid structure or a checklist that must be followed in order to properly understand diaspora engagement. Nor does it argue that it will provide a perfect understanding of mobilizing practices or every distinct diaspora group. Instead, the paper argues that particular framings of diaspora can produce real world impacts as they produce a shared understanding of events and conditions that render them meaningful. Probing these frames could theoretically change the role of diasporas in conflict settings by adding a layer of complexity that reveals competing opinions to allow for dialogue instead of images of the world that are cast in black and white (see Lyons 2004). A more nuanced analysis of diaspora groups could reshape how diasporas are externally and internally conceptualized, how they are regarded in academia, and, ultimately, how policy is crafted to facilitate or hinder their engagement with the homeland.

As long as the transnational practices of diaspora groups attempt to *remak*e the homeland, it will be important to evaluate why these actors are engaging, how they are engaging, and the result of their actions. Framing diasporas from internal emic and etic perspectives influences their formation, mobilization, and (in)action, revealing why certain claims are made and actions are undertaken. The ability of diasporas groups to act as 'third level' mediators or the positioning of these groups as political assets for policies to pass *on* and *through* can determine the impact of diasporas in peace- and state-building processes in their homeland. Definitional clarity demonstrates how diasporas are a unique group, and why their studying in political science continues to merit attention.

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