

## **The Potential of Diaspora Groups to Contribute to Peace Building: A Scoping Paper<sup>1</sup>**

Joanna Spear<sup>2</sup>

The George Washington University

This paper is a preliminary consideration of the question of how Diaspora from Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sierra Leone could contribute to peace building in their home states. Often Diasporas are regarded as obstacles to peace building, so it is not the assumption of this scoping paper that the relationship between Diasporas and peace building will always be positive. That being said, neither does the paper make the assumption that the Diaspora are homogenous groups that behave in consistent and coordinated ways. The aim is to consider what scope there is for tapping into more positive elements of Diaspora relations with their homelands as they emerge from conflict.

The paper begins by setting the context for contemporary interest in Diaspora groups. It then considers four different arenas of peace building where they could play a role; the political realm, the socio-cultural realm, the philanthropic realm and the economic realm. In each of these areas the paper picks out examples of the behavior of these three Diaspora groups.

There have been a number of waves of Diaspora, each followed by a wave of scholarship examining the experiences, causes and consequences of the existence of that Diaspora.<sup>3</sup> Steven Vertovec has identified three common usages of the term Diaspora in recent academic literature on the subject; “Diaspora” as a social form, “Diaspora” as a type of consciousness, and “Diaspora” as a mode of cultural production.<sup>4</sup> The traditional

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a contribution to The UK Economic and Social Research Council funded project Res. 223.250071, “Transformation of War Economies”, <http://www.research.plymouth.ac.uk/twe/mainframe.html>

<sup>2</sup> A first draft of this paper was presented at the panel on Post War State Building, International Studies Association Conference, March 24, 2006, San Diego, California. The author would like to thank the discussant, Elizabeth Cousens, and the audience for their helpful comments.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Cohen, “Diasporas and the Nation State: From Victims to Challengers”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (1996), pp. 507-520; J. T. Shuval, “Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm”, *International Migration*, Vol. 38, No 5 (2000), pp. 41-57.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Vertovec, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora’, Exemplified Among South Asian Religions”, *Diaspora* Vol. 6, No. 3 (1997), pp. 277-299.

understanding of Diasporas sees them as resulting from catastrophic events.<sup>5</sup> The three Diasporas considered here; Afghan, Bosnian and Sierra Leonean, can be seen in this tradition as they were created by civil wars. These *conflict-generated Diasporas*, as Terrence Lyons calls them, are a largely untapped source of expertise and knowledge that may have the potential to contribute to post-conflict peace building.<sup>6</sup> As Gabriel Sheffer has noted “A fundamental characteristic of diasporas is that they maintain their ethno-national identities, which are strongly and directly derived from their homelands and related to them.”<sup>7</sup>

The latest wave of scholarship on Diasporas has been spurred by recognition of the central role of people on the move in reflecting and enhancing the quickening pace of globalization. More than that, there has been recognition of the role of Diasporas in two key issues of the day, first, the role of Diaspora remittances as the major flow of economic resources from the developed to the developing world, dwarfing aid monies and potentially being much better targeted and effective.<sup>8</sup> This has spurred considerations of how to make remitting easier and cheaper and how to maximize the development consequences of remittances.<sup>9</sup> Second, the concern that Diaspora groups are willing or unwilling conduits for terrorist activities.<sup>10</sup> For example, through transferring funds to terrorist through traditional money transfer systems which operate

<sup>5</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997), pp. 26-28.

<sup>6</sup> Terrence Lyons, “Engaging Diasporas to Promote Conflict Resolution: Transforming Hawks into Doves”, Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason university (April 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, “Ethno-National Diasporas and Security”, *Survival*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 61.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Carol C. Adelman, “The Privatization of Foreign Aid: Reassessing National Largesse”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (Nov/Dec 2003); Richard Lapper, “Study Finds More Migrants Sending More Money Home”, *Financial Times*, May 17, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Manuel Orzoco, “Changes in the Atmosphere? Increase of Remittances, Price Decline and New Challenges”, *Inter-American Dialogue Remittances Project Research Series No. 2*, March 2003; Andrew Balls, “World Bank in Call to Ease Poverty”, *Financial Times*, November 16, 2005. At [http://news.ft.com/cms/s/92ab10d4-56e6-11da-b98c-00000e25118c.ft\\_acl=s01=1.html](http://news.ft.com/cms/s/92ab10d4-56e6-11da-b98c-00000e25118c.ft_acl=s01=1.html); Jørgen Carling, “Policy Options for Increasing the Benefits of Remittances”, *Working Paper No. 8* (Oxford: Center on Migration, Policy and Society, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, RAND, 2001); Margaret Purdy, “Targeting Diasporas: the Canadian Counter-Terrorism Experience”, especially sections 1 & 2, Draft Working Paper, Center of International Relations. Undated.

on the basis of trust as opposed to paperwork.<sup>11</sup> This study, however, is motivated by a third issue; the potential role of Diasporas in peace building in their home countries.

For the last twenty years policy makers, scholars and practitioners have been trying to discover the alchemy that will enable states to recover from brutal internal conflicts and successfully build a peaceful state and community. The path to this type of peace building has been marked by attention to key issues such as: the role of the international organizations in ending internal conflicts, establishing security through disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, establishing democracy and the best version of democracy for the state, re-invigorating the economy, re-directing income to the state and the role of economic actors such as international financial institutions (IFIs) and firms in the peace building process. In considering the different actors with the potential to enhance peace building, the role of Diaspora groups has, to date, received little attention.<sup>12</sup>

This paper and the larger study it is a part of are aimed at beginning to fill this gap in the literature. The Diasporas being considered currently reside in Great Britain and the United States. Their home countries are Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sierra Leone. This Diaspora study is part of a wider project on transforming war economies into peace economies and all the project participants are working on different aspects of building political economies of peace within these three countries.<sup>13</sup> Each of

---

<sup>11</sup> Concerns about the funding of terrorists led to the closing down of many money transfer systems such as the “hawala” system used in India and the Middle East (whose charges are as low as 1-2%). This had the counter-productive effects of cutting vulnerable populations off from economic relief for a period of time and diminishing the amount that could subsequently be remitted due to the higher costs of transfer. Philip Bowring, “The War on Third World Remittances”, *International Herald Tribune*, November 28, 2005. Subsequently the counter-productive nature of those measures was realized and balanced by attempts to reduce the costs of remitting through regular (read Western) banking systems. This also reflected the desire of banks such as Citibank to secure some of this lucrative market. Diana Ransom, “Banks Aim to Help Immigrants Send Money Home”, *Christian Science Monitor*, January 26, 2006. At <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0126/p15s01-lifp.html>

<sup>12</sup> Notable exceptions to this include: the ESRC Research Programme on Transnational Communities, which produced among other studies: Nadjie Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism: The Experience of Bosnians and Eritreans in Europe”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 2001), pp. 615-634; Nadjie Al-Ali, Richard Black and Khalid Koser, “Mobilisation and Participation of Transnational Exile Communities in Post-Conflict Reconstruction”, Interim report for the ESRC program (1999).

<sup>13</sup> The UK Economic and Social Research Council funded project Res. 223.250071, “Transformation of War Economies”, <http://www.research.plymouth.ac.uk/twe/mainframe.html>

the countries being examined has experienced civil war (often protracted civil war) and is now considered to be in a peace building phase.

In each case there have also been a number of ‘waves’ of people leaving the country, creating Diasporas that mirror the political tensions within the home countries. The most potent question you can ask a member of a conflict-generated Diaspora is “when did you leave?” as the answer will potentially provide a lot of political, economic and social information about the person you asked. For example, in the case of Sierra Leone we have several ‘generations’ of people leaving, each carrying a sense of being a ‘victim Diaspora’ to use Robin Cohen’s phrase.<sup>14</sup>

Diasporas are not alike and their different histories, generations of exit, conflicts between the different waves of exit, their cultures and trajectories mark them out as truly unique. Importantly, Diasporas are usually internally non-homogenous - containing groups of different classes, genders, religions and ethnicities – so it cannot be assumed that a given Diaspora can be treated as a single unit and assessed as such, in fact it may be more fruitful to start from the opposite assumption. Indeed the Diaspora may be operating at cross-purposes with itself and it will be important to be alert to this dynamic. Of course, these issues raise important methodological questions about how much can be generalized from a study such as the one being scoped here.

Given the degree of difference between Diasporas what is required is a “thorough, country-specific understanding of Diasporas and the dynamics of their interaction with their country of origin.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, much of the work on Diasporas completed to date has not been focused on conflict Diasporas, so there are questions about the applicability of some of the conclusions and policy recommendations from that literature – generally concerned with understanding the economic roles of Diasporas in their home and host countries – to the particular circumstances of post conflict peace building.

This study is interested in the gamut of involvement of Diasporas with their home countries. This is necessitated because peace building is an enterprise that entails political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological aspects. Thus, to capture the actual

---

<sup>14</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Kathleen Newland, *Beyond Remittances: The Role of Diaspora in Poverty Reduction in their Countries of Origin*, A Scoping Study by the Migration Policy Institute for the Department of International Development, July 2004, p. vi.

and potential role of the Diaspora in peace building requires attention to their networks and activities in all of these areas.

### **Political Roles:**

Diasporas can have either negative or positive effects on peace processes and politics in the home state.<sup>16</sup> These will be dealt with in turn.

- Benedict Anderson tends toward a negative view, labeling them “long-distance nationalists” and considers them inevitably unaccountable and irresponsible.<sup>17</sup> An example of this may be the behavior of the Serbian Diaspora before and during the Balkan wars.<sup>18</sup>
- The Kosovo Diaspora is an interesting example of a group that became radicalized over time. Although initially giving support (requested at the level of 3% of annual income) to the moderate LDK party headed by Ibrahim Rugova, “As the conflict grew, so too did the insurgency. Money from the diaspora community that was previously given to the LDK was increasingly diverted to the fund of the KLA, known as Homeland Calling. Increasingly, Albanian men from Western Europe and later the U.S. joined the insurgency.”<sup>19</sup> The Drenica killings in March 1998 marked a take-off point in terms of support from the Diaspora.
- There is a long tradition of Diasporas funding conflicts in their home countries.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Somalia, different parts of the Diaspora supported different clan groups with funding that was funneled through civil society groups and used to purchase weapons.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> R. Iyob, “The Ethiopian-Eritrean Conflict: Diasporic vs. Hegemonic States in the Horn of Africa, 1991-2000”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2000); I.I. Ahmed, “Remittances and their Economic Impact in Post-War Somaliland”, *Diasters*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2000); Lyons, “Engaging Diasporas” op cit.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict Anderson, “The New World Disorder”, *New left Review*, No. 193 (1992), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Brad Blitz, “Serbia’s War Lobby: Diaspora Groups and Western Elites”, in Stjepan Mestrovic and Thomas Cushman (eds.), *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia* (New York: New York University Press, 1996)

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo”, section 2,

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau & David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), especially Chapter Three “Diaspora Support for Insurgencies”, pp. 41-60.

<sup>21</sup> *Civil Society and Conflict Management in Africa: Report of the IPA/OAU Consultation*, 29 May – 2 June 1996, International Peace Academy, New York, p. 12.

- It is also common for Diasporas to perpetuate the conflict – through funding and unwillingness to compromise to reach a settlement - despite the desire of those in the country to compromise and end the conflict. This connects to the notion that those outside of the country tend to have a more idealized view of “home” than do those who live there.<sup>22</sup>
- The establishment of a Diaspora can be seen as an extraterritorial political constituency that the home state needs to take into account because it poses a challenge to its authority.<sup>23</sup>
- Diasporas can play important roles in electoral politics in their home countries. For example, the Croatian Diaspora was reported as providing \$4 million in contributions to the electoral campaign of Franjo Tudjman and was rewarded with 12 of the 120 parliamentary seats in recognition of their role.<sup>24</sup>
- The fact that some groups – such as Cuban-Americans - choose to regard themselves as Diasporas and not just immigrants (indicating that they do not want to completely assimilate and signal an intention to return “home”), has great significance for their relationship with their host state.<sup>25</sup>
- Host governments can attempt to use the Diaspora community to achieve their own goals, for example, Tony Blair’s attempt to court Muslim and Afghan Diaspora opinion in Britain in support of the 2001 war on Afghanistan.
- Gabriel Sheffer notes that “The establishment of independent states in the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union has had at least one impact on modern diasporas by reducing the number of stateless diasporas and leading to a change in their strategies towards both their host countries and their homelands.”<sup>26</sup> The specific effects that he is talking about result from their transformation from stateless Diasporas to state-based Diasporas and the consequent move to a less conflictual stance in international politics. It will be interesting to track if this change in

---

<sup>22</sup> As Gina Bujis has noted, “. . . part of the process of crossing physical and metaphysical boundaries for migrants and refugees is an investment in an idealised perception of the society of origin or homeland.”

<sup>23</sup> M. S. Laguerre, “State, Diaspora, and Transnational Politics: Haiti Reconceptualised”, *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No 3 (1999).

<sup>24</sup> “Special report: Diasporas: A World of Exiles”, *The Economist*, January 4, 2003, pp. 25-27. Cited in Lyons, “Engaging Diasporas”, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> D. Reiff, “From Exiles to Immigrants”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (1995), pp. 76-89.

<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, “Ethno-National Diasporas and Security”, p. 63.

Diaspora status effects how individuals from Bosnia Herzegovina interact with their now-sovereign homeland.

- On the more positive side, Margaret Purdy considers that because they are “removed from the frontline of conflict”, Diasporas may “have a wider and more objective perspective, less influenced by raw emotion and anger. In their new homeland, they may have access to a wider variety of information sources, such as those provided by social and employment contacts, media reporting and Internet communications.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the experience of being a migrant / refugee may bring them into contact with others from the region with different perspectives. For example, in London there have been putative efforts by the Diaspora from the Horn of Africa to work together to move the home countries towards a more constructive political relationship.<sup>28</sup>
- In the case of Eritrea in the aftermath of the liberation struggle, a group of Diaspora intellectuals known as the ‘G13’ wrote to the President of Eritrea. In what is known as the “Berlin Manifesto” they laid out the case for democracy and criticized a number the government’s practices and demanded trial or release of all political prisoners. Thus supported, Assembly members and government officials also demanded multiparty elections, which President Issayas reluctantly agreed to.<sup>29</sup>
- In the case of Uganda, members of the Acholi Diaspora, particularly those living in London, have worked to bring together representatives from the Government of Uganda, the Government of Sudan, the Lords Resistance Army (the rebel group) and other groups with a stake in the conflict. The Diaspora has organized a series of conferences designed to be open forums for dialogue between the parties, with the aim of promoting a negotiated solution to the conflict.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Purdy, “Targeting Diasporas”, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Mesfin Gebrekal, *The Horn of Africa: The Changing Nature of Security in the Aftermath of the Cold War* PhD thesis, University of London, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> “Eritrea: The Intelligentsia Rebel”, *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 922 (22 October 2001), p. 1. Cited in Gebrekal, *The Horn of Africa*, p. 262.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Rigby, “Civil Society, Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation in Post-War Africa”, in Oliver Furley and Roy May (Eds.), *Ending Africa’s Wars* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Citing: N. C. Poblücks, “Kacoke Madit: A Diaspora Role in Promoting Peace”, in Okello Lucima (Ed.), *Protracted*

- Members of the Afghan Diaspora played a constructive role in the 2001 “Petersburg Talks”, convened by the United Nations and Germany. These meetings resulted in the formation of a transitional government for Afghanistan (see below).<sup>31</sup>
- That President Hamid Karzai and three-quarters of his initial 30-strong Afghan cabinet were drawn from the Afghan Diaspora is an indication of the political role that the Diaspora can play in post conflict peace building.<sup>32</sup> However, the challenges that his government has faced and their rocky progress strikes a cautionary note about any expectations of Diaspora success, though it is difficult to determine if the obstacles faced in Afghanistan are made any more challenging because people who have lived abroad for a long time are amongst those trying to get the country back on its feet.
- A number of Sierra Leonean political parties court the Diaspora and have offices in the U.S. and Britain. For example, the *All People’s Congress* has a North America Branch and the *Sierra Leone Peoples Party* has a General Secretary based in Houston, Texas.

### **Socio-Cultural Roles:**

- The majority of those who define themselves as Diaspora invest time and money in maintaining contacts with family and friends, and particularly, if the situation allows, by visiting their home countries.

A 1999 study of Bosnian Diaspora in Britain noted that:

Despite...various obstacles to return, Bosnian refugees have increasingly sought links and contact with their country of origin. Both as individuals and as members of community organisations, there have been few yet growing attempts to get involved in ongoing developments within Bosnia,

---

*Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda*, Accord Issue 11 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2002), pp. 62-3.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities”, p.34.

<sup>32</sup> Leila Jazayery, “The Migration-Development Nexus: Afghanistan Case Study”, in *International Migration*, Vol. 40, No. 5, p. 244.

i.e. sending financial remittances, organizing cultural and social events, and regular visits to see friends and family.<sup>33</sup>

In this 1999 survey over half the respondents had visited Bosnia since they left. The majority of visits took place in the summer, designed to coincide with school holidays.<sup>34</sup>

“[T]heir motives were...arising from social obligations to family members, specific events such as a death in the family, or bureaucratic matters such as those relating to housing or land. A number of Bosnians in particular felt ambiguous or were even opposed to visiting Bosnia, but felt compelled due to such obligations.” An interesting finding is that for many the visits led them to decide to remain outside the country.<sup>35</sup>

- The Diaspora also maintains their socio-cultural identities by supporting artists, musicians and writers from their home countries touring in their host countries.
- Levitt has defined as “social remittances” the ideas, values and cultural artifacts that travel between countries.<sup>36</sup> In terms of the Bosnian Diaspora community, a number with creative backgrounds (artists, musicians, journalists etc.) continued to work creatively with the aim of sharing the products with both the home and the host country.
- Language is an important connection to the home country – and often to a particular region – and many parents fear that their children will lose their mother tongue. In Britain the Diaspora’s response to this fear was to initiate Bosnian supplemental weekend schools. The Bosnian Embassy has provided an official curriculum that covers Bosnian language, history, geography, music and art. Qualified volunteers do most of the teaching.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 617. It should be borne in mind that the relationship between Diasporas and the home state is dynamic, and what was true in 1999 when this survey was conducted, is not necessarily still true.

<sup>34</sup> In Somalia they actually talk about the “Diaspora season” when many return home to visit. Karin von Hippel and Randolph Kent, *Social Facilitation, Development & The Diaspora: Sustainable Health Services as Indicative Issue*. (December 2005)

<sup>35</sup> Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 623.

<sup>36</sup> Peggy Levitt, “Social Remittances: Migration-Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion”, *International Migration Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, (1998) pp. 926-48. Cited in Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 624.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 625.

- In the case of the Sri Lankan Diaspora, school and university alumni associations have become an important political space for the exchanging information.<sup>38</sup> If such associations exist, the role of these organizations for our chosen Diaspora will be investigated.

## Philanthropy

Somewhere on the cusp between socio-cultural activities and economic roles comes philanthropy. Andrew Rigby has noted in his work that the groups most able to demand peace and those that in some way enjoy a degree of ‘protection’ such as women and faith healers.<sup>39</sup> In the context of looking at Diasporas, it appears that doing charitable work may be a way to provide a safe space for engagement with the home country whilst sidestepping some of the toxic politics of the period. Indeed, women in the Diaspora started many of the charitable groups discussed below.

- In Britain, in 1995 Action for Children (AfC) was formed by a group of British-based Sierra Leoneans. From early fundraising campaigns they moved to partner with an established international NGO working in Sierra Leone, Concern International, and this is now an important partnership. Another successful initiative is the Sierra Leone War Trust for Children (SLWT), which was founded by seven members of the Diaspora based in Britain. The project is working with the communities of six war-ravaged villages on rehabilitating the communities and the services.<sup>40</sup> The Children’s Relief Trust- Sierra Leone (Colindale, London) was begun in 1996 and the Kambia Hospital Trust was begun in 1992. It may be that a focus on children allowed Sierra Leoneans a “neutral space” through which to contribute to the homeland without becoming embroiled in the political struggles roiling the country.
- In the U.S. there seem to be a number of philanthropic initiatives, including Grassroots Empowerment for Self Reliance (GEMS), whose National Coordinator

---

<sup>38</sup> Wolfram Zunzer, “Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation”, *Berghof Occasional Paper No. 26*, The Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, Berlin (September 2004), p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Rigby, “Civil Society, Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation in Post-War Africa”, in Oliver Furley and Roy May (Eds.), *Ending Africa’s Wars* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Newland, *Beyond Remittances*, p. 27. SLWT is found at: <http://www.slwt.org>

is Barbara Bangura, the Sierra Leone Fund, begun by childhood friends in the U.S., The Africa AIDS Education and Prevention-Sierra Leone Project, Inc. based in Florida and begun in 2003 by Diaspora, the Koinadugu Descendent Organization (KDO), the Kono District Post-War reconstruction Foundation (Hyattsville, MD), the Alpha Foundation (Atlanta, GA), Leonenet Street Children Project, Inc. (Kentucky), and the Sierra Leone Relief /Texas Gulf Coast (Seabrook, TX), Friends of Africa Relief and Development Agency Sierra Leone (New York, NY), Gbonkolenken Descendants Organization (Alexandria, VA)

### **Economic Roles:**

There are a number of challenges to the assumption that Diasporas will be willing and able to play positive economic roles in their homeland. As B. Lindsey Lowell and Stefka G. Gerova noted in a paper written for the World Bank:

...solid data do not exist on the extent of diaspora business investment, but it is reasonable that expatriates avoid high-risk emerging markets even when they happen to be in an expatriate's homeland.<sup>41</sup>

However, this is assumed, rather than known. This study aims to investigate whether this is the case with these three conflict Diasporas. Our starting assumption is that the Diaspora has the *potential* to contribute to peace building, but it is to be investigated whether that potential is realizable.

There are other unknowns as well, in particular, "Other than the more obvious and general facts of diaspora-generated flows of money and transnational networks, there is little agreed-upon detailing of the mechanisms by which diasporas stimulate development."<sup>42</sup> Manuel Orozco has identified five 'Ts'; forms of economic transfers between Diasporas and their home countries:<sup>43</sup>

- Tourism
- Transportation

---

<sup>41</sup> B. Lindsay Lowell and Stefka G. Gerova, "Diasporas and Economic Development: State of Knowledge", Paper prepared by the Institute for the Study of International Migration for the World Bank, September 13, 2004, p. ii.

<sup>42</sup> Lowell and Gerova, "Diasporas and Economic Development", p.1.

<sup>43</sup> Manuel Orozco, "The Impact of Migration in the Caribbean and Central American Region", *Focal Policy Paper FPP-03-03*, (Ottawa: Canadian Foundation for the Americas, 2003).

- Telecommunications
- Trade (nostalgic)
- Transmission of monetary remittances

To his categories it might be helpful to add another category (though it breaks up the rhythm of the ‘T’s):

- Investments in the homeland

Of these six, the one most discussed in the literature on Diasporas is monetary remittances. Even here, however, there is debate in the literature as to the extent to which remittances actually contribute to development. Part of this project will be to consider the scope and use of such remittances from our three Diaspora communities, but our interest is also in non-monetary transfers. In terms of what is already known about the activities of our chosen conflict Diasporas, the majority of information concerns tourism and remittances and investments in the homeland. These three areas will now be briefly discussed.

### Tourism

As noted above, one of the most common forms of connection to the homeland is that members of the Diaspora make efforts to return fairly regularly. As the numbers of returnees increases, they can begin to generate fairly regular revenue through their demands for services such as transportation. Such Diaspora returns are not strictly speaking tourism, but it has been suggested that where Diasporas go, the more adventurous non-residents may choose to follow.

In terms of tourism, there are some interesting initiatives taking place on bringing people from the U.S. to Sierra Leone. The group that is being targeted as potential tourists are African Americans, not recent Diaspora, but those whose roots go back to the slave ships bringing their ancestors to the U.S. several centuries ago. The ‘hook’ that is being used is the newly discovered connections between Sierra Leone and African slaves sent in particular to South Carolina, Georgia and Florida in the 1700s. Until recently it was not known where the slaves who embarked at the Bunce Island port (in Freetown) ended up, but anthropological work has uncovered a connection to these three U.S. states,

and in particular to the need for slaves who understood rice cultivation.<sup>44</sup> Discovery of this link has led to important anthropological discoveries of connections between Sierra Leone and the Gullah communities of coastal South Carolina and Georgia, in terms of basketry and, in one case, knowledge of a very old funeral song from the country, sung in Mende, that had passed down through five generations of the Moran Gullah family.<sup>45</sup>

The organization that is pushing forward this tourism agenda is actually interested in the preservation of Bunce Island. Bunce Island Preservation, Inc. is based in New Haven, Connecticut and seems to bring together those interested in African-American history, more recent Diaspora from Sierra Leone (including members of the Friends of Sierra Leone) and a number of very enthusiastic ex-Peace Corps volunteers. It seems that the Bunce Island project predates the Sierra Leone civil war, but was kept alive during it by contacts between the U.S. Park Service and President Joseph Momoh and, in 1996 Tejan Kabbah.

The Gullah people have taken up the link with Bunce Island and are becoming advocates for its preservation. In 1989 thirteen Gullah people made a pilgrimage to Bunce Island during an official “Gullah homecoming” sponsored by the Sierra Leone government. In April 2005 the Martin family, descended from a 10 year old slave girl called “Priscilla” who was brought to the U.S. in 1756, visited Sierra Leone.<sup>46</sup>

#### Transmission of Monetary Remittances

Thus far, after tourism, the most evidence of economic links with the homelands of the Diasporas is in terms of remittances. Much of the literature on remittances is focused on Latin America, India, China, Greece etc. - the major recipient of monies transferred from the U.S. and the major remitters. Considerably less is known about remittances to Africa. One of the few studies is by Una Okonkwo and examines ten years of remitting by Igbo’s based in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Individual Remittances*

---

<sup>44</sup> Professor Joseph Opala, “The History of Bunce Island” at the National Summit of Bunce Island, September 28, 2004, Washington, DC.

<sup>45</sup> Emory Campbell, “The Meaning of Bunce Island” at the National Summit of Bunce Island, September 28, 2004, Washington, DC.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Una Okonkwo, “Igbo Emigrants in Chicago Invest at Home, 1986-1996”, in J. Guyer, L. Denzer and A. Agbaje (eds.), *Money Struggles and City Life* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), pp. 239-255.

In terms of what is known about the remitting activity of our three Diasporas, Leila Jazayery considers that the number of Afghan refugees who benefit from remittances (and are mainly not in Afghanistan but the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan) is relatively low; “probably in the low hundreds of thousands, a relatively small proportion of the total number of Afghan refugees.”<sup>48</sup> However, she provides little statistical evidence to support her claims, and is discussing only refugee support.

Al-Ali, Black and Koser note in their 1999 study that in the case of the Bosnian community in Britain “Money is generally sent to close family members, most notably parents and siblings. It was impossible to obtain concrete figures, but it was often stated that financial remittances were a direct response to the basic needs of the refugees’ relatives, including food, housing and medicine.”<sup>49</sup>

#### *Collective Remittances*

The Bosnian community in Britain also makes collective remittances, often channeled through charities, community organizations (for example, the Bosnia & Herzegovina Refugee UK Network) or, in the case of Bosnian Muslims, through the collection of the obligatory ‘poor-due’ (*zakat*) that is then distributed according to need.<sup>50</sup>

Within the literature on remittances there is a big debate about their economic utility. There are some structural factors that impact the efficacy of remittances as a strategy for poverty reduction in developing countries. As Kathleen Newland has noted about Mexican governmental efforts to promote collective remittances:

The local focus of many of these programs gives them a direct connection to the poor, but the outcome is also dependent on improvement in macro-economic conditions. Poor infrastructure (physical and financial), underdeveloped markets, corruption, and a poor investment climate confine the potential of remittance-focused strategies to the immediate receivers. Remittances do, however, shelter recipients from the effects of these development inhibitors nonetheless – at least in the short term.<sup>51</sup>

A more jaundiced view of their role asserts:

---

<sup>48</sup> Jazayery, “The Migration-Development Nexus”, *International Migration*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2002) p. 242.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 620.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 621.

<sup>51</sup> Newland, *Beyond Remittances*, July 2004, p. v.

Remittances, moreover, do not serve the cause of development as effectively as targeted government giving. Although such funds are important temporary sources of income for millions of people in the developing world, they do little to alleviate deep-rooted problems there. Relying on remittances makes it possible for developing countries to avoid the hard work of structural change, which is the only real hope for lasting development.<sup>52</sup>

If these problems inhibit development in ‘normal’ situations, then the limitations on the efficacy of remittance strategies in post-conflict states must be much greater.

#### Investments in the Homeland

Brett Johnson and Santiago Sedaca have identified other forms of Diaspora involvement that bring economic benefits to the homeland. In addition to the widely noted mechanism of remittances, they identify mechanisms such as business investments, investment instruments, and knowledge transfers.<sup>53</sup> According to Newland,

Remittances...are far from being the only vehicle for Diaspora influence on the incidence of poverty in their home countries. For many countries, the Diaspora are a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI), market development (including outsourcing of production), technology transfer.... The quality of information, much less hard data, about Diaspora influences in these dimensions is in general very poor, posing a serious challenge to policy development.<sup>54</sup>

This is a gap in the data that our interview and survey work will make a contribution towards filling.

In general discussion of Diasporas and economic development, it has been noted that, “As consumers and business actors, expatriates help map out the potential for business opportunities in the sending [home] country. Furthermore, and to the degree to which expatriates are intermediaries on business transactions,

---

<sup>52</sup> Peter Samson, letter to the editor, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (March / April 2004), p. 178.

<sup>53</sup> Brett Johnson and Santiago Sedaca, “Diasporas, Émigrés and Development: Economic Linkages and Programmatic responses”, Study Conducted under the Trade Enhancement Service Sector (TESS) Project under contract for the U.S. Agency for International development, Washington, DC.: Carana Corporation, January 2004. Cited in Lowell and Gerova, “Diasporas and Economic Development”, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Newland, *Beyond Remittances*, p. 2.

they can reduce risk for non-nationals by enforcing transactions.”<sup>55</sup> An important function that Diaspora investment can perform is to improve others’ perceptions of the environment for business.<sup>56</sup> There is a big question over whether these types of business relations are possible in the post conflict cases we are examining, but they will be sought.

This study will also consider various forms of skills and knowledge transfer that are made through the Diaspora. One form of this has been christened the ‘reverse brain drain’; where Diaspora return to their home country for a time (though not necessarily for good).<sup>57</sup> Since 2002 there has been a ‘reverse brain drain’ of eager Diasporas into Afghanistan, particularly from among the ranks of young Diaspora, often at the expense of lucrative careers in the West.<sup>58</sup>

In the case of Sierra Leone, Minister of Mineral Resources Mohammed Swarray Deen reported at a 2003 International Peace Academy meeting that by the end of 2002 many Diaspora came home to Sierra Leone, over 1,000 from the West, on “experimental visits”. The Government held seminars for the Diaspora to tell them about economic opportunities. These were well received, but as of 2004, little had happened, though the government is trying to change this. Diaspora and the middle income in Sierra Leone are beginning to invest their savings in the country, especially into agriculture such as cocoa, oil etc.<sup>59</sup>

A number of donor organizations are seeking to harness the Diaspora for plugging skills gaps and facilitating skills transfers. For example, the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) *Return of Qualified Afghans* program and the World Bank’s \$1.5 million trust fund to hire professional expatriates trainers and experts. The latter was

---

<sup>55</sup> Lowell and Gerova, “Diasporas and Economic Development”, pp. 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Kate Gillespie, Lisl Riddle, Edward Sayre and David Sturges, “Diaspora Interest in Homeland Investment”, *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Fall 1999), pp. 623-634.

<sup>57</sup> See for example, Savina Ammassari, “From Nation-Building to Entrepreneurship: The Impact of Elite Return Migrants in Côte d’Ivoire”, International Workshop on Migration and Poverty in West Africa, March 13-14, 2003, University of Sussex.

<sup>58</sup> Homira Nassery, “The Reverse Brain Drain: Afghan-American Diaspora in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Reconstruction”, 2003, p. 20, abstract at: <http://www.comminit.com/strategicthinking/st2003/thinking-266.html> Accessed 12 October 2006; Don Ritter, “Return to Afghanistan”, *Washington Times*, October 7, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Comments of Minister of State, Ministry of Mineral Resources, Mohammed Deen at the International Peace Academy conference on *Transforming War Economies: Challenges for Peacemaking and Peacebuilding*, Conference held at Wilton Park, 27-30 October, 2003.

delayed for some time by political concerns from the Afghan government, but now seems to be delivering Afghan Diaspora members to firms in need of help.

IOM also has a *Return of Qualified African Nationals* program. This seems to have achieved rather low ‘bang for the buck’ sending about 100 nationals back to Africa annually between 1983 and 1999. A follow-on program with the Organization of African Union, MIDA; *Migration for Development in Africa* program was begun in 2001, though by 2004 few projects had been implemented.<sup>60</sup> Neither program seems to have returned nationals to Sierra Leone.

In investigating the capabilities of Bosnians and Eritreans to participate in relief and reconstruction in their home countries, we have found an important distinction between individuals’ capabilities – or abilities – to participate, and their desire – or willingness – to participate.<sup>61</sup> It will be important to draw out and consider this distinction through our interview and questionnaire work.<sup>62</sup>

...in the context of my research among Bosnian refugees it became obvious that variations in intensity and frequency of transnational activities are linked to the great level of heterogeneity among refugees. Again, this is not to suggest that human agency, creativity and innovation do not play a role, but the likelihoods and possibilities for the emergence of transnational social fields are shaped by factors which distinguish Bosnian refugees from one another.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

This scoping paper has identified some of the relevant writings on conflict Diasporas and has mined the available literatures on the three Diasporas of

---

<sup>60</sup> Newland, *Beyond Remittances*, p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Ali, Black and Koser, “Refugees and Transnationalism”, p. 626.

<sup>62</sup> For maximum comparability with existing questionnaire results, I will be harmonizing the questions I ask with those used in two previous surveys: Alice Bloch, “The Development Potential of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora: A Survey of Zimbabweans Living in the UK and South Africa”, prepared for the International Organization for Migration, January 2005, and Elizabeth Kirk, “Skills Audit of Refugees”, *Home Office Online Report No. 37/04*.

<sup>63</sup> Nadjé Al-Ali, “Trans- or a-national? Bosnian Refugees in the UK and the Netherlands” in Nadjé Al-Ali (Ed.), *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 102.

particular interest to the Transformation of War Economies project. What is clear is that the available literature on Diasporas in general is quite extensive, but the literature focusing on either conflict Diasporas or Diasporas from Afghanistan, Bosnia Herzegovina and Sierra Leone is more limited. More than that, the issues that are covered in the literatures on Diasporas range far and wide but rarely focus on contributions that Diasporas can make to peace building. There is clearly a gap in both the academic and policy literatures which this study will hope to contribute to filling.