



## Thinking About Governance *Through* Diasporas

Decentering the State and Challenging the External/Internal Binary

Catherine Ruth Craven



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DFG Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 700

Freie Universität Berlin

Alfried-Krupp-Haus Berlin

Binger Straße 40

14197 Berlin

Germany

Phone: +49-30-838 58502

Fax: +49-30-838 58540

E-mail: [sfb700@fu-berlin.de](mailto:sfb700@fu-berlin.de)

Web: [www.sfb-governance.de/en](http://www.sfb-governance.de/en)

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## **Thinking About Governance *Through* Diasporas: Decentering the State and Challenging the External/Internal Binary**

*Catherine Ruth Craven*

### **Abstract:**

Diasporas have emerged as powerful, if contentious, actors with a complex impact on global political processes. This includes the provision of governance to their homelands in the form of remittances but also through more direct involvement in the provision of public goods and services. Puzzlingly, governance research, which empirically investigates public goods provision by state and non-state actors alike, has largely steered clear of investigating diasporas. This paper argues that the reason for this blind spot is that diasporas pose an uncomfortable conceptual challenge to governance researchers. By taking a diaspora perspective on governance, we can see that state-centrism still has a firm, if elusive, grip on much governance research, which manifests as an insistence to differentiate between external and internal actors. It is this inbuilt assumption, that external and internal actors have quintessentially different properties, which does not match the often ambivalent quality of diasporas as they engage in governance in their homelands. This article will tease out some of the contradictions inherent in governance research by thinking about governance through diasporas and point out ways in which diaspora research itself has addressed the problem of state-centrism.

### **Zusammenfassung:**

Diaspora-Gruppen gelten in der internationalen Politik als einflussreiche, jedoch umstrittene Akteure. Ihre Remittances, in Form regelmäßiger Geldsendungen, aber auch die direkte Bereitstellung öffentlicher Güter und Dienstleistungen aus der Diaspora, prägen die Governance-Landschaften ihrer Herkunftsländer. Überraschenderweise hat gerade die Governanceforschung bisher einen Bogen um Diaspora-Gruppen gemacht, obwohl es eigentlich ihr Ziel ist, die Governance-Leistungen staatlicher und nichtstaatlicher Akteure gleichermaßen empirisch zu erforschen. Der vorliegende Beitrag argumentiert, dass dieser blinde Fleck auf eine konzeptionelle Unstimmigkeit der Governanceforschung zurückzuführen ist. Die Grundannahme, dass externe und interne Governance-Akteure unterschiedliche Eigenschaften in Hinblick auf ihre Effektivität und Legitimität besitzen, reproduziert den Staatszentrismus, den die Governanceforschung eigentlich schon für überwunden erklärt hatte. Diaspora-Gruppen lassen sich allerdings weder der einen, noch der anderen Seite zuordnen; sie agieren als interne und als externe Governance-Akteure. In der Diaspora-Perspektive auf Governance wird diese Ambivalenz deutlich. Dadurch lässt sich die Frage nach dem Staatszentrismus in der Governanceforschung noch einmal neu stellen.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This paper is interested in the question why governance research has, to date, failed to include diaspora actors in its analyses of non-state governance provision. Anthropologists have long studied diasporas in relation to experiences of migration, persecution and exile, as well as processes of cultural production and identity generation oriented around ideas of homeland and return. But diasporas are also becoming increasingly important subjects of analysis in the field of Political Science. In a world that is characterized by the interconnectedness of human populations across traditional nation-state boundaries the power of diasporas to impact on global politics is being recognized. For example, there is ample evidence to suggest that diasporas contribute to the governance of their homelands. They send remittances (Ratha 2013), build hospitals and schools (Foley/Babou 2011), engage in formalized knowledge and skills transfer (Brinkerhoff 2006; Minto-Coy 2016), and campaign for the reform of legal institutions that carry out transitional justice processes (Orjuela 2018; Koinova/Karabegovic 2017; Haider 2014). Outside of academia diasporas have been hailed as the silver bullet to policy problems, especially in the field of international development (Pellerin/Mullings 2013).

On the flip side, the involvement of non-state actors in the solution of policy problems has been of central concern to governance research. And yet, the International Relations (IR) sub-discipline has itself steered clear of investigating diasporas. This is puzzling because governance is itself built on the assumption that the state is not the only powerful actor in global politics. Attempts to counter state-centrism via the inclusion of non-state actors have been part and parcel of the research agenda. A recent iteration of this research strand, which suggests a “minimally normative, functionalist” (Draude 2012: 19; author’s translation) perspective on governance in areas of limited statehood (ALS), has taken particular issue with the persistent state-centrism of existing governance concepts. Utilizing a minimalist conceptualization of governance that is ontologically separate from the state, scholars have investigated governance provision to areas of limited statehood by a variety of actors from international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (INGOs), to private companies, and even violent non-state actors (Risse et al. 2018).

Diasporas have been painfully missing from this list of actors.<sup>2</sup> This working paper seeks to investigate why diasporas have constituted a veritable blind spot in governance research considering the overlap of existing work on governance by non-state actors and the engagement of diasporas in the political, social and economic affairs of their homelands. I shall argue that this is because, despite concerted efforts to move away from the state, governance research is still inherently state-centric. In fact, the analytical distinction between actors that are either

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my team at the Collaborative Research Centre (SFB 700) “Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood”, especially Tanja A. Börzel and Luisa Linke-Behrens for making my research stay at the Freie Universität Berlin possible. I also want to thank Sophie Frossard and Tamara Harmsen for their support with the workshop “Diasporas and Homeland Governance: Decentering the State as Analytical Category” from which the idea for this working paper springs. The paper also draws on fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation supported by SOAS University of London and the Economic and Social Research Council. And finally, a huge thank you to Anke Draude who was an indispensable pillar of support during my entire research stay and also provided invaluable feedback on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Fritz et al. (2011) who focus on remittances as financial flows, not as actor-led governance provision.

external or internal to the state remains built in to the research paradigm. It is along this conceptual and spatial boundary that explanations for governance effectiveness and legitimacy continue to be sought. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of diasporas who, by definition, transcend state boundaries, operate according to a different spatial logic or exist on a different level of analysis. By offering a diaspora and governance dialectic I hope to further tease out the roots and consequences of this analytical disconnect.

The paper will proceed as follows: I will offer an introduction into the study of diasporas that focuses on their "actorness", or agency in global politics. I will then give a brief overview of governance research, with a specific focus on its latest articulation, which explicitly decouples governance from the state. In the main body of the paper, I will then explore how far this recent governance conceptualization can take us when we try to apply it to an analysis of diaspora homeland governance. Ultimately, I will argue that by thinking about governance through diasporas, whose empirical realities eschew the external/internal binary, we can tease out the implicit underlying state-centrism of governance research. In the conclusion I will offer some alternative ways of thinking about and problematizing different geographies of governance.

## 2. Diaspora Research: The State of the Art

Diasporas emerged first in the social sciences in the study of forced displacement and dispersal of ethnic groups. The experience of trauma was seen to create specific collective identities that made diasporas differ from other migrants. However, the term soon starts to encompass groups who may not have experienced trauma but nevertheless feel a collective sense of belonging to their original homeland from which they or their ancestors migrated. In 1983, Anderson (2006) publishes his seminal work "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism", in which he argues that a nation is constructed by the people that imagine themselves to be part of it. In that sense, the concept of diaspora encompasses all those individuals who imagine themselves as such, regardless of their place of birth, or intent to return. Similarly, for Safran (1991) it is the "myth of homeland", rather than actual return, that defines diaspora populations. Most recently, the idea of "diaspora positionality" (Anthias 2002) has taken hold, which allows for an even more fluid conceptualization of collective diaspora identities, that no longer even relies on the idea of a homeland. Diaspora now means to be positioned between spaces; to be a link between different locales – territorial or otherwise.

While the question "what is a diaspora?", and the search for an *Alleinstellungsmerkmal* continues to this day, anthropologists and sociologists have largely moved on from attempts to grasp a diasporic essence. Rather, these disciplines now study diasporas both as products and productive of global transformations (e.g. Vertovec/Cohen 1999; Clifford 1994). Essentially, diasporas offer a research lens from which a variety of questions can be asked. For example: How do diasporas renegotiate ideas of citizenship and belonging to places, both territorial and imagined? Research highlights diasporas' bordering practices (Bouzas 2012) and the production of new forms of citizenship beyond the state (Faist 2000). Other scholars have explored how diasporas function as agents of cultural diffusion in transnational or urban spaces. Here they are studied as drivers of urban diversity, integration and multiculturalism (Vertovec 2007) and offer a means of addressing broader methodological questions regarding scale and global –

local relations (Glick-Schiller/Caglar 2010). Ultimately, the fluidity of the diaspora concept has led anthropologists and sociologists to pursue innovative research, rather than despair over its instability or analytical value. In Political Science and IR the concept has, arguably, been more contested. Especially the spatial ambiguity of diasporas and their defiance of state boundaries has caused some intellectual headaches. And yet, as globalization, the acceleration of migration and transnational flows begin to make it on to the Political Science research agenda, scholars become interested in the impact of diasporas on global political processes. Of course, diverging theoretical traditions come to different conclusions regarding questions such as: What kind of “actorness” (power to affect global politics) do diasporas have? What is the nature of their agency, if any?

This disciplinary context is the point of departure for this paper. Ultimately, because I am interested in mapping the activities that diasporas engage in in the context of global politics, I offer a functionalist definition of diasporas as both individual and collective agents that are mobilizing socially, politically or economically towards a homeland in which they do not permanently reside. The following paragraphs will now offer a brief review of diaspora research in the field of Political Science, with a focus on IR. The discussion is organized around ontological shifts in the way that diaspora agency has been conceptualized, which of course also mirrors major shifts in the empirical and theoretical focus of the discipline.

### **2.1 From Conflict Spoiler to Active Security Threat**

Throughout the Cold War, when realism dominates IR, political agency remains firmly in the hands of states. Yet, global interdependence is becoming an undeniable reality, leading to power shifts that impact upon the agency and security of individual sovereign states. Accordingly, diasporas are primarily considered products of such processes; mere intervening variables in the power-play of and within nation-states. The bulk of the early literature on diasporas in Political Science thus suggests that diasporas have limited causal impact on the social and political world and are thus barely studied as “actors” in IR.

As interest in the political and security consequences of globalization increases diasporas start to feature more prominently in the literature. By the end of the Cold War scholars of global security diagnose a profound shift in the nature of modern violent conflict and usher in an era of “New Wars” (Kaldor 2006). New Wars are no longer contained within nation states. Rather, they rely on transnational war-economies, and have global spillover effects. Interestingly, conflict-generated diasporas are often found to epitomise these spillover effects. They emerge in the dominant literature as actors that sustain informal economic flows to and from the conflict or post-conflict zone (Collier/Hoeffler 1998) or that practice “long-distance nationalism” (Anderson 1992; Demmers 2002). Collier and Hoeffler’s (1998) widely cited large-N study on drivers of civil war argues that large diasporas act as spoilers and ultimately prolong civil war. Some qualitative studies echo this finding. For example, in studying the Ethiopian diaspora Lyons (2007: 529) found that “(d)iaspora groups created by conflict and sustained by traumatic memories tend to compromise less and therefore reinforce and exacerbate the protracted nature of conflicts.”

## 2.2 Beyond Threat Perceptions: Managing Diaspora Agency

In response to the research that sees only the conflict-sustaining potential of diasporas a discourse develops, which attempts to comprehensively map the potential impact of diasporas on conflict zones and sending-states more generally. Diasporas are here conceptualized as more complex agents with the capacity for decision-making in conflict or post-conflict situations. This agency has been explored via the concept of diaspora identity politics (Adamson 2012) exacerbated by “long distance nationalism” (Anderson 1992), or as driven by more rational calculation. For example, Koinova (2011) argues that, while diasporas are by default radical conflict actors, they may act moderately under specific circumstances, and when it is to their strategic advantage. Meanwhile, Brinkerhoff (2008a; 2011) has explored different motivations for diasporas’ engagement with their homelands (e.g. guilt, marginalization, confusion, pride) and concludes that they may foster peace if managed effectively. Similarly, Smith and Stares (2007) suggest that diasporas are not “peace-wreckers” per se. In fact, they may act as “peace makers” if sending-states harness their ability to contribute to problem-solving in the areas of development and peacebuilding. This thread of literature on the link between diasporas and conflict presents a more nuanced picture and bestows more agency on diasporas, however, some parallels to the first literature strand can be drawn. While there certainly is an increased effort to pay attention to the internal complexity of diaspora groups, the above analyses still somewhat essentialize diasporas as bounded variables in linear causal mechanisms, i.e. calculations on the likelihood and outcome of civil conflicts.

And yet, the theoretical shift towards more liberal constructivist understandings of diaspora agency generates increased interest in unpacking the potential contributions of diaspora to global political processes. Empirically, a widening of diaspora research takes place. For example, in recent discussions the individual agency of diaspora members is highlighted, and they are cast as development entrepreneurs (Brinkerhoff 2016) or mediators in peace processes (Baser/Swain 2008). Crucially, in these liberal accounts causal power is transferred to the diaspora agent and emphasis is placed on the (normatively) positive contributions of diaspora to political processes. Power struggles involving diaspora are conceptualized as interactions between rational thinking agents, whether driven by a logic of profit maximization or normative appropriateness. In that sense, diaspora mobilization is the result of individual speech acts, of persuasion or negotiation.

This recognition of the agency of diasporas (and their potential to impact on security and development) is reflected by emergent policy initiatives. For example, the UN Global Compact on Migration (2018) explicitly links diasporas to development through the migration–development nexus (Faist 2008) and there has been a proliferation of state and non-state “diaspora engagement” institutions seeking to manage individual and collective diaspora mobilization. Accordingly, the focus in diaspora research in IR has, most recently, shifted to explaining the rise and proliferation of these institutions. For example, Gamlen et al. (2013) have created a helpful typology for understanding why states might want to respond to the increased political and economic importance of diasporas by creating diaspora engagement institutions.



### 2.3 Diasporas as Objects of Power

Finally, in the wake of the increased attention paid by both states and other global governance actors to diasporas, critical voices have emerged that seek to address and understand the politics behind this development. Some scholars have argued that through engaging diasporas states seek to increase their power and build their capacities. Diasporas are ultimately pawns of powerful states.

For example, Varadarajan (2008) suggests that contemporary state attitudes towards diasporas must be understood as part of the hegemony of a neoliberal global political economy, whereby diaspora communities offer opportunities for capitalist expansion. Poststructuralists agree with the reasoning that liberal international community is driven by a will to subjugate and discipline global populations but argue that this happens in different ways. For example, Ragazzi (2014) uses Foucauldian governmentality theory to explain why states are increasingly interested in engaging their respective diasporas in an effort to reproduce the global political economy. Similarly, Laffey and Nadarajah (2012: 404) support the view that diaspora engagement forms part of a liberal governmental logic, albeit this time as part of a larger effort to securitize and generate “*pacific liberal order*”. All of these authors offer critical insights into the structural forces that drive state–diaspora relations. In contrast to the liberal literature they also make explicit the often-exploitative power relations, which underlie diaspora engagement practices.

The latter literature hints at the political complexities that are set in motion when diasporas engage in or are engaged by their home states and other powerful global actors. By focusing on the constraints posed upon actors by structural dynamics and the whims of powerful imperialist states these theories certainly complicate the picture of diasporas as sovereign agents in global politics. While studying the power struggles that inform global diaspora politics is crucial (see Craven 2018), this task is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, this paper will shed light on diasporas’ governing potential. To this end, the next section will discuss what is meant by “*governing*” and governance.

## 3. Governance Research and the State

Governance has always been a contested term, not least since it’s coupling with the “*global*” prefix. Even within the ranks of those who popularized the term, some now fear it may have devolved into “*an intellectual cottage industry*” (Weiss 2000: 796). However, criticism does not negate the fact that the governance research agenda has had a huge impact on both domestic and international politics and policy-making over the last 25 years and thus must be subject to ongoing scrutiny. I will now trace a brief history of the governance concept, culminating with the most recent iteration of governance research that has been especially keen to provide a state-critical perspective on governance.

### 3.1 Early Governance Research in IR: 1990s to mid-2000

The term “*governance*” first proliferates in IR in the early 1990s, however, the discipline remains split as to what causes this proliferation. Some argue that it is a direct response to empirical



transformations, which require a new language and categories of analysis. Accordingly, *global* governance emerges as a *new* mode of democratic governance at the critical juncture that is the end of the Cold War, at which point technological advancement in concert with the proliferation of liberal social and fiscal policies has resulted in a decline in state power (welcomed by hyperglobalists such as Friedman (2012) and Ohmae (1989)). The term describes the ways in which a diversifying group of actors, both above and below the nation state, are now contributing to the conduct of global affairs.

While this “optimistic” view is primarily espoused by neoliberal economists and management strategists, Political Science literature starts from the premise that: yes, there has, arguably, not been a more significant shift or realignment of ideas than that caused by the end of the Cold War. However, governance is not a response to these shifts in the empirical world. Rather, in the discipline of IR, it now describes a mode of non-hierarchical order creation, or the functioning of power under the absence of top-down state rule. In this debate, Rosenau deems governance as “systems of rule at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organization – in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions” (1995: 13). Finkelstein translates this as “any purposeful activity intended to ‘control’ or influence someone else that occurs in the arena occupied by nations” (1995: 368) and critiques Rosenau’s definition of global governance as too broad. Instead, he defines it as “governing, without sovereign authority, relationships that transcend national frontiers” (Finkelstein 1995: 369). The critique that is leveled against this conceptualization of global governance is that it is ontologically tied to the state and doesn’t actually take transnational actors seriously. Global governance is no more than international *governance-PLUS*, thus its analytical value is diminished.

Meanwhile, in an effort to not throw the baby out with the metaphorical bathwater, others try to reclaim the global governance term. Dingwerth and Pattberg (2006) suggest that it remains a useful concept because it allows one to identify and describe transformation processes with a new conceptual toolkit that includes not just a variety in actors but action across different policy levels. The simple international – transnational binary is not adequate and so global governance can be considered “an analytical concept that provides a perspective on world politics different from the more traditional notion on ‘international relations’” (Dingwerth/Pattberg 2006: 185), a perspective on world politics beyond the state. Ultimately, the theory that there should not be an ontological hierarchy between transnational and international actors presents a first attempt to decenter the state.

### 3.2 Decentering the State? Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood

If, according to Dingwerth and Pattberg (2006), global governance can offer a non-state centric understanding of global policy-making, then can governance do the same for non-global policy-making? This question has recently been of concern to a number of scholars who argue that power vacuums not only emerge with globalization; they also exist, and have always existed, within states. Traditionally, such absence of domestically-projected state power has been described as state failure. However, besides being blatantly euro-centric, diagnosing state failure also creates an analytical dead end (Draude 2007). Empirical evidence has suggested that even

in a place like Somalia that has historically fallen under the failed-state label, some actors are providing public goods and services to local populations. However, in order to further assess the conditions of effective and legitimate governance in a place like Somalia, once again, a reconceptualization of the governance term is required. Thus, mindful of the need to empirically investigate governance provision in areas of limited statehood, in the recently released “Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood” (Risse et al. 2018), the editors conceptualize governance as “the various institutionalized modes of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding rules, and/or to provide collective goods.” (Börzel et al. 2018: 6). They further state that this conceptualization

*“[...] covers ruling by the state (‘governance by government’), governance via cooperative networks of public and private actors (‘governance with government’), as well as rule-making by non-state actors or self-regulation by civil society (‘governance without government’ [...]).” (Börzel et al. 2018: 6)*

Central to this broad definition of governance, much like Dingwerth and Pattberg’s (2006) definition of global governance, is that it is ontologically decoupled from the state. The reasoning behind this decentering is based on the following interrelated claims about the relationship of governance and the state. First, linking governance to the state does not make sense empirically or historically. Contrary to popular modernist theorising, researchers have found that the majority of the world’s population lives (and has lived) in areas where the state is not the sole setter of rules, or provider of common goods and services. Both from an historical and regional perspective, limited statehood has been the norm rather than the exception. Thus, we should be able to assess the effectiveness and legitimacy of such rule- and service-provision without building the state into the definition of said rule- and service-provision. Second, if the state is reified as the sole provider of governance, then state failure logically implies the absence of governance. This approach expects that governance can only take place through the state, making it so that other variants of rule and governance are considered suboptimal. Besides being ahistorical, this conceptualization is inherently euro-centric, pandering to racist and orientalist stereotypes about the uncivilized and primitive nature of non-Western subjects, societies and political relations. And, if the normative argument isn’t enough, a euro-centric perspective on governance also analytically obscures other non-western governance realities (Draude 2007).

From this follows that, theoretically, linking governance to the state obscures our ability to analyse governance provision outside of the narrow confines of the Westphalian Treaty context. For the research on *governance in areas of limited statehood* to have wider analytical value an ontological separation of governance and state is required. Thus, it appears these scholars are better served with a “minimally normative, functionalist” definition of governance as the “intentional provision of collective goods, whereby a collective good may be both material and immaterial (for example, drinking water, health services or social order)” (Draude 2012: 19; author’s translation).

Finally, and maybe most importantly for this paper, the ontological separation of the state from governance, implies a widening of the pool of actors that govern. Ultimately, those

governance scholars who have focussed on empirically investigating public goods provision (in ALS) have made it one of their central aims to move away from modernist conceptualizations of the state as the sole provider of goods and services. This explicit rejection of state-centrism is also intended to open up space for the analysis of non-state governance actors. Over the past decade this has allowed scholars to investigate governance provision to areas of limited statehood by International Organisations and Regional Organisations (ROs) (Börzel/van Hüllen 2015; Lederer 2018), INGOs and multi-stakeholder partnerships (Beisheim et al. 2018), private companies (Börzel/Thauer 2013; Börzel et al. 2013; Börzel/Deitelhoff 2018), traditional authorities (Förster/Koechlin 2018) and even violent non-state actors (Berti 2018).

That diasporas have barely featured in this governance research, which explicitly aims to study governance by actors other than the state and also to ontologically de-center the state from governance research, is therefore surprising. After all, diasporas, by definition, challenge the state and its boundaries. In the following section I aim to illustrate why this blind spot is no coincidence. Rather it speaks to a need to delve even deeper into the ontological and conceptual underpinnings of the “governance-and-limited-statehood” approach. In the next section I will explore how, despite explicit efforts to minimize state-centrism (and methodological nationalism, for that matter), a certain assumption reintroduces state-centrism through the back door; that assumption is the insistence on an analytical dichotomy between external and internal governance actors.

#### **4. Diasporas Through the Governance Lens**

Based on the above outlined definitions of governance (as the production and implementation of collectively binding rules, goods and services) and diasporas (as individual and collective agents that are mobilizing socially, politically or economically towards a homeland in which they do not reside) diasporas are governance actors. The following paragraphs will now empirically map some of the governance activities that diasporas engage in. I have organized this mapping by diaspora engagement channel (direct service provision vs. indirect local capacity strengthening) and give examples of governance tasks of varying complexity and institutionalization, echoing Krasner and Risse’s analysis in their 2014 *Governance* special issue.

##### **4.1 Diasporas and Indirect Governance: Enhancing Local/State Capacities**

It is no longer a secret that diasporas send remittances, engage in political advocacy, conflict mediation and development in their respective homelands. While these are, arguably, the most prominent contributions that diasporas make to the governance of their homelands, they are made indirectly. This means that the intervention is intended to strengthen the capacity of local actors to provide governance themselves. The following paragraphs will now shed further light on indirect diaspora governance.

A significant indirect contribution that diasporas make to the governance of their homelands is through financial remittances. Remittances have been well-researched and describe all money sent by a migrant worker to their family at home. The concept may also include diasporic contributions to villages or community organizations (Helweg 1983). In 2007 the World Bank

released a policy brief stating that, compared to other global financial flows, remittances were “more than twice as large as official aid and nearly two-third of foreign direct investment flows to developing countries” (Ratha et al. 2007: 2). Since the mid-2000s research on the link between remittances and global poverty reduction or development has mushroomed.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, growing awareness of remittance strength and impact have led to the increased institutionalization of this form of migrant or diaspora engagement. Emigrant states with large and wealthy diasporas are increasingly setting up institutions and ministries (Gamlen 2006; Ragazzi 2014; Délano Alonso/Mylonas 2017) to manage incoming financial flows and channel them towards public goods and service provision (Brown 2006; IOM 2017).<sup>4</sup>

While financial remittances are the most often cited mode of diaspora mobilization, another way in which diasporas have indirectly contributed to the governance of their homelands is by engaging in political advocacy. Such advocacy may take the form of public demonstrations, lobbying members of parliament or IOs. Studies have found that diasporas may further democratize governance in their homelands by pushing for institutional reforms and normative change or by bolstering local civil society (e.g. Koinova 2009). For example, Brinkerhoff (2005) has argued that coptic organizations in the US support democracy promotion/democratic governance in Egypt by using the internet to foster greater transparency, while Mohamoud (2009: 12) suggests that “(t)he African diaspora can also contribute to democracy building in Africa by making its knowledge, professional experience and expertise available to strengthen the capacity of political institutions in Africa and create effective, responsible, transparent, accountable and democratic systems of governance on the continent.” Advocacy may also take place in the area of foreign policy or human rights, when diasporas mobilize to influence transitional justice processes, which then indirectly has an effect on the implementation of the rule of law in their homeland (Orjuela 2018).

Toward the more complex end of the spectrum of indirect governance tasks that diasporas engage in lies conflict mediation. This can be indirect in the sense that mediation takes place between ethnic groups in the diaspora. Here conflicting parties are engaged in dialogue and design conflict solutions, which are then proposed to actors in the homeland.<sup>5</sup> This often has the dual function of ameliorating the potential for “imported conflict” in the new country of residence (Monahan et al. 2014). Further, diasporas may contribute indirectly to conflict mediation by influencing the agenda setting processes of international organizations. Baser and Swain (2008: 7) have suggested that “(t)hrough lobbying governments and international organizations and aiding transition and post-conflict reconstruction, diasporas are increasingly playing an important role in mediation and peacebuilding.” Similarly, Orjuela (2008: 436) has argued that, far from being peace wreckers by default, as discussed earlier, “there are also examples of diaspora groups that challenge war and militarism, for instance by calling for non-

3 For example, the World Bank migration and remittances publication series: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-and-remittances-publications>.

4 This is also largely in response to the critique that remittances flows, if left unmanaged, have a deteriorating effect on governance in many developing countries because they create unsustainable remittance-economies (Hubert Ebeke 2012; Ahmed 2013).

5 See, for example, the Young Canadians’ Peace Dialogue: <http://mosaicinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/New-Beginnings-China-Tibet-Dialogue-Public-Report-Final-2014.pdf>.

violent conflict resolution, condemning atrocities on both sides, and engaging in cross-ethnic dialogue.” But diaspora may even be formally or directly integrated into a peace process. For example, Tamil diaspora members formed part of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-sponsored delegation for the “socio-economic needs assessment for the North and East”, which was part of the peace process 2002/2003 (Zunzer 2004: 29).

Finally, an area of governance in which diasporas are currently a hot topic is that of development. Since the initial link was drawn between migrant remittances and poverty reduction – and migration and development more widely – a huge amount of interest has been generated in the potential contributions of diasporas to the economic and social development of their homelands (e.g. “Beyond Remittances” by Newland and Patrick (2004)). It has been found that diasporas increasingly contribute to complex governance in the area of development through building state/local capacity. While their role as sources of innovation and capital has long been acknowledged (Minto-Coy 2016), they are also increasingly engaged in formal programs that aim to foster knowledge transfers (see Tejada in Walton-Roberts et al. 2016). Such indirect governance through capacity building falls in line with current development norms that favour more hands-off approaches, such as “helping people help themselves” (World Bank report by Ellerman (2001)). While the private sector has been a first-mover in this regard, increasingly we see diasporas building public sector capacity by diffusing good governance norms and practices. For example, the Canadian government, as part of its international assistance policy, sends Canadian public servants abroad to offer their expertise on specific governance issue areas.<sup>6</sup> On top of that, non-governmental organizations like *Tamils in Public Service* have engaged in talks to implement a capacity building program in the North and East of Sri Lanka to train civil servants for operating in constitutional power-sharing arrangements and multi-lingual constitutional arrangements, both areas in which (Tamil-)Canadians are deemed experts.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4.2 Diasporas and Direct Governance: Goods and Service Provision “On the Ground”

Not unlike other non-state actors, diaspora engagement in homeland governance includes contributions to public health, clean environment, social security, and infrastructure (see Krasner/Risse 2014) and also ranges from simple and barely-institutionalized interventions to highly complex and institutionalized tasks. So, what does this direct governance by diasporas look like?

A growing proportion of direct diaspora governance today is organized through volunteering programs. Here members of a diaspora may spend a few weeks or months in their country of origin to contribute to development projects in their homeland. What they do as volunteers and how their “return” is framed varies widely. They may engage in simple tasks such as contributing manual labour to the building of wells or larger infrastructural development projects. In a recent project on diasporic Armenians, Darieva (2011: 498) investigates this booming industry of diaspora-volunteering. She writes that “(b)etween 2007 and 2009, more than 200 male and female volunteers from the US, Canada, France and Australia between the ages of 21 and 34

<sup>6</sup> Interview with civil servant (Ontario Provincial Government), August 2016, Toronto.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with civil servant (Ontario Provincial Government), August 2016, Toronto.

went to Armenia for periods varying from three months to two years with the specific goal of supporting impoverished Armenia and not as tourists.” On the more complex end of the direct governance spectrum, diasporas are involved in the provision of welfare and infrastructure development. For example, an Ivorian diaspora organization has taken over not just the fundraising for, but the operation of an entire hospital in Ivory Coast.<sup>8</sup>

While above I map diaspora contributions to conflict mediation and peace-building, such indirect contributions to governance are often preceded by periods of more direct diaspora involvement in the provision of goods and services during violent conflict. Because this is an area in which the governance impact of diasporas has been highly visible, it has also received a lot of attention from scholars and policy-makers. As mentioned in the state-of-the-art section, much early research on diaspora impact on global politics found that diasporas may directly provide security to members of their community in the homeland by supplying arms and manpower for armies or police forces (Chalk 2008).<sup>9</sup> In the post-Cold War years these kind of diaspora interventions were conceptualized less as governance contributions and more as negative conflict-spillover, or the maintenance of war economies. Of course, questions regarding the extent to which the support of an army can be considered a public *good* need to be considered case by case. Ultimately, whether only “good governance” qualifies as governance has been discussed at length elsewhere (e.g. Berti 2018) and exceeds the scope of this paper.

Finally, while diasporas are engaged in the general provision of goods and services during violent conflict, Brinkerhoff (2008a; 2008b) has been at the forefront of arguing that they are consequently also key to rebuilding governance in post-conflict countries. This is because they are often first movers in humanitarian relief and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Kleist concurs that though often contested, “diaspora groups have emerged as development and humanitarian actors in their own right”, not least from war torn and post-conflict countries where remittances often constitute “a lifeline for local populations” (Kleist 2018: 2).

The preceding paragraphs have provided a sweeping, but by no means exhaustive account of the many ways in which diasporas contribute to governance in their homelands. Accordingly, we would expect to find diasporas amongst the actors examined in the governance literature. That this has not been the case remains puzzling. And yet, the above mapping also foreshadows, to an extent, an analytical disconnect that exists between governance and diaspora research. Evidently, in trying to organize diaspora engagement in governance around existing categories used by governance researchers we encounter some problems. Although it is helpful to distinguish between direct and indirect, simple and complex, informal and institutionalized modes of engagement, empirical realities defy these categories. Most instances of diaspora engagement in governance run the gamut of direct and indirect, simple and complex interventions. And yet, I suggest that the use of the above categories is *not* the primary reason for the analytical disconnect between governance and diaspora research. After all, Krasner and Risse (2014) purport that task complexity and mode of governance provision (direct vs. indirect) are not sufficient to explain the success of non-state governance. Rather, two other factors are deemed central to the analysis of governance failure and success: effectiveness and legitimacy.

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with Ivorian-British entrepreneur and NGO-founder, December 2017, Loccum.

<sup>9</sup> See also the emerging literature on foreign fighters (e.g. Bakke 2014).

### 4.3 Explaining Effective and Legitimate Governance

Analysing the conditions under which governance is effective and legitimate has been at the core of the latest strand of governance research. This is based on evidence suggesting that governance in areas of limited statehood is often met with contestation and resistance (Draude 2017) sometimes leading to outright failure of governance interventions (Richmond 2014). I suggest that it is in this most recent quest to determine the *conditions for effective and legitimate governance* (in ALS) that an implicit form of state-centrism is reintroduced via the strict distinction between external and internal governance actors. It is a distinction that does not sit well with diaspora governance realities. I will now attempt to tease out this external/internal distinction and show how it has become entrenched in the governance-and-limited-statehood scholarship.

If we look at definitions of external and internal actors in the recent governance literature, it becomes apparent that they are understood to possess profoundly different properties. Börzel and Linke-Behrens (2017: 2) define external governors as “state and non-state actors whose operational basis lies outside the areas where they provide governance” and tend to “dispose of higher resources including knowledge and (technical) expertise, the access to transnational networks, and financial resources” (Linke-Behrens 2018). Internal actors are rarely explicitly defined or problematized. From the above citation we can only infer that their operational basis is congruent with the area in which they provide governance but that they lack resources and capacities to govern.

Where external and internal actor properties diverge, so do the conditions that need to be met in order for them to govern successfully. In the case of external actors, such as NGOs or multi-stakeholder partnerships, Beisheim et al. (2018) have argued that a condition for legitimate governance is that they need to be partnered with local actors. More broadly, it is suggested that the problem-solving capacity of external actors is conditioned by empirical legitimacy, the level of institutionalization of the governance constellation, as well as a shadow of hierarchy (or its functional equivalent) (Börzel/Risse 2010; Börzel et al. 2013). Similarly, Krasner and Risse suggest that when it comes to state-building by external governance actors, “three factors determine success: legitimacy, task complexity and institutionalization, including the provision of adequate resources” (2014: 545). Internal factors, such as “the engagement of domestic actors”, as well as reception by the target population are considered necessary conditions for successful governance by external actors (2014: 547). On the other hand, for internal actors, the main barrier to successful governance is not a lack of legitimacy, but rather a lack of effectiveness. Thus, a condition for internal actors to govern successfully is that they bolster their effectiveness by receiving support from external actors. Ultimately, it is assumed that the conditions for successful (effective and legitimate) governance are profoundly different for external than they are for internal governance actors but that they are mutually constitutive.

While these excerpts show that external and internal actors have been analytically strictly separated, I want to emphasize that I do not take issue with this separation per se. In fact, to a large extent, it is warranted. After all, the repeated violation of the sovereignty of post-colonial states by external state and non-state actors in the West under the guise of regime-change or liberal state-building are highly problematic and need to be investigated. However, beyond a



helpful analytical separation based on empirical evidence, the governance literature has come to rely too much on this distinction. There has emerged a dichotomy between external and internal that has become so enshrined that the concepts are no longer problematized. Rather, they have become actor types. A governance actor whose legitimacy and effectiveness are under investigation, is *a priori* characterized as being either internal or external. In the above cited definitions of external actors, the external aspect is not under investigation. The possibility that actors may have both external and internal properties is thus obscured; the option of their overlap not even considered.

This is problematic for several reasons. On the one hand, it defeats the purpose of this latest incarnation of governance research whose primary aim it has been to offer a minimally functionalist definition of governance that should be freed from historically and spatially contingent assumptions. Instead, it seems that state-centrism is reproduced rather than challenged as the line dividing external from internal risks becoming *deckungsgleich/congruent* with the borders of the state. Ultimately then, the analytical distinction between actors that are either external or internal to the state remains built in to the research paradigm. Equally importantly, the dichotomy also obscures empirical phenomena, which has been the impetus for this paper and thus will be explored in the final section.

#### 4.4 Thinking Diasporas through Governance and vice-versa

Of course, questions of effectiveness and legitimacy have been central to the analysis of diaspora mobilization towards their homeland. For example, based on an increasingly popular policy discourse on multi-stakeholder “partnerships” (Beisheim et al. 2018), diasporas are framed as ideal partners in external governance interventions.<sup>10 11</sup> They represent populations of states in which external governors operate, thus bolstering legitimacy and they are understood to possess local knowledge which has a positive effect on governance effectiveness (Beisheim et al. 2018). This local knowledge may come in the form of cultural competency, language skills, or networks of trust. Similarly, when external governance actors need information about events or circumstances on the ground they turn to diaspora groups for first-hand information. And often diaspora groups, especially those that are already engaged in lobbying activities in their countries of residence, are quite happy fulfilling this function.<sup>12</sup> However, in contrast to this increasingly popular policy discourse, there is ample evidence to suggest that the transnational mobilization of diaspora communities and individuals contributing to the governance of their homelands has not been unequivocally welcomed.

As mentioned in section two, diaspora have been often associated with conflict and violence and thus regarded with suspicion. An example of a diaspora whose engagement has been especially contentious is that of Sri Lankan Tamils. Diaspora Tamils (especially in the UK and Canada) played a significant role in funding the LTTE, one of the main parties fighting in the 30

<sup>10</sup> USAID and Diaspora: Partners in Development, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/usaiddiaspora16\\_web\\_spreadv3.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/15396/usaiddiaspora16_web_spreadv3.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> <https://unofficeny.iom.int/unlocking-power-diaspora-new-partnerships-development>.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Tamil diaspora NGO-spokesperson, August 2016, Toronto.

year-long civil war (Human Rights Watch 2006). However, during the war the LTTE ultimately functioned as a regional/transnational government providing populations with goods and services, and thus, ultimately, governing. Naturally, such diaspora engagement in homeland governance is contentious and the dynamics complex, not least because the Tamil diaspora is effectively a diaspora without an internationally recognized “home-state”. Therefore, most – if not all – engagement by the Tamil diaspora has been a thorn in the eye of the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka, to the point where many Tamil diaspora organizations have been banned on account of being accused of terrorist activities. On the other hand, there are also Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka, as well as in the diaspora, who recognize that the effectiveness of Tamil diaspora engagement in Sri Lanka has been mixed.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, both the effectiveness and legitimacy of diasporas as governance actors is hotly debated, to the extent that diaspora involvement in governance has often led to conflict between diaspora actors, international stakeholders, sending states and local populations. In studying the Somali diaspora, Kleist (2008) has found that diaspora engagement in development is often contested based on the assumption that it reproduces the ideology of the new host state of the diaspora. A critique that has been levelled at the mushrooming diaspora-volunteering industry is that many lack actual development expertise and may not even speak the language (cf. the literature on “volountourism”) thus leading to deficits in both governance effectiveness and legitimacy even though individuals might have ancestral links to the local context. Other criticism includes that often diaspora engagement in homeland governance is targeted only at small portions of the homeland population, which may reproduce local inequalities among communities.<sup>14</sup>

What becomes evident here is that even in diaspora research scholars continue to grapple with conceptualizing diaspora as either internal (and legitimate) or external (and effective) actors. The dichotomy that has become so entrenched in governance research is clearly also reproduced in diaspora studies, while scholars across disciplines struggle to put diaspora actors in a specific box. This illustrates how deeply ingrained the external/internal binary is in social scientific thought<sup>15</sup>, and especially in Political Science where the state remains the primary unit of analysis. However, in offering this diaspora perspective on governance, we also learn that the analytical distinction between external and internal actors does not match empirical realities. It is impossible and analytically inadvisable to reduce diaspora governance and its contestation to the external/internal binary. Conflict cleavages often sit elsewhere or are difficult to locate. Orjuela (2008) has explicitly addressed this issue in her study of the involvement of the Tamil diaspora in the Sri Lankan civil conflict. Here she argues against a simplistic understanding of diasporas and has sought to emphasize the multiple roles that diasporas can play during and in the aftermath of violent conflict. Further, Stefanos investigates how developing states

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Tamil diaspora NGO-founder, July 2017, Toronto.

<sup>14</sup> The finding that remittances tend to benefit only parts of a local homeland community has resulted in diaspora investment initiatives that try to ameliorate this. Overall, professional diaspora organizations are increasingly aware of the problems and contestation they face, when they implement development initiatives e.g. comdui.it (See Craven 2018).

<sup>15</sup> See also the literature on methodological nationalism (e.g. Wimmer/Glick-Schiller 2003).

struggle with diaspora investors who fit neither into the “national” or the “foreign” categories that previously had been used to determine concessions for land deals.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, the analytical distinction between external and internal governance actors does not hold up when we point the governance lens towards diasporas. This is because diaspora inhabit an “in-between space”. It appears, the reason that governance literature has not engaged at length with diaspora actors is that its inbuilt assumption – that external and internal actors have quintessentially different properties – does not match the genuinely ambivalent quality of diasporas as they engage in governance in their homelands. The continued insistence of designating actors along this binary and the discomfort experienced when it does not fit shows that state-centrism still has a firm grip on governance research. And it is this insight, which we owe to the diaspora perspective, which should drive governance researchers to rethink the external/internal dichotomy.

## 5. Conclusion and Avenues for Further Research

This paper has sought to shed light on the question why governance researchers have not taken more interest in the governing activities of diaspora populations towards their homelands. I considered this puzzling because recent governance research has explicitly attempted to clear the path for the analysis of governance by non-state actors. In an effort to shed light on this puzzle, I first established that existing research on diasporas does indeed define them as agents on the global political stage, with agency much like any other non-state actor in IR. I then offered a review of the literature on governance in International Relations with a particular focus on its most recent iteration, which has explicitly tried to de-centre the state to allow for the study of governance in areas of limited statehood. The main part of the paper then sought to cross-fertilize diaspora and governance research in order to dig deeper into the diaspora/governance-research relationship and its potential disconnects. The cross-fertilization proceeded in two parts; first, as a governance lens on diaspora and second, as a diaspora lens on governance. I began by empirically mapping diaspora governance initiatives according to mode of governance (direct/indirect) and task complexity. Indeed, it became evident that, by looking at diaspora engagement in their homelands through this governance lens, I was able to disentangle the many complex ways in which diasporas engage with their homelands without falling immediately into normative evaluations of these activities (for better or worse). Undoubtedly, research on diaspora governance can thus benefit from being translated into governance terms, if only to reorganize the field of research, widen interest and foster transdisciplinary dialogue.

However, it appears that there remains a fundamental barrier to the analysis of diaspora governance through the governance-and-limited-statehood-lens, and that is its insistence on distinguishing between external and internal actors along existing state boundaries. Diasporas do not fit neatly into either the external or the internal category, no matter the level of essentialization. And neither can diaspora governance failure or success be explained by their positioning on this divide. Thus, in order to truly add value to diaspora governance studies, governance research must overcome this external/internal dichotomy. That is to say, they must

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<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with Sarah Stefanos, April 2018.



contend with the fact that despite efforts to the contrary, governance research still remains implicitly state-centric. It leaves little space for the possibility that actors might be “in-between”, neither entirely external nor internal. Thus, far from a pure and unmediated empirical approach, research on governance in areas of limited statehood remains mediated by this fairly modernist analytical dichotomy.

In conclusion, the ambivalence of diasporas need not be a call to shut down dialogue between diaspora and governance research. To the contrary, a diaspora perspective on governance can be productive, in the sense that it allows us to see beyond certain assumptions and binaries, especially those that have been ingrained in much IR literature. Whichever way we think of this “in-between space”, it cannot be theorized if we remain stuck in a state centric governance model. But then, how can it be theorized? While a lot of literature on diaspora governance also falls prey to state centrism and methodological nationalism, some have begun to theorize what it means for diasporas to exist “in-between” traditional analytical boundaries. Especially in IR, scholars are offering innovative ways of studying diaspora governance that might be of interest to governance research more widely. For example, Koinova (2017) has made use of the “positionality” concept mentioned above, to go “beyond statist paradigms” in the study of diaspora mobilization in IR. Meanwhile, Karabegovic (2018) analyses diaspora mobilization through a “translocal” lens, thus challenging the primacy of transnational-linkages. Finally, the author of this paper is working on a dissertation project that aims to de-center the state in studying the politics of diaspora engagement in global governance by employing a combination of practice theory and assemblage thinking (Craven 2018). What unites these approaches is that they draw on insights from anthropology, sociology and geography, disciplines that have long tried to make spatial and conceptual liminality intellectually accessible. What is maybe even more crucial is that these disciplines have openly and explicitly struggled with the difficulties of moving beyond eurocentric (and therefore often positivist) theorising, something which governance research would be well advised to do.

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## The Author



Catherine Ruth Craven is a PhD Candidate in Politics and International Studies at SOAS University of London. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, her research explores the politics of diaspora inclusion in global governance through the lens of Tamil diasporas in urban settings. She

received her MSc in Global Politics from the London School of Economics, and her BA in Anthropology from the University of Sussex. She has been a visiting scholar at George Washington University's Elliot School for International Affairs and York University's Centre for Asian Research and was a research associate at the Free University of Berlin's collaborative research centre "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood" in the summer and fall of 2017.

Contact: [catherine\\_craven@soas.ac.uk](mailto:catherine_craven@soas.ac.uk)

## Research Framework

Governance has become a central theme in social science research. The Collaborative Research Center (SFB) 700 Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood investigates governance in areas of limited statehood, i.e. developing countries, failing and failed states, as well as, in historical perspective, different types of colonies. How and under what conditions can governance deliver legitimate authority, security, and welfare, and what problems are likely to emerge? Operating since 2006 and financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Research Center involves the Freie Universität Berlin, the University of Potsdam, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) and the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA).

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