Engaging Diasporas as Agents of Development for Guyana's Entrepreneurial Sector

For several years, I served on the executive committee of the Queen's College of Guyana Alumni Association New York Chapter which is, arguably, the largest and most prominent Guyanese diasporic organization. Founded close to thirty years ago, the association's original mission was to build camaraderie amongst alumni, help them acculturate to their new homeland, and to organize fundraisers to provide monetary assistance to the school in Guyana. Over the past decade, our mandate, and role, has evolved. In 2014, we met with the President of Guyana and discussed the development of the education sector in Guyana. For the past four years we have collaborated with Guyana's Ministry of Education to execute a national student conference that engages hundreds of high-school students across Guyana, with the aim of "empowering and inspiring youth for the future.[1]" While policymakers have traditionally perceived of migration, and brain drain, as banes to development, many have come to realize that their emigrants can be assets, as the aforementioned example aptly illustrates. In this paper, I examine how the migration-development nexus has changed. I argue that the shift (in migration studies) from methodological nationalism towards a transnational perspective, has opened up new avenues to achieving development. Emigrants from development countries are no longer simply seen as losses, and the source of underdevelopment, but as agents of development. I specifically examine how diaspora engagement could help augment economic development through entrepreneurship in Guyana, and, provide recommendations for a robust diaspora engagement policy around the area of entrepreneurship.

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[1] This is the theme of the conference.

CHANGING THE LENS OF ANALYSIS: FROM METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM TO

TRANSNATIONALISM

Migration studies scholars have long recognized that migrants maintain relationships in, and ties

with, their countries of origin.  In many cases migrants hold onto their ethnic cultures and

identities.  Yet, historically, most migration research focused on how migrants adapted

themselves to the host nation-state, and were socially excluded from, their place of immigration

(Vertovec 2001).  Wimmer and Schiller have argued that the social sciences has tended to

conceptualize social processes focused on, and utilizing the boundaries of, the nation-state - a

theory known as methodological nationalism (302).  Methodological nationalism takes the

nation-state as the container of society, assuming that the nation-state is the natural unit of

analysis and data collection (Faist 2011).  There are three variants of methodological

nationalism: ignorance – the taken for granted assumption that a world divided by nation-state

boundaries is the way society always existed; naturalization – believing based on national

discourses, agendas and loyalty that nation-states are the natural entities of study; territorial

limitation – reduction of the analytical focus to the boundaries of the nation-state (Wimmer &

Schiller 2002; Faist 2011).

Advancing national boundaries as the container of all social, economic and political

processes, migration studies obscured the examination of other social interactions and structures

that existed either beyond the borders of the nation-state, or within the nation-state.  While the

notion of methodological nationalism influenced migration studies for quite some time, it

became increasing clear that assimilation theory did not explain the lived experience of migrants;

that the adaptation of immigrants within nation-states was not always the reality.  Theories of

assimilation and methodological nationalism could neither explain the cultural maintenance of immigrants, nor the varying degrees of acculturation amongst immigrants. Indeed, it was patent that migrants' lives were oriented in ways that connected them with others (family, friends, neighbors) who lived in other nation-states, and that migrants conducted activities outside the boundaries of the nation-state. Migrants were transnational – they had various kinds of global and cross-border connections (Vertovec 2001).

THE TRANSNATIONALISM PERSPECTIVE

Transnational migration studies did not develop as a subdiscipline until the early 1990s when a cadre of researchers underscored that migrants were not always tied to one nation-state but could indeed be active in both home and host countries. Anthropologists Basch, Shiller and Blanc's canonical literature, *Nations Unbound: Transnational projects, post-colonial predicaments and de-territorialized Nation-State*, defines transnationalism as the set of processes by which immigrants create and maintain multidimensional social relations which link societies of origin and destination (20). Transnationalism not only refers to people; ideas, knowledge and other materials may also cross borders. Transnational research in many ways supplanted methodological nationalism to become the center of theoretical debates of immigration, illuminating that transnational relationships change the limitations of the nation-state, and redraw the borders and boundaries of society. The transnational perspective stretches the boundaries of an immigrant's world, making home and host society a single, bounded arena, of social action.

Transnationalism is certainly not a new phenomenon. Paul Gilroy, in his 1993 book *The Black Atlantic*, highlights the transnational roots of the African-American experience that

originated with slavery. The trafficking and enslavement of people of African descent had transnational effects that shaped the institutionalization of racism and left Africa in an underdeveloped state. Other historical examples of the overlooked concept of transnationalism are the Russian Jew and Italian immigrants who came to New York City with ties to their homelands. From 1870 to 1910, close to 80% of Italian immigrants were men who left behind wives, children and parents, with whom they would regularly correspond and send financial remittances (Foner 2001). In 1838, Indian indentured immigrants left their homelands and loved ones, voluntarily but under false pretenses, to work on sugar plantations in Guyana, assuming that they would be able to work temporarily, and earn income with which they would return to their homeland. In contrast to methodological nationalism, the lens of transnationalism allowed the bonds between migrant and non-migrants, through the transfer of money, goods, ideas, and culture, to be more apparent (Lamcomba & Cloquell 2014). What have been described as transnational activities, are activities that have always been normal to immigrants e.g. sending remittances, telephone contact, immigrant property ownership in homelands, political activity, and other forms of emotional connecting (Basch et al. 1994). More saliently, there is now more of a reference to a de-territorialized world, in which, in juxtaposition to a world under methodological nationalism, the power of the nation-state has waned. Globalization and technological advances have changed both the nature of transnational connections and the nature of migration. Airplanes, television, fax, email, and new laws and institutions all support the transnational movement. Country policies and laws like dual citizenship have buttressed and propelled transnationalism. As Brettell et al. note, countries like Portugal, Mexico and India allow dual nationality to maintain a presence abroad as well as attachment to home (20). Along

with Mexico, many South and Central American nations have amended their nationality laws to allow retention of citizenship after naturalization elsewhere (Spiro 2016).

However, several scholars argue that transnationalism is just an enhanced form of methodological nationalism. Waldinger believes that borders remain a constant in migration and a clear limitation to the transactional nature of migration (760). Safran refers to cross-border migrant processes as *transnationalism nationalism* emphasizing the fact that transactional actors and process are nevertheless still constrained by nation-states (90). Transnationalism shares some of the same deficiencies as methodological nationalism by drawing borders around nation-states, including some while excluding others.

THE MIGRANT: FROM LOSS TO AGENT OF DEVELOPMENT

Concomitant with the turn from methodological nationalism to transnationalism, has been the change in perception of migrants, not as losses, but rather, as agents of development. Development is no longer relegated to the boundaries of the nation-state but can happen from outside. Through concepts like brain circulation, and knowledge transfer networks, migrants move between countries and act as transnational actors in the areas of peace-building, politics and business and finance. In the past, policymakers would lament the issue of brain drain, a phenomenon whereby less developed countries invested scarce resources in training young professionals only to see them move abroad after completing their studies, since the country did not have the resources to gainfully employ its people upon graduation. Brain drain has been a vexing issue for many developing countries - it is estimated that more than 24% of tertiary educated citizens of developing countries end up migrating (Newland & Plaza 2013). In the case

of Guyana, the migration rate of the tertiary educated, at 89%, is the highest in the world (Guyana Chronicle 2015).  Now, it is widely acknowledged that migration does not have to result in permanent loss and underdevelopment.  Transnational activities such as temporary return, virtual return, and diaspora knowledge transfer networks, enable migrants to aid in the development of their countries of origin (Portes 2013).  Unlike remittances (which are utilized on consumables), diaspora knowledge transfer networks, which allow migrants to move between home and host country, allow for a more sustainable means of development (e.g. human capital development of local entrepreneurs).  Governments that take the passive approach of relying on remittances for local development will not garner the full benefits of economic and occupational achievement from their emigrants.

This seismic shift in thinking and practice within the development sector has changed the perception of emigrants from the problem, to the solution, of underdevelopment (Boyle 2014). More recently, research has turned its attention towards understanding diasporas as politically important agents of development (Vertovec 2005).

DIASPORAS AS TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Anthias, describes the idea of a diaspora as a connection between groups across different nation-states whose commonality derives from an original but maybe removed homeland; a new identity becomes constructed on a world scale which cross national borders and boundaries (564).  Diaspora is a kind of transnational community characterized by having dispersed, or experienced movement (either voluntarily or forcibly) from their homelands; having a collective myth of home and strong ethnic-group consciousness; having a sustained network of social

relationships with group members (Safran 1991). Not everyone in a diaspora is part of a transnational community in the sense of being actively engaged in the politics of their country of origin. But many diasporic communities have been actively involved as agents in global affairs and development. This involvement shifts the methodological focus from the nation-state as the unit of analysis to non-state actors transcending sovereign borders. While some aspects of diasporas transnational activities are partially or fully controlled by the state (e.g. restrictions on cross-border mobility) other facets lie beyond the nation-state's reach (e.g. an alumni association sending funds to make repairs to its alma mater).

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

The central challenge facing many policymakers is how to best engage, motivate and mobilize their diasporas to engender meaningful transformation of their homeland economies and institutions. Diaspora engagement strategy is the formal and explicit policy initiative, or series of policy initiatives, enacted normally by the sending state, or its peoples, aimed at fortifying and developing relationships with expatriate communities, diasporic populations, and foreign constituencies who share a special affinity (Boyle & Kitchin 2014). Tactics employed have been the creation of a ministry level institutions to handle diaspora affairs (e.g. in the case of Haiti), the establishment of hybrid ministries where diaspora engagement is a core belief, the introduction of sub-ministry level institutions, the buttressing of consular and embassy networks, the erection of new regional or local diaspora engagement agencies, and the mobilization of foundations and advisory councils (Aguinas & Newland 2012).

The government of Guyana has identified diaspora engagement as a core development strategy.  Below is an excerpt from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website:

> A wealth of resources, from political and economic to human capital, offered by the Guyanese diaspora serves as a boost to local development through trade, partnerships, investments and philanthropy.  In its own engagement of diaspora communities, the Government of Guyana therefore considers the importance of enhancing both its related national policy and its preservation of individual social and cultural ties.  Accordingly, the Government is extremely mindful of this crucial group to national development efforts, especially (sic) looking forward to the country's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the Schumpeterian theory, the entrepreneur, through the processes of creative destruction and innovation, is the key to economic growth.  Accordingly, entrepreneurship has been identified as a key element of Guyana's development strategy.  In June of 2019, the University of Guyana will host a diaspora engagement conference focused on the topic of entrepreneurship, reflecting the paramountcy of the subject matter to policymakers.  In publicizing the conference, the University of Guyana issued the following statement:

> As we observe the economic challenges in the regions and prepare; for example, for the emergence of the Oil and Gas Sector in Guyana, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the traditional way of doing business cannot yield success. The gaps in skills and competencies necessary to spur local involvement are clear. The focus on entrepreneurial activity is of particular significance to the youth, women, indigenous and Diaspora population, whose ideas and initiatives will serve as the foundation for new ventures and innovations. Yet, as we have seen, current initiatives to support these groups are often

stymied by the absence of funding, lack of adequate training and non- access to critical social, human and other networks. These facts suggest that there is not only a need for the Diaspora to 'return home', but also bring their global business principles, connections, access to critical resources and ideas to support business and social development.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN GUYANA

The transnationalism lens helps illuminate the skills and knowledge that lie in the diaspora, and the positive impact 'brain circulation' could have on local entrepreneurial development.  In recent years, the focus of policy discussions has moved from brain drain prevention to the possibility of taking advantage of knowledge circulation and brain gain to help grow the entrepreneurial sector in the country.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, entrepreneurs can be classified as either "necessity entrepreneurs" who pursue self-employment due to lack of employment options, or "opportunity entrepreneurs" who reform and revolutionize the pattern of production (Samuelson 1981).  While there is a positive correlation between entrepreneurship and economic development (Acs 2006), the presence of a greater number of necessity entrepreneurs (as is the case of developing countries like Guyana) may actually not correlate with economic growth as it suggests that individuals are pursuing self-employment due to a paucity of employment options (Acs 2006).  By definition, necessity entrepreneurs are usually more focused on their own survival and tend not to pursue business expansion, innovation or add to job creation. Opportunity entrepreneurs, conversely, have a positive impact on economic development since they are more likely to pursue growth and scale, innovate and create jobs.  As an example, a

local craft vendor who has a small shop and no employees may be content with generating enough income to just sustain herself and family (necessity entrepreneur). If that vendor were to also create an on-line marketplace to sell her products, develop a new, innovative, transferrable on-line payment system, and hire employees, she has transformed from a necessity to opportunity entrepreneur, and will have a greater impact on the local economy. To stimulate economic growth, policies that encourage the formation of more "opportunity" type entrepreneurs and allow for the conversion of necessity to opportunity entrepreneurs would have the greatest impact. One such strategy is human capital development through diaspora knowledge transfer networks, whereby diasporans expose local business to new business practices, technologies and innovations, and provide coaching, mentoring and a support network – factors necessary for the creation of "opportunity type" entrepreneurs.

Ethiopian and Ghanaian diaspora organizations provide apposite examples of how human capital amongst the diaspora can be effectively leveraged (Newland & Tanak 2010). Through the use of technology, some of these organizations have set up online discussions and websites to interact with entrepreneurs in their countries-of-origin. In the case of UNIFEM's Digital Diaspora Initiative, projects are undertaken that empower African women economically through the use of capacity building in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Chile Global supports the development of innovation and business creation in Chile through the transfer of knowledge, skills, ideas, contacts and technology through members of the diaspora. Members of its 400 member network of influential Chileans contribute their time, experience, contacts, knowledge, and skills to help Chilean companies. By 2011, Chile Global had helped 76 companies, holding shares in 23 of them (Newland & Plaza 2013).

India's software industry has seen major development due in large part to its Silicon Valley based diaspora of technical managers who played instrumental roles in the development of IT centers in India's main outsourcing hubs such as Bangalore.  Many of these Indian diasporans return to their homelands at least once a year, many of them more often, facilitating the substantial transfer of information (Kapur 2002).

In South Korea, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has set up an online community, the Global Network of Korean Scientists and Engineers. The network leverages the knowledge and skills of diaspora Koreans to develop local Korean science and technology businesses.  Over 80,000 ethnic Korean scientists and engineers, both in South Korea and overseas, participate in the network, exchanging more than 300 scientific and technological questions and answers each day (Song 2014).

In the Philippines, TOKTEN, a program that was started by United Nations volunteers, has helped with business development by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and skills by members of the diaspora to their home country (Newland & Tanaka 2010).

DEVELOPING A ROBUST DISAPORA ENGAGEMENT POLICY TO INCREASE LOCAL ENTREPRENERUSHIP

The above examples aptly demonstrate the power that exists in diasporas, and the results that can be achieved from effective diaspora engagement strategies that transfer knowledge to develop human capital in local entrepreneurs.  The notion of diaspora engagement is a critique, and rejection, of the relevance of methodological nationalism in that it imagines a development strategy that extends outside of the nation-state.  In drafting a diaspora strategy, care must be

taken to avoid the same 'wrongs' of methodological nationalism whereby a bounded container society concept is reproduced albeit in a different form. Accordingly, the following should be considered:

- How would *Diaspora nationalism* be avoided?
- Should (and if so how would) the traditional definition of diaspora be expanded to account for multiculturalism and different degrees of identity?
- Is there inherently an unequal power relationship in diaspora engagement policy? Who benefits from diaspora related development?

Ang postulates that *diasporic nationalism* produces an imagined community that is de-territorialized but that is symbolically nevertheless bounded. As previously described, the term diaspora connotes a transnational community. The concept of community as relates to diasporas can be problematic since there may be an assumption of naturality, cohesion and homogeneity without regards to division and differences within the diaspora (Anthias1998). As Wimmer and Schiller state,

> much of transnational studies overstates the internal homogeneity and boundedness of transnational communities, overestimates the binding power for individual action, overlooks the importance of cross-community interactions as well as the internal divisions of class, gender, religion and politics… (324)

One of the main criticisms of the diaspora concept is the belief of an actual integrated community. Diaspora should not be thought of as one homogeneous group where identity is connected solely to the nation-state. Many of those considered to be a part of a diaspora are often quite divided, do not act in unity, and may have much more in common with people

outside the supposed group than inside. In an ethnically plural country like Guyana where ethnic divisions and disagreements are widely known, it would be inaccurate to state that there is one Guyanese diaspora. Guyanese may identify themselves as part of the Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese diasporas. Afro-Guyanese may more identify with others in the Afro-Caribbean diaspora or black diaspora than with a Guyanese diaspora. This point is exemplified during cricket season in Guyana. Cricket is one of the events that unites yet divides Guyanese society; many from the diaspora return to Guyana and sit alongside local Guyanese to view cricket matches in the National Stadium. But what is interesting is that when the Guyana or the West Indies team plays India or Pakistan, many Indo-Guyanese spectators cheer not for their national or regional team but for the Indian and Pakistani teams. Identity and belonging is not just to the nation-state but may be based on religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and any combination of the aforementioned. Starting with the understanding that there exist several differentiated groups within the larger 'Guyanese diaspora', different targeting mechanisms, messages and strategies are required to mobilize emigrants. Intermediary organizations like diasporic organizations (such as hometown associations) in which diasporans naturally self-select should be partnered with. Hometown associations are a natural fit for a customized strategy since hometown associations tend to be themselves segmented by 'sub-identities', for example, The Guyanese Hindu Association.

Similarly, identity is also not constant and static. It is a fluid phenomenon – not all who could potentially be beneficial to local development identify as part of the diaspora. A key example is the second generation. Second generation refers to those who are born in the host country but have one or more parents who are born outside of the host country. A question frequently raised in migration and diasporic studies is whether transnationalism applies to the

second generation.  Since this generation is not born in Guyana, and, may have multiple identities (and in some cases may affiliate with their own homelands rather than with their parent's/parents' homelands), they are not always perceived to be part of the diaspora.  As these young people mature, they develop multiple, overlapping and simultaneous identities.  Although they may not identify as Guyanese, and do not fit the definition of diaspora, this generation may actually be an attractive target as agents of development. According to the Pew Research Center second- generation Americans are substantially better off than immigrants in terms of socioeconomic attainment.  They have higher incomes than their parents ($58,000 vs. $46,000); are more college educated than the previous generation (36% versus 29% with college degrees); and are more likely to be homeowners (64% versus 51%)[2].  They are also more likely to be technologically savvy, and, may be more relevant contributors to a diaspora knowledge network than their parents.  As policymakers develop strategies of knowledge transfer, this is certainly one group that should not be excluded!  Policymakers should help this generation develop a sense of belonging to Guyana by engaging with them, and, forming relationships from an early age through initiatives like organized education programs and homeland visit programs.  In her book, *From Here and There: Diaspora Policies, Integration, and Social Rights Beyond Borders*, Alexandra Delano also provides accounts of how home country governments (in that case the Mexican government) could help with the development of their diaspora in their destination countries through the provision of social services.

     While utilizing the skill and talents could have positive impacts, the question that requires closer examination is who benefits from this development.  As previously noted, for real economic growth to be achieved through entrepreneurship, small scale "necessity" type

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[2] http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/02/07/second-generation-americans/

entrepreneurs must scale to the point where they can be job creators. But these entrepreneurs tend to be of lower socio-economic class.  Conversely, diaspora knowledge transfer networks are, arguably, inherently elitist.  Knowledge is primarily transferred through on-line platforms, academic conferences, and by emigrants with the financial means to return and share their knowledge.  In Guyana, there is a huge digital divide - many smaller local entrepreneurs cannot afford ICT capability, and, are unlikely to attend an academic conference. The entrepreneurs who will probably benefit from the current diaspora knowledge networks are more than likely to themselves be elites – they are the established business owners who have internet access, and, can afford the time off from their businesses to attend a conference.  Diaspora engagement policy could therefore potentially exacerbate inequality by furthering entrepreneurs who are already established, while neglecting those who really require the help to grow.  To prevent this, government should support programs that are likely to help smaller scale entrepreneurs.  An example would be providing incentives, and recognition, to hometown associations who engage with entrepreneurs located in lower income areas.

Finally, diaspora engagement policy should avoid creating division and conflict between the local Guyanese and the diaspora.  Government should ensure there is not an unequal power dynamic where diasporans are treated as superior to local citizens.  While diasporans may have migrated to advance their individual and family circumstances, there are many local Guyanese who have chosen either not to migrate or who have re-migrated to help with the development of the country.  As an example, tax breaks and incentives should not be awarded across the board to the diaspora while not provided to locals who are helping with development of the country.  Rather, these incentives should be offered to entrepreneurs in industries and sectors that are essential to national development regardless of whether they live aboard or not.  In the same

vein, diasporans should not behave as if they are superior to local Guyanese and should not dogmatically impose the ideas and beliefs of the developed world onto the developing world while disregarding the local context.

CONCLUSION

Over the past few decades, migration scholarship has seen a shift in focus from methodological nationalism towards transnationalism. The transnationalism lens has allowed for the consideration of other social and economic processes that are not centered around the nation-state. This shift in thinking, coupled with globalization and technological advances, have allowed scholars and policymakers to conceive of new ideas of, and avenues to, development. Diaspora engagement – mobilizing transnational communities to engender meaningful transformation in their homelands - is one such means. While governments have historically used terms like brain drain in describing the loss of intellectual and human capital, many cases globally illustrate how policy makers could develop programs to capitalize on the phenomenon of brain circulation through diaspora knowledge transfer networks. To be effective, a diaspora engagement policy should avoid diaspora nationalism and not bind the unit of analysis, and policy creation, solely along the lines of national identities; diasporas should not be assumed to be homogeneous, and the traditional definition of diasporas should be expanded so as not to be too exclusionary. The possibility of power imbalances should also be carefully examined. Working cooperatively, and in tandem, government, migrants, and local Guyanses can create programs, and an enabling environment, to facilitate economic development through the establishment of a robust entrepreneurial sector in Guyana. As the country continues to develop

local industries to support and capitalize on our recent discovery of oil, the ideas and

recommendations presented herein come at an important juncture in the history of Guyana.

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