Transnational belonging and leverage: A new theory of diaspora political agency

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Abstract

The article presents a new theoretical framework, the Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory (TBLT) to explain the political agency of the diaspora communities in the postcolonial and global settings. The current body of research on the study of diaspora has been either inclined towards material variables (remittances and lobbying) or social cultural variables (identity and nostalgia). TBLT is a way to develop the field by defining diaspora influence as a result of a dynamic interaction between the notion of belonging, as defined by emotional, symbolic and identity ties to the home land, and the notion of leverage, which comprises economic, political, technological and institutional resources which have been accumulated in host societies. The theory argues that belonging and leverage do not work alone to explain diaspora behaviour, but rather the interaction of the two dimensions is what defines how much, how, and the results of diaspora engagement. The article defines the main ideas, processes, interaction patterns, and analytical quadrants by which TBLT explains the differences in the roles of diaspora in the processes of conflict escalation, peacebuilding, governance reform, and citizenship politics. The framework is an empirically applicable and flexible frame of reference to the study of diaspora politics in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the Global South.

***Keywords*:** Diaspora Politics, Transnationalism, Belonging, Leverage, Migration, Postcolonial Governance, Conflict

Introduction

Diasporas have become common actors in the global politics space functioning across national boundaries to shape the results of political, social, and security policy in the host state as well as that of the home state. Diaspora networks can now influence political paths that have never left the borders of their new home countries because of processes like remittances, lobbying, electoral interference, activism via the internet, and, in some instances, financing of conflicts (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Adamson 2019). These combine with the development of communication technologies, the opening of migration policies and the globalization of political advocacy, which have increased the ability of the diaspora to become transnational mobilized, and, therefore, become central figures in the economy of international relations and dynamics of peace and conflict in the present (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003).

Theoretical conceptions of diaspora political engagement is scanty notwithstanding this empirical prominence. Despite the fact that migration and transnationalism research has generated comprehensive descriptive explanations, little agreement is reached on the factors that determine the impact of the diasporas political behaviour and how their impact is organized in various contexts. Some of the diasporas operate as a peace broker, development partner, and political reform agenda, but others add to the polarization of politics, to the strengthening of extremist stands, or even to the rise in conflict within their original countries of origin (Koinova 2018). The explanation of this variation remains one of the unresolved scholarly issues.

Current theoretical methods are only partial explanations. Both materialist and rational-choice schools of thought generally predict economic resources (remittances, or access to funding) as the main source of influence of the diaspora, often diminishing political participation to financial abilities or cost-benefit analysis (de Haas 2010). Although these methods are educational, they do

not give proper consideration to identity, memory and affect in motivation. On the other hand, constructivist and identity based approaches focus on belonging, ethnicity or nationalism but tend to see these identities as fixed, thus ignoring how power, positionality and institutional access may inform the translation of sentiments into political action (Brubaker 2005). Thus, there is a common tendency to examine identity and power independently, which limits our understanding of the agency of the diaspora.

To address this conceptual gap, the article proposes a new theoretical construct named Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory (TBLT) to consider the concept of transnational belonging. TBLT assumes that TBLT is politically active because the interaction between two analytically distinct but mutually constitutive forces belonging and leverage forms the basis of the diaspora political agency. Belonging summarizes emotional attachment, identity, moral obligation and symbolic connection to a homeland, hence creating the drive to engage. In its turn, leverage refers to the structural and positional resources that allow influence such as economic capital, political access, legal status, organisational capacity, and digital or diplomatic reach (Adamson and Demetriou 2007).

Introducing the relationship between belonging and leverage, TBLT does not consider the diasporas as a migrant community or an economic force but rather as transnational political forces that can influence the results, contingent upon condensation of emotional commitment and structural power. Higher rates of belonging with no leverage can lead to symbolic/moral activism with little concrete effect, whereas higher rates of leverage with no belonging can lead to transactional/instrumental engagement. Only when the point of convergence of belonging and leverage is significant, is the possibility of sustained and transformative diaspora influence distant.

This article makes a contribution to the academic discussion of the issues of diaspora politics, peace and conflict studies, and transnational governance through a lean but flexible theory that can explain the difference in the behaviour of diasporas in different political settings. TBLT provides the conceptual linkage between both identity and power and provides new analytical instruments to understand the circumstances in which diasporas may be agents of peace, reform, polarization or conflict in an ever more interconnected world.

The Transnational Belonging–Leverage Theory (TBLT)

Core Proposition

The Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory (TBLT) provides a relational explanation of the role of the diaspora politically that prefigures the dynamics between the affective attachment and the structural capacity. The theory states a very simple and consequential argument, diaspora political power is a product of the dynamic interaction between belonging and leverage, not necessarily of either of these elements. Although the available scholarship has tended to focus on one of the two mentioned identities or on the material and institutional resources, TBLT posits that none of the two aspects can solely explicate the circumstances, processes, or results through which the diasporas influence cross-border political action.

In TBLT, belonging refers to the emotional, symbolic and normative networks of the interrelations between the diaspora actors and a homeland or an imagined political community. Such bonds are formed based on historical accounts, memory, cultural belonging, moral duty and symbolic citizenship as developed by both Anderson (1998) and Brubaker (2005). Belonging explains the role of diasporas in politics: it produces motivation, constructs grievances and continues the long-term participation despite the lack of material rewards at that specific moment. However, TBLT emphasizes that membership does not necessarily translate into political power; emotional

attachment on a high level can be expressed through activism like protests, cultural activism, or social mobilization on the web without necessarily changing the policy or power dynamics (Koinova 2018).

Leverage, in its turn, encapsulates the positioning and structural resources that are needed to transform the actions of the diaspora into actions that are beyond the symbolical articulation into the material political impact. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) and Adamson (2019), these assets are economic capital (remittances, investments), institutional access (citizenship rights, lobbying channels), political embeddedness in the host states, digital connectivity, and diplomatic or epistemic capital. Leverage illustrates the extent to which the actions of diaspora are moving and the size of their effects. However, TBLT reminds us that leverage should not be self-activating; structural capacity without belonging often results in transactional, episodic, or instrumental interaction, where the actors of the diaspora will have a very limited set of interests that are not tied to the transformation of the whole society.

The key analytical input of TBLT lies on its insistence of interaction. Optimal political influence is achieved when strong belonging is combined with strong leverage, which generates, according to the theory, transformative diaspora agency. Under these conditions, diasporas actually have the ability to direct the peace processes, shape the foreign-policy agendas, mediate or institutional reform in the country of origin (Shain and Barth 2003; Ostergaard-Nielsen 2016). On the contrary, instances of incompatibility between belonging and leverage create different but predictable results: high belonging and low leverage result in symbolic or moral activism and high leverage and weak belonging results in elite bargaining or instrumental politics. The low degree of belonging and leverage gives low engagement by the diaspora.

Theorizing the influence of diaspora as a property of relational activity instead of an attribute of certain properties, TBLT evolves past the reductionist categorizations that see the diaspora as the source of peace or the source of conflict. Rather, the theory provides a versatile structure that can explain variation in time, space and political circumstances. By doing this, TBLT reflects on wider arguments concerning transnationalism, political mobilisation and global governance as it presumes how identity and power, in turn, constitute political action in diaspora in an ever-interconnected world (Faist 2010; Adamson and Demetriou 2007).

Conceptualising Belonging within the Transnational Belonging–Leverage Theory (TBLT)

The Transnational Belonging -Leverage Theory (TBLT) defines belonging as an identity, affective and symbolic attachment that diasporic actors hold to their societies of origin. Belonging is not rationalized in terms of legal nationality and physical presence but a multidimensional association between migrants and homelands that is emotionally instantiated but socially exercised. It includes cultural and ethnic identification, emotional attachment and nostalgia, collective recollection of displacement or migration, normative responsibilities to aid in the development of the homeland and symbolic or formal claims to citizenship (Yuval-Davis 2006; Anthias 2008).

Belonging works by working on a shared language, religion, rituals and historical narratives to reproduce a sense of we-ness across the borders (Anderson 1991). To most diasporas, this connection is strengthened by the family relationship, the practice of remittances, consumption of the homeland media, as well as the membership of transnational associations (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Notably, belonging is not simply sentimental but it often has a moral dimension to it. Diasporic subjects can feel a moral obligation to become contributors of giving back to their country of origin, especially when this is seen as a situation of conflict, underdevelopment or political marginalization (Carling and Hoelscher 2013).

TBLT breaks with the romanticised concept of diaspora attachment in its stress on the fact that belonging is neither uniform nor fixed. It differs mostly between generations, genders, social statuses, migration processes and political life. The first-generation migrant can have high emotional and nostalgic attachment whereas second or third generation diaspora can be more symbolic or selective (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). The gender expectations may also influence belongingness, as women are often placed in the role of the custodians of culture, whereas men may be directed to political or economic participation (Anthias 2013).

Importantly, TBLT emphasizes the fact that membership does not necessarily result in political or developmental power. Whereas, although it offers motivation, legitimacy and emotional commitment, it is a lack of material, institutional as well as positional resources that renders belonging an ineffective aspect. In this regard, belonging is more of a motivational power than an ability. Diasporas can have a strong sense of belonging to their motherlands and still be structurally marginal, politically excluded, or economically restrained (Brubaker 2005). The lack of leverage: The absence of leverage (access to capital, political networks, or strategic location) means that one will be manifested mostly by symbolic activism or episodic participation.

Analytically isolating the notions of belonging and leverage, TBLT provides a better model of understanding why the phenomenon of a deep emotional attachment does not have transformative consequences in all cases. Belonging provides the normative and affective bases of agency of the diaspora, yet its effects depend on the way it is interacting with structural possibilities and limitations in transnational spaces.

Leverage

In the Transnational Belonging Leverage Theory (TBLT), leverage refers to the structural and positional resources that the actors of the diasporas gain in the host societies, and they then invest in transnational political, economic, and social arenas. In comparison to belonging, which is founded on affective attachment, identity and normative obligation, leverage is material and institutionally situated. It embodies the degree to which the diasporas have the ability to affect the results, dictate the agendas, and achieve access to the decision-making arenas other than the symbolical participation.

There are a number of resource domains interrelated to form leverage. To begin with, the economic capital, such as remittances, investments, philanthropic investments, and entrepreneurial activities, gives the diasporas material power, which when mobilised, can be used to sway the priorities in terms of development, and political figures in the homeland (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Second, political accessibility of the host states including the voting rights, the lobbying prospects and party membership allow the diaspora groups to perform as the intermediaries between the host-state institutions and the home authorities (Shain and Barth, 2003). This access is usually a factor that makes or breaks the voices of diaspora claims in terms of being heard or marginalised in transnational governance spaces. Third, the digital and media capacity has emerged as a source of leverage that is critical in the age of platform politics and flows of information. The transnational media networks, social media and digital advocacy has become one of the ways in which Diasporas frame the story, mobilise the public and put reputational pressure on states and international organisations (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Fourth, the security and legitimacy of the political engagement of diaspora actors are formed by the legal safeguards and citizenship in host societies. The dual citizenship, permanent residence or asylum status tends to increase the Maximum of political

action that one can undertake and the precarious legal status limits political action (Baubock, 2010). Lastly, professionalism and institutional relations, such as using academic, international organisations, civil society, and institutions of the private sector, elevate the credibility and policy power of the diasporas by locating them in the official knowledge and governance frameworks (Koinova, 2018).

More importantly, leverage dictates the scale, scope, and impact of the engagement of the diasporas but not in a vacuum, leverage does not necessarily result in a transformative influence. TBLT assumes that leverage independent of belonging is likely to produce instrumental or transactional types of engagement, like elite bargaining, opportunistic lobbying, or extractive engagement due to personal, or group benefit as opposed to collective responsibility. In these cases, the diaspora actors can be very influential and yet normatively removed to the social impact of their activities in the motherland (Brubaker, 2005). Therefore, leverage is a not-sufficient but necessary requirement of constructive transnational agency. This interaction with belonging is what ultimately defines its political meaning and ethical direction, which is one of the core propositions of the Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory.

Interaction Dynamics and Analytical Quadrants

The theoretical analysis of the Transnational Belonging -Leverage Theory (TBLT) is that it approaches the agency of Diasporas interactively. Instead of understanding diasporas as a homogeneous political force or assuming a linear correlation between migration and influence, TBLT argues that the engagement of diasporas is the resultant product of interacting between belonging, in terms of affective, symbolic, and identity attachments to the homeland, and leverage, in terms of structural, material, position capacity to influence. and only to this extent of interaction

is it due that specific patterns of transnational action are generated and not to each of the variables considered individually.

At the intersection of belonging and leverage, TBLT distinguishes four ideal-typical analytical quadrants that embrace forms of diaspora agency that are dominant. These quadrants are heuristic constructs and not fixed categories, and comparative and longitudinal analyses can be conducted across cases (Brubaker, 2005; Koinova, 2018).

High belonging-high leverage: This is the most consequential type of the diaspora engagement and the first quadrant. In this case, deep emotional and identity-based identifications to the homeland are merged with high resources, political contacts, or institutional platforms in the host states. Diasporas in this quadrant can impose transformative pressure, which can influence peace negotiation, governance reform, reconstruction of post-conflict reality, or even escalation of the conflict. Empirically, these actors can be the intermediaries between the homeland elites and the international institutions, mobilise transnational advocacy networks, or may tie financial flows on political reforms (Adamson, 2019; Ostergaard-, Nielsen, 2003). TBLT theorises this quadrrant as the culmination of the diaspora agency in which normative commitment and structural capacity support each other.

The second quadrant is high belonging-low leverage in which there is a high emotional attachment and low structural power. The symbolic activism, preservation of cultures, memorialisation and moral advocacy are the activities commonly undertaken by the Diaspora actors in this space. Their interventions can be in the form of protests, narrative framing, cultural diplomacy, or humanitarian aid but their influence on political outcomes is limited. Although this form of engagement might be viewed as peripheral in terms of power, TBLT points out its importance in the long term in

maintaining collective identity, legitimising political claims, and creating discursive spaces that ultimately facilitate more influential types of action (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Low belonging-high leverage: Quadrant three, includes various types of diaspora activities that are motivated mainly by instrumental interests or elite interests. Actors in this group have a high level of economic, political, or technological advantage but do not have emotional or normative attachment to the homeland. They participate in the activities mostly on a transactional, intermittent basis, or one that is driven by personal economic or geopolitical motives. Such agency can stabilize or corrupt the political processes because there is all influence without a high accountability to homeland communities (Koinova, 2018). TBLT considers this quadrant as analytically different to transformative engagement, and laments the dangers of elite capture and depoliticised transnationalism.

Lastly, there is the low belonging-low leverage which is a small or intermittent involvement of the diaspora. Weak emotional ties are associated with structural incompetence leading to disengagement or passive observation. TBLT however would warn not to understand this quadrant as something that is permanently irrelevant. Alterations in crises at home or openings in the host countries politics or shifts in the generational identities can quickly re-pattern the belonging and leverage, shifting actors to other quadrants over time.

More importantly, these quadrants are not fixed locations but rather fluid and relational as conceived by TBLT. The actors of Diasporas can move up and down quadrants due to change in political setting or emergence of crisis or leverage changes. This dynamic approach can facilitate the temporal, contextual, and power-sensitive character of the diaspora politics and can provide a sound analytical scope of studying peace, conflict, and transnational governance studies.

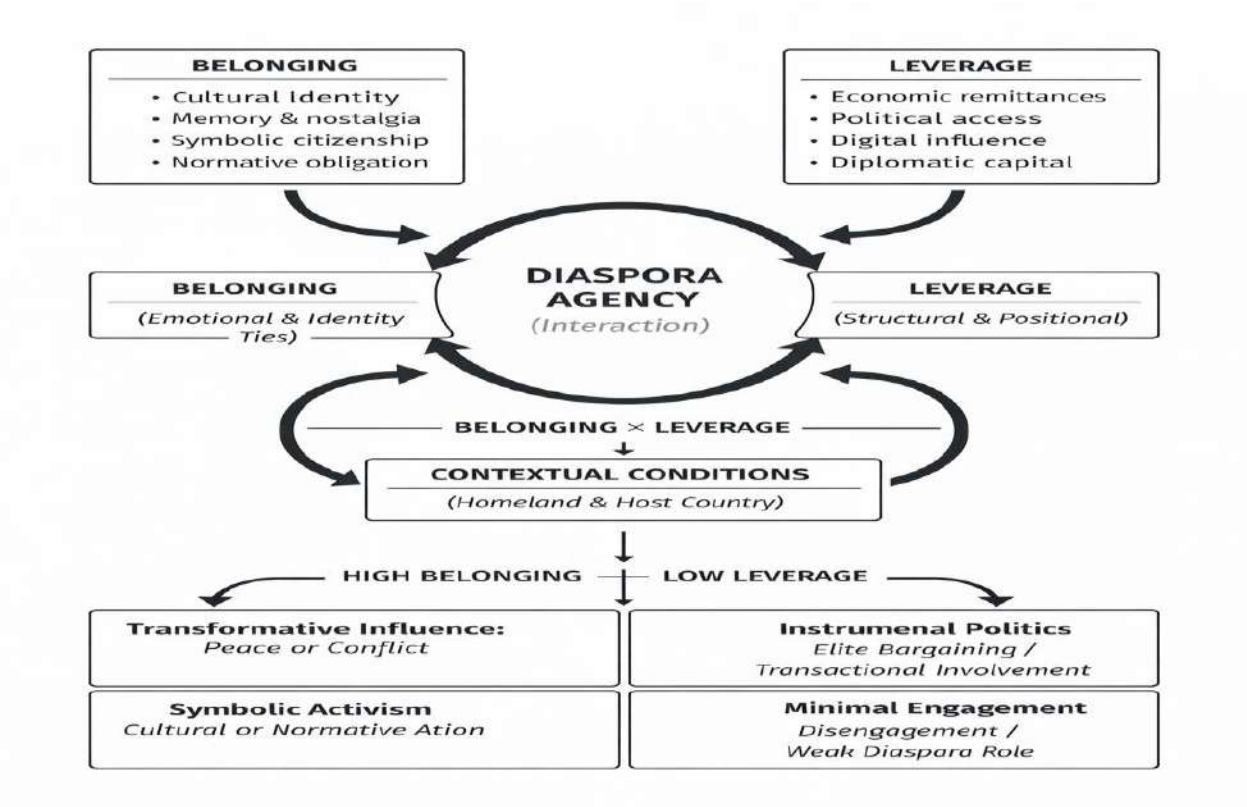


Figure 1. *Processed and Designed by the Author (2025)*

Key Mechanisms of Transnational Belonging–Leverage Theory (TBLT)

The Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory (TBLT) further promotes a relational conceptualization of the politics of the diaspora by revealing four connected processes through which the diasporic actors gain, organize and project political power across boundaries. Instead of viewing diasporas as either affective communities or instrumental political users, TBLT theorises diaspora agency as an outcome of affective belonging and material-institutional leverage in the dynamic transnational spaces.

Dual Anchoring

The very essence of TBLT is the dual anchoring mechanism that refers to the concurrent integration of diasporas into the host-country and the homeland political, social, and symbolic structures. Diasporic actors do not only constitute displaced subjects; they fill up overlapping spheres of politics that facilitate the formation of identities, the political opportunity, and calculations of strategy (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Such dual positioning makes the diasporas to practice both the politics of here and the politics of there simultaneously, possibly at the expense of taking advantage of the rights, protections and platforms that are offered by the host societies and yet the diasporas are normally obligated by the normative, cultural or political needs of their home countries (Brubaker, 2005).

Asymmetry Dual anchoring is asymmetric. Asymmetries of power between host and homeland situations predispose the types of engagement that can be deployed by the actors of the diaspora. Host states that are liberal democracies such as these usually offer institutional access, legal protections and freedoms of expression that are sharply opposed to homeland environments, which are often restrictive. TBLT believes that it is this asymmetry that empowers diasporas to perform the functions of a transnational intermediary that re-frames issues about the homeland via host-country political norms and discourses (Adamson, 2013).

Leverage Conversion

The second key process is the leverage conversion which is described to be the process through which diasporas convert host-country resources into forms of influence to the homeland. They comprise economic capital (remittances and investments), political access (lobbying, advocacy,

and voting blocs), symbolic capital (media narratives, moral authority), and institutional positioning in the international organisations or civil society networks (Koinova, 2018).

TBLT points out that leverage is not innate but has to be transformed. Remittances, in one example, become political when they are associated with conditions, stories, or action in common instead of merely being individual transfers (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Likewise, diaspora lobbying is effective when the political institutions of the host country are open, and when the homeland actors accept the voice of the diasporas to be legitimate or effective. The conversion of leverage hence relies on structural access, and strategic agency, which supports the argument presented by TBLT that the material capacity is not enough without the continued belonging and identification.

Conflict Projection

The third process is the projection of conflicts, whereby conflicts in the homeland are replicated, re-framed and even exaggerated in the diaspora. Instead of being situated in a remote location to violence or political struggle, in many cases, diasporas turn out to be the spaces where national division is symbolically and politically reenacted (Demmers, 2007). Digital media platforms have intensified this process as they allow narratives, images, and calls to action to be shared across borders in a short time span, eliminating the distance of time and space (Mavroudi, 2018).

TBLT leaves behind the previous descriptions by emphasizing the fact that projection of conflict cannot be simply a by-product of the engagement of the diaspora but an orderly result of high belonging in conjunction with the unequal leverage. In situations in which emotional attachment towards the homeland is high but there are weak institutional avenues to high-quality engagement, the diasporic activism is likely to be polarized, performance-based, or exclusionary. In contrast, in

the cases of leverage that is incorporated in responsible institutional structures, conflict projection may be shifted to mediation, peace advocacy, or norm diffusion.

Belonging Crisis Points

Lastly, TBLT presents the notion of the crisis of belonging where there is a point where both homeland crises (war, takeover, or persecution) or host-country exclusion (racism, securitisation, or political marginalisation) can augment diasporic identification and mobilisation. Such events mobilize latent attachments and tend to generate spontaneous spurts in the activism of the diaspora, fundraising, lobbying, and symbolic action (Sokefeld, 2006).

Belonging crisis points play an essential role since they add and reset a balance between belonging and leverage. Host society exclusion can increase emotional connectivity to the homeland and also decrease leverage, and homeland crisis can increase the legitimacy of the diaspora as a foreign agent. According to TBLT, the political orientation of the diaspora engagement towards constructive change, instrumental bargaining or disengagement is defined by how the actors negotiate such crises within the existing transnational power networks.

Implications for Conflict, Peacebuilding, and Governance

The Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory (TBLT) provides a strident analytical apparatus to explain the ambivalent character of the role of the diasporas in conflict relations, peacebuilding and governance results. TBLT cuts across deterministic accounts of the world that portray diasporas as predisposed to conflict or consistently peace-seeking by presupposing the future of affective attachments to a homeland (belonging) and the material, political, and symbolic resources accessible to the migrants in the host country (leverage). Rather, this theory illustrates that

diasporic behaviour will be dependent on how these two dimensions intersect in specific political and institutional environments.

With respect to conflict, TBLT clarifies why some of the diaspora communities are so powerful in escalation. The most likely conditions of conflict intensification include: belonging is rigid, exclusionary and ethno-nationalist or grievance-based, leverage is high in the form of financial capital, political access in host states or control over transnational information flows (Collier, 2004; Adamson, 2013). It is in such circumstances that diasporas can fund armed groups, enhance polarising discourses, or lobby other governments elsewhere in a manner that reinforces conflict lines. TBLT explains that the concept of belonging or leverage cannot explain such outcomes, but their combination, especially when there is no institutional restraint of the emotional attachment.

TBLT, on the other hand, sheds some light on avenues in which diasporas can be used to support peacebuilding. When belonging is pluralistic and inclusive, granting more than one identity and future to the homeland, and where leverage is made institutionalised via legitimate and transparent means whether via development agencies, mediating platforms, or post-conflict reconstruction frameworks, then peace-oriented engagement would be more plausible (Kaldor, 2003; Lyons, 2007). In such formations, diaspora resources and influence may be used to facilitate dialog, reconciliation, and social reconstruction and not zero-sum politics. In this way, TBLT is useful to understand the differences in the results of peacebuilding when it comes to allegedly similar conflicts that are faced by different diaspora communities.

Governance has a lot to do with the theory as well. TBLT is the reason why transnational and local politics can reinforce or can erode domestic politics. Informally exercised leverage or seized by elite networks can lead to the distortion of local power relations, undermine state legitimacy and cause externalised forms of political contestation (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003). As an

alternative, belonging and leverage by states through the formation of institutionalized means of diaspora involvement, including consultative councils, regulated remittance flows, or voting abroad, can strengthen the state of democratic rule and responsiveness to policy (Gamlen, 2008). Lastly, in the migration and citizenship studies, TBLT points out that dual and multiple citizenship regimes redefine the balance between the belonging and leverage. Transnational membership is legally recognized which increases the leverage of the diaspora at the same time reconstructing the understanding of loyalty, obligation and political community (Baubock, 2005). Therefore, TBLT provides a coherent approach to the transnational interaction of mobility, identity, and power and has drastic implications on conflict, peacebuilding, and governance in an ever more transnational world.

Contributions to Theory and Practice

The Transnational Belonging-Leverage Theory (TBLT) contributes to the scholarship on the politics of diaspora and transnationalism in four interrelated theoretical and practical ways. To begin with, TBLT incorporates emotion and power into one analytical framework and thus it bridges the gap in the literature that has persisted. Although a lot of literature on diasporas speculates on either of the two affective dimensions of identity, memory, and nostalgia (Brubaker, 2005; Safran, 1991) or material and institutional dimensions of remittances, lobbying potentials, and access to political resources (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Ostergaard Nielsen, 2003), TBLT shows that the concept of diaspora agency is not caused by either of these dimensions, but by the connection between The theory views belonging and leverage as mutually constitutive and hence the reason why emotionally attached diasporas can continue to be politically marginal, and why materially powerful diasporas can act instrumentally without further commitment to normativity.

Second, TBLT offers an orderly description to the variability in the impact of the diaspora in the contexts. Available literature tends to regard diasporas as either equally powerful, or prone to conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), neglecting the fact that such engagement differs in intensity and results. TBLT develops a typology that distinguishes between transformative influence, instrumental politics, symbolic activism, and minimal engagement forms of diaspora action, depending on the relative placement of belonging and leverage in certain host- and home-country circumstances. This methodology is consistent with context-sensitive views in comparative politics and peace studies that highlight structures and constraints of opportunities (Tarrow, 2011; Koinova, 2018), and it includes a more articulate way of explaining why different diasporas act in different ways.

Third, the theory fills the gap between migration research, peace and conflict research, and international relations. Diaspora studies have been cutting themselves off in migration scholarship, whereas peace research has been concerned with state and rebel actors, and international relations have been preoccupied with formal diplomacy (Adamson, 2013). TBLT establishes diasporas as transnational political agents through which their emotional attachments and structural advantages can simultaneously influence the escalation of conflicts, peacebuilding, and outcomes of diplomacy. By doing so, it is helping to form new research on transnational actors and non-state interference in world politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Zurn, 2018).

Lastly, TBLT is a versatile instrument of policy formulation and research. The framework can be implemented qualitatively or quantitatively, at regional, and can be extended to other areas of issues like peace mediation, development policy, or regulation of foreign influence. To policy makers, TBLT as a policy diagnostic tool can help to tell when the engagement of diasporas is

most likely to be constructive, symbolic, or destabilizing to allow the application of more targeted engagement strategies. In this regard the theory will not only promote the clarity of concepts but it will also provide greater practical governance of transnational political life.

Conclusion

Diasporas cannot be analytically understood as either internally homogeneous actors or inherently destabilizing forces in international and domestic politics. Rather, their political implications are situational, relational, and deeply contextual. Building on this premise, Transnational Belonging Leverage Theory (TBLT) explains diaspora influence as the outcome of an interaction between two core dimensions: affective attachments to the homeland (belonging) and access to material, institutional, and positional resources across borders (leverage). It is this interaction rather than identity or resources in isolation that shapes whether diaspora engagement becomes transformative, symbolic, instrumental, or minimal within specific political contexts (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Brubaker, 2005).

By conceptualizing diaspora agency as the product of intersecting emotional and structural forces, TBLT moves beyond the conventional dichotomy that frames diasporas either as peacebuilding actors or as conflict entrepreneurs. Instead, it aligns with an emerging body of scholarship emphasizing conditionality, political opportunity structures, and multi-scalar embeddedness in diaspora mobilization (Koinova, 2018; Adamson, 2019). The framework further underscores the importance of contextual mediators such as host-state receptivity, the nature of the homeland regime, and transnational governance arrangements in enabling or constraining the activation of belonging and leverage (Qstergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Gamlen, 2014).

Future research can operationalize TBLT through comparative empirical studies across regions, migrant generations, and policy domains, including peacebuilding, development finance, electoral politics, and digital activism. Longitudinal and mixed-methods designs would be particularly valuable for tracing how shifts in affective ties or resource access over time reshape diaspora functions and modes of engagement. Normatively, TBLT offers policymakers and practitioners a diagnostic framework for engaging diasporas strategically, without resorting to essentialist assumptions about their intentions or impacts. As such, it provides a theoretically grounded lens for rethinking diaspora politics in a global order characterized by intensified mobility and transnational interdependence.

Suggestions

i. Policymakers should avoid essentialist assumptions that portray diasporas as either inherently beneficial or destabilizing. Instead, engagement strategies should be grounded in contextual analysis that considers the interaction between diasporic belonging and leverage within specific political environments.

ii. Governments and international organizations should create inclusive and transparent institutional mechanisms such as consultative forums, advisory councils, and structured investment platforms that enable the productive activation of diaspora leverage while aligning with positive affective ties to the homeland.

iii. Host countries should recognize the transnational political roles of diasporas and facilitate legal, civic, and economic spaces that allow diaspora communities to engage constructively with homeland affairs without securitizing or delegitimizing their activities.

iv. Practitioners in peace building and conflict mediation should apply TBLT as a diagnostic tool to assess when and how diaspora involvement may contribute to peace, polarization, or political stagnation, depending on the configuration of belonging and leverage.

v. Scholars should employ mixed-method and longitudinal research designs to capture how changes in emotional attachment, generational identity, and access to transnational resources reshape diaspora engagement over time across regions and policy fields.

vi. Given the growing importance of digital platforms in diaspora mobilization, policymakers should regulate and support transnational digital spaces in ways that encourage constructive political participation while mitigating misinformation and polarization.

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