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The Diaspora and Conflicts

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Introduction

The past two and half decades have witnessed a surge in the prominence of the Diaspora as a key player in the international political arena. This is not surprising, given the percentage of the world population currently living outside their own countries of origin. In 2006, this was estimated to be 191 million worldwide. In West Africa, the proportion of migrants to the total population is estimated to be 2.9 per cent. Nigeria alone is estimated to have about 15 million of its citizens living abroad (Sani 2007; Singer 2001). A number of factors accounts for the growing prominence of the Diaspora on the world stage. The rapid development of new communication technologies has improved abilities to transmit information rapidly, and therefore enhance the capacities to mobilise across continents on common causes. There is the improved climate of multiculturalism in host countries, which has helped to revitalise the cultural identities and assertiveness of Diasporas. This is coupled with profound changes in global political configuration in the form of the emergence of more widespread claim or adherence to liberal democratic tenets among nation-states in the aftermath of the Cold War (Vertovec 2005).

In the late twentieth century, most wars became intra-state in nature, raising issues about the role and status of nationalities and communities within these states (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1997; Holsti 1996). The political goals of these wars are often presented as being geared to the construction and consolidation of the power of rival ethnic groups or nationalities. Identity politics defined in ethnic, nationalist, religious or communalist terms tends to constitute their dominant ideological platform. More often than not, the external support base for them has shifted from the superpower of the Cold War era or even ex-colonial powers, to the Diaspora, foreign mercenaries, criminal mafia and regional powers. The

war economy is often sustained by external emergency assistance and a ruthless parallel economy of plunder and unofficial exports and imports (Kaldor and Vashee 1997:7-19; Miall et al 1998:69).

The increasing importance of Diaspora communities to contemporary conflicts is traceable to the rapid rise of war refugees in intra-state civil conflicts (Miall et al (1998:130). With a sizeable part of some of the new Diasporas directly rooted in conflict from the home country, it has been pointed out that the Diaspora communities usually participate in their homeland conflicts, and indeed, "live their homeland politics long-distance" (Anderson 1992:12). The spectre of a virulent racist nationalism in contemporary Europe whose defence of the home space and territory pointedly identifies the immigrant, the asylum seeker and ethnic minority as an unwanted category has increasingly made settling in other countries difficult. This in turn has reinforced the focus of Diaspora communities on their countries of origin, as it becomes increasingly risky to stake their future in their new abode (Koser and Lutz 1998; Brinkerhoff 2005). Finally, the growing prominence of the Diaspora has been impacted by the economic crises of the last two decades and half in Africa that had seen many African professionals or workers migrate to Europe or America. This migration process might also have been fuelled by the protracted political struggles against authoritarian rule in the continent during the same period which produced a steady stream of an exile element. In the Diaspora, authoritarian persecution could force various groups on the receiving end to constitute themselves into "communities of suffering", which would invariably reinforce underlying identities.

If Diaspora communities are increasingly involved in living the politics and conflicts of their homelands 'long-distance', precisely what does this entail? In what ways do Diasporas insert themselves in the conflicts of their homelands? What are the effects of such interventions? Are Diasporas conflict accelerators? Or do they serve to moderate conflicts?

In attempting to grapple with these questions, this chapter adopts a two-pronged approach. The first is to catch some a glimpse of the answers proffered in the general literature on Diasporas and conflicts. This is complemented with case studies on the multiple patterns of intervention or involvement of Diaspora communities of West African origins in conflict and post conflict situations in their home countries.

Conceptualising the Diaspora

Although used quite liberally, the term 'Diaspora' has no single definition. However, there is a general agreement about some common features which members of a Diaspora community share. First, Diaspora members share a self-awareness or consciousness borne out of common origins in a homeland and current domicile outside of that homeland.

Second, they tend to identify with each other as members of an identity group, often scattered or dispersed, but with sustained common ties to the homeland. It is these features that often lead to 'institutionalising networks of exchange and communication that transcend territorial states,' linking Diaspora groups between host countries (Vertovec 1997:278). According to Sheffer, 'modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands' (Sheffer 1986:3). In effect, a Diaspora community refers to a group that recognises its separateness based on common ethnicity or nationality, lives in a country other than its own country of origin, but maintains some kind of attachment to the home country. Cohen suggests that the strong motivation for collective action on behalf of the homeland usually found among Diaspora communities is driven by a collective memory and myth about the homeland. A sense of distinctiveness, common history and belief in a common fate all help to fashion an idealisation of the putative ancestral home. This, in turn, provides a 'collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation' (Cohen 1997:515).

Diaspora communities can be multi-layered, ranging organisationally from the regional and national to the ethnic or even town and village levels. Thus, it is possible to be part of the African Diaspora, the Nigerian Diaspora, the Niger-Delta Diaspora, the Urhobo (or Itsekiri, Ijaw, Isoko, Ogoni) Diaspora, all at the same time. In this context, the 'homeland' may not necessarily be fixed at a particular level. It is contextual and its expression may well reflect the complex interactions of the diverse layers. The myths, consciousness and constructs about the ancestral home may be shared at one level but they may also clash at another. This could be a reflection of the importation of contested issues of land or history into the Diaspora. Much of the animation for some Diaspora groups may be derived from such contestation. In effect, the Diaspora very much reflects the heterogeneous mix of the national (home) population.

However, the organisational directions of the Diaspora community and the kinds of intervention it can mobilise in its 'long-distance living' of the homeland will be affected by the socio-economic and political environment of the host country. If the African Diaspora communities played prominent roles in the continent's various struggles (liberation, human rights, democratisation, and economic development), the host environment often provided the resources mobilised for such. These resources include 'homes' for the exile and the refugee, and employment opportunities for the migrants. Educational and skills acquisition opportunities are important resources. Same goes for communication resources and the accessibility of social and political processes in the host country. The Internet in particular has become a forum for the organisation and promotion of

various kinds of associations and institutions (public, private, and nonprofits). The internet has fostered inexpensive, instantaneous global information sharing and often circumvention of national legal frameworks. Also, the internet enables the creation, and enhances the effectiveness, of transnational movements to address key global public policy issues. Indeed, the Internet promotes universalism, that is, 'a universal moral code transcending state boundaries and state interests' (Jacobsen and Lawson 1999; Greig 2002). Such moral codes increasingly encompass respect for human rights and democratic practices. Thus, Boli (2001:66) argues that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the 'most highly legitimated single expression' of world citizenship doctrine – a doctrine that calls into question the locus of state sovereignty.

It is on the basis of such values that transnational civil society organisations and inter-governmental organisations increasingly seek to intervene in and/or otherwise influence policy and practice internal to the nation-state. Diaspora groups often intervene in conflicts in their home countries by deploying this human rights discourse and tapping into a sympathetic civil society element in their host states to influence political developments in their countries of origin. In specific terms, the chapter briefly examines the pattern of involvement of relevant Diasporas in the crisis in the Casamance region of Senegal; the Tuareg revolt in Mali and Niger; and the attempt at conference diplomacy by Diaspora groups on the Warri crisis in Nigeria. Finally, the paper highlights the efforts to bring the memory, recollections and suggestions of Liberian Diaspora elements to bear in a post-conflict attempt to heal the wounds of the Liberian civil war.

Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: Patterns of Intervention

Several studies have examined the role of organised Diasporas in promoting policy and regime change in their homelands (Byman et al 2001; King and Melvin 1999/2000; Shain 1994-1995, 1999). Many others have focused on the economic value of remittances by Diaspora communities to the home country. Migrant remittances have been generally recognised as critical to many economies in the Global South. In fact, by the end of 2004, official figures suggested that remittances from across the globe collectively added up to approximately $125 billion (Fagen 2005). It is therefore not surprising that remittances from African Diasporas from 2000 – 2003 averaged about 17 billion dollars per annum, practically overtaking the flows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which averaged 15 billion dollars during the period (Egbe & Ndubisi 1998:43). The contributions these make to the development processes in the countries of the Global South have also been generally acknowledged, although this has remained debatable. However, there is no question that remittance income reaches social sectors that official development assistance (ODA) usually misses (Meyers 1998; Newland 2004; GCIM 2005).

However, the role of remittances in conflict situations has been more contro-versial. There is some degree of consensus that one of the most significant av-enues of influencing the course of conflicts by Diaspora groups is through re-mittances. However, the nature and direction of the impact of such remittances on the conflicts remains an issue that is very much controversial. Two opposed standpoints are evident on the role of remittances by Diaspora communities in conflict in their homeland. One group of scholars sees much of Diaspora communities' financial muscles in the funding of conflicts. For these scholars, Diasporas play a particularly important role in sustaining insurgencies (Byman et al 2001; Van Hear 2003). For example, out of 74 insurgencies active since 1991, 40 received significant support from refugees and Diaspora groups. In fact, it is held that Diaspora support is far more important than state support for the sustainability of many insurgencies (why is that the case? You may wish to interrogate this point briefly). The state is held to be particularly unreliable for the sustenance of conflict since its support could suddenly disappear or be reduced (Byman et al 2001). Furthermore, both state and non-state support for an insurgency can make a movement far more effective, prolong the war, increase the scale and lethality of its struggle and may even transform a civil strife conflict into an international war (Byman et al. 2001).

In addition, channels through which private financial transfers are sent are alleged to allow criminal or 'terrorist' groups to use 'clean' Diaspora networks to move 'dirty' money to other countries. Africa can be particularly vulnerable in this regard, given that most of the remittances transmitted to Africa south of the Sahara are not conveyed by means of formal banking procedures. Only 16 per cent of the money remitted to Senegal by the so-called *modou-modou* migrants, for instance, is channelled through Western Union (Pérouse De Montclos 2005).

Large segments of the populations living in conflict, war-to-peace transition and crisis contexts are highly dependent on remittances (Fagen 2005). Some studies have pointed out that in many countries in West Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, warlords and criminal political leaders make use of global connections to exploit or use migrants to advance power and illegal wealth and to prolong war (Ballentine 2003; Ballentine and Sherman 2003; Collinson 2003). Anderson (1999) has observed that during conflicts, Diaspora communities raise money to support continuing warfare, promote public opinion and international interventions in support of their cause, and prevented (?) resolution, even when local compatriots are prepared to negotiate. Many Diasporas use networks to coordinate activities and raise funds. While their actual mobilisation characteristics vary extensively, some Diasporas have demonstrated the ability to exert sufficiently focused, organised, and powerful influence to become significant actors in international affairs. Many rebel movements are launched in exile because of

political repression or crisis in the homeland. Some of these use the countries of asylum as places from which they can inform against a dictatorship at home (Israel 1999:281; Thomas 1996:333). Others plot against or support armed struggles from neighbouring countries. Refugees sometimes utilise opportunities that may arise to launch guerrilla attacks against the authoritarian regimes that caused them to flee their countries of origin (Benard 1986). Due to their often richer financial status compared to those in the homeland, it is often relatively easy for emigrants to fight by proxy by financing military operations. Some World Bank economists assert that the more powerful a Diaspora is, the more likely it is that a civil war will be prolonged. According to them, the probability that a conflict will resume during the five years following a cease-fire or a peace settlement is increased six-fold if a strong migrant community has an interest (Collier & Hoeffler 2000:11-12). (How does the money for such an enterprise go through both international and national money transfer circuits? How can we be sure that some categories of transfers are meant for militias and rebel groups and some others are not?).

In both the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflicts, neighbouring countries provided launching pads for attacks on these countries by their exile elements. These neighbours were either complicit, or had become too weak to exert control in some parts of their territories. For example, the December 24, 1989 attack of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF) was launched from across the Ivorian border. The arms from Libya for the NPLF were brought into Burkina Faso by air. From there, they were usually transported by road through Ivory Coast into Liberian territory (Williams 2002). In the same vein, the Foday Sankoh, the leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was allegedly resident in the Ivory Coast while directing his campaign against the government of Sierra Leone. Then, in 2002, Ivory Coast itself became the target of a rebellion from groups that were reputed to have roots in Liberia (Williams 2002).

The Casamance Revolt in Senegal

Since 1982, the separatist *Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance* (MFDC) has been first through popular protest, then since 1990 through a guerrilla war fighting for an independent Casamance. Durable peace remains elusive despite ceasefires and accords and improved security conditions throughout the 1990s. The death toll either killed in armed attacks, by landmines or as a result of human rights abuse due to the conflict directly is probably around 1,000. Many more have been displaced into neighbouring countries or within the Casamance since armed conflict commenced in 1990. Modes of displacement are complex, and reliable figures are difficult to obtain. However, according to a 1998 Caritas census, 62,638, out of a total 1.1 million Casamance population were displaced.

Ziguinchor, the capital of the western region of the Casamance, has received some 14,000, with a further 6,000 in other Casamance towns. Estimates by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees indicate that a further 10,000 people are refugees in Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia (Evans 2007).

The Casamance conflict started in mid-December 1983, when hundreds of demonstrators – armed with spears, machetes, and hunting rifles, covered in protective charms, and chanting incantations to render them invulnerable to bullets – invaded the streets of Ziguinchor to call for the independence of Casamance – a region in the southwest corner of Senegal (Humphreys and Mohamed 2005). The government responded with a heavy hand, leaving an official toll of 80 injured and 29 dead, though unofficial reports put the death toll at over 100 dead and more that 700 arrested. A handful of those retreating, led by veterans from the Senegalese army, under the banner of the MFDC took to the forest of lower Casamance to commence military operations against government positions. So began the guerrilla war that has left thousands killed and the south of Senegal dotted with land mines.

The Senegalese Exterior (an umbrella platform of Senegalese nationals especially in the United States of America) has typically directed itself at mobilising external support for the home government as well as promoting social and economic development of the home country. Following the smooth and peaceful transfer of power in 2000, emigrant elements from Senegal under the aegis of the Senegalese Exterior in the United States met to consider how the Diaspora could help to improve the social and economic conditions of the country. Apart from the developmental issues which the forum considered, it was also felt that the Senegalese Diaspora should concern itself with the situation in the Casamance region of the country. Specifically, it was to create a strong lobby in the United States with the objective of getting the government of the United States of America to take a more active interest in the crisis in the region.

In this regard, the expected assistance from the United States in resolving the conflict would be in the form of exerting pressure on Libya, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau (Portugal, why the conflation?) to halt their perceived support for the MFDC; participate in the struggle to dismantle the circuit of production and distribution of illegal drugs (which is presumably one of the sources of funding for the separatist movement); organise, through the Carter Centre, negotiations between the governments of Senegal, Guinea Bissau and The Gambia on putting an end to separatism; and assist Senegal to de-mine the war zone. The post-conflict role of the United States would then be to assist in the 'economic revitalisation of the Casamance region' (CORISEN 2000).

The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali and Niger

The insurgency in Mali started very differently. In June 1990, the *Mouvement Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad* (MPLA), intent on gaining independence for Azawad, their region, commenced military operations against the Malian government by way of an attack on government positions in the far northeast of Mali. Neighbouring countries provided safe haven while the Tuareg in Dispora provided support to the insurgency of their kith and kin in Mali. Thus, at this point while no external patron was providing the Malian government with significant financial or military assistance (meaning Mali had no military/defence assistance or accord with any western or eastern 'development partners'?), the Tuareg rebels clearly had external sources of support (from which countries? What types of support?) (Rowland 1992:43-45).

As Humphreys and Mohamed opine, 'These attacks were the beginning of a war that would engulf the region in inter-communal conflict, pitting northern "whites" against northern "blacks". After extensive and broad-based negotiations, the war ended with a weapons-burning ceremony in 1996' (Humphrey and Mohammed 2005). In 2006, the conflict flared again, and a year later, the Tuareg in Niger Republic unleashed a similar revolt against their own government.

The Tuareg revolts in both Niger and Mali could be seen as a pointer to the importance attached to relevant Diaspora communities in homeland conflicts, and how they are mobilised to support the agitations at home. In July 2007, the *Mouvement des Nigeriens pour la Justice* (MNJ) which has been engaged in armed conflict with the government of Niger Republic decided to set up a political office with the aim of reaching out to Tuaregs in Europe and America. The objective was to use the Tuareg Diaspora to help garner external support and funding for the struggle (Newsgroup, Nordniger 2007, online).

In Mali, the Tuareg who took to arms again in June 2006, after earlier demobilising in 1996, tried to reach out to its Diaspora when the conflict flared again. In the latter case, the military activities of the Tuareg are believed to be strongly influenced by the existence of a returnee Tuareg ex-combatant element in Libyan and, perhaps, other Middle East causes. The discovery of oil reserves in commercial quantities in Northern Mali (mostly inhabited by the Tuareg), the increasing presence of United States' military advisers in the country and a pool of fundamentalist militias in the area of Algeria bordering Mali, have all combined to reignite a war that was once thought to have ended (Wienberg 2006).

The separatist movement in the Casamance region of Senegal and the Tuareg uprising in Niger and Mali are contemporary conflict areas in West Africa where parties to the conflicts have made serious efforts to mobilise their Diasporas behind their positions. The transnational character of Casamance is reflected in its familial, ethnic, religious and economic links with Guinea Bissau and The Gambia. This facilitates cross-border movements of people (including Casamance rebels

and refugees) and trade in arms and 'conflict goods' between the region and the other two countries (Evans 2004:3). The Gambia and Guinea Bissau have often mediated between the separatists and the Senegalese government. However, their territories have also provided bases for the Casamance revolt, just as factions of the MFDC have intervened in the internal affairs of Guinea Bissau by fighting for the government in power or the armed opposition.

Governments also seemed to be involved in promoting conflict and instability in other countries by organising their Diasporas against them. Senegal, for example, claims to see the firm imprint of the Yahya Jammeh administration in The Gambia in the mid-2007 upsurge of the fighting in the Casamance. This has led to allegations that Senegal has tried to retaliate by organising elements of the Gambian Diaspora to unseat President Jammeh (Morgan 2007). Whether the Senegalese Government is behind this effort or not, it is apparent that there is an open effort on the part of the Gambian Diaspora to unseat the Jammeh administration. The firm authoritarian grip on power by Yahya Jammeh and the apparent inability of a fractious opposition to bring about regime change through elections has galvanised some elements of the Gambian Diaspora (largely driven into exile, in the first instance, by the iron fisted rule of the government) to get rid of him by 'whatever means necessary' (Jalloh 2007). To achieve this, the Diaspora dissidents' movement proposes to create a military wing and a political wing. While the military wing is located in neighbouring Senegal, the political wing, which embraces the Gambian Diaspora in Africa, Europe and the United States, has the task of raising funds from 'Diaspora Gambians, democracy and human rights organisations and friendly governments around the world to support both the political and military wings of the movement' (Jalloh 2007). (So, funding for both political and military wings come from the same source (s)?)

The tendency to read conflict-increasing role into the remittance activities of Diaspora groups is very much contested. It may be possible that when funds are channelled through organisations with connections to radical causes in the homeland, the intervention of the Diaspora community will 'tend to be conflict-increasing than contributing to constructive conflict transformation' (Zunzer 2004:27). However, as Zunzer maintains, remittances are more often than not channelled on family to family basis. In situations of serious conflicts occasioning population displacements, economic production and the livelihood of households in agriculture, fisheries or even paid employment are often very much undermined. Migrant remittances become important in sustaining the viability of households in these conditions.

This much was acknowledged by the then President of Sierra Leone, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, when in 2002, he initiated a crusade to encourage Sierra Leoneans living in the Diaspora to contribute meaningfully to the country's reconstruction efforts. He noted that Sierra Leoneans in Diaspora made enormous contribu-

tions in sustaining their families, relations and friends during various stages of the civil war in that country. In the post-conflict phase where poverty reduction is a critical dimension of reconstruction, increasing the support of the Diaspora would go a long way in ensuring the success of the programme (Sierra Leone Homecoming Summit 2003).

Quite often too, funds from the Diaspora are channelled to the most disadvantage of the population, the kind that are generally overlooked in the 'development' process, and missed out in the foreign donor agenda. Remittances in this case contribute to the stabilisation and transformation of the lives of the disadvantaged (Zunzer 2004:28). In contemporary times, remittances constitute a vital core of the intervention of Diaspora communities in their home countries. Whether this core role is positive or negative remains controversial. The conflict-increasing perspective has been quite dominant and the fact of the respectability it enjoys is to be found in the rash of anti-terror laws in many countries which invariably include provisions to eliminate and criminalise migrant funding of violent or 'potentially violent' groups.

However, the household sustainability thesis is much more recent, at least in the context of locating the role remittances play in situations of violent conflicts. While the two perspectives appear to have their own moments, care must be taken to ensure that the effort to contain the conflict-increasing possibilities of remittances in the age of 'anti-terror wars' do not create difficulties for remittances that are critical to household survival in home countries.

The other major mode of Diaspora intervention in home country affairs is essentially in the area of information dissemination. There are two dimensions to this. The first dimension is the mobilisation of public opinion in the host country and the world in general to draw attention to conflicts and unwholesome practices of home state and economic agents in the home countryside. The internet and other means of communication have been veritable tools servicing this process.

It involves a great deal of networking with various non-governmental organisations in the sensitisation of the general public to the plight of environmental pollution, land erosion and degradation, exploitation, and consequences of these on the population of the home country. It also involves drawing attention to the authoritarian character of regimes, their specific acts of repression and a demand for action, including intervention by international organisations such as the United Nations, European Union, the African Union or the Economic community of West African States. The other major dimension is to demand action against the offending home state or group by the host state through foreign policy action. As pointed out earlier, the Senegalese Exterior in the United States has tried to mobilise the diplomatic weight of the United States towards a resolution of the conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal. The activities of other Diaspora groups in West Africa exemplify this trend.

Limits of Dialogue and Peace Initiative of Diaspora Communities: The Washington DC Peace Conference on the Warri Crisis

Over the years, various groups identified with the Niger Delta Diaspora have been quite active in mobilising foreign support for their struggles. These include the Ijaw National Alliance of the Americas, Ijaw National Congress (USA), Council of Ijaw Associations Abroad, Itsekiri Survival Movement, Warri Frontline (UK), The Urhobo Historical Society, etc. These groups track events in the Niger Delta on a daily basis and make public responses to them promptly, often through the internet. That these Diaspora organisations constantly put the deleterious policies and activities of the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta in the limelight is usually taken by the home state as evidence that such organisations promote conflict, which has become endemic in the region. Often this is really an inability to transcend its own framework of the conflict itself and begin to look at it from the point of view of those who are the major victims of its major impact. However, the inability of these organisations to transcend their peculiar ethnic bases also become apparent when the ethnic groups in the country of origin find themselves embroiled in inter- communal conflicts.

The Washington DC Peace Conference on the Warri Crisis was convened by U.S based Nigerian scholars with ethnic affinity to the three warring ethnic groups involved in the Warri crisis, namely, Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo. The Conference took place at Howard University, Washington DC, on July 24, 1999. The trigger for the conference was the eruption of violence between the Ijaws and the Itsekiri communities in Warri, in mid-1999. While the matter of local government creation in the city was the immediate cause of the violent confrontation between these two groups, it was realised that any peace initiative must embrace the Urhobos, the other major claimant to the ownership of Warri, but not involved in the particular crisis when it erupted. Once the issue of the tripartite nature of the conference was settled, the next was to be (?) the mode of representation. Here, it was agreed that each of the three ethnic groups would be represented by a delegation. This did not preclude individual participation, but the delegation was to act as the negotiating arm of the group. Another issue that had to be trashed out was whether the delegations should contain elements from the home front. The challenges of fund-raising to finance the participation of delegates from the homeland, especially for a conference that was being convened at a very short notice (approximately one month) apparently dealt a blow to this suggestion.

However, it would not be out of place to suggest that there were strong feelings within the Diaspora communities too that such an inclusive arrangement might deny the conference the necessary flexibility to tackle issues that had assumed a non-negotiable status by the long history of conflict and mutual recriminations among the ethnic groups in Warri. But this decision would leave the other major challenge of the conference open – how do you translate the conference decisions

into practical peace-builders in the city if those who directly live the crisis at home are not involved in the process of arriving at these prescriptions? This challenge was not to be tested, as the outcome of the conference was unable to deal with the conflicting claims of the warring groups. Diaspora groups may try their hands at inter-ethnic conference diplomacy to resolve violent conflicts in their country of origin, but, as the present case shows, long distance will not diminish the emotions attached to the issues or create a common platform for interpreting the history that brought them together.

The agenda of the conference which drew input from the three communities involved clearly set out its goals. While the achievement of 'harmony among our people at home to ensure an immediate end to the present hostilities' and ensuring 'a lasting peace in the long run' in Warri were the immediate goals, the conference also set its sights on engaging the larger Niger Delta conflict, a conflict in which all three warring groups in the Warri crisis, among others, lay claim to neglect and marginalisation within the Nigerian federal framework. Thus, the conference aimed to 'help further the interest of all our people in the area by getting involved in processes that will lead to the betterment of our area (a) in revenue allocation (b) in reduction of the oil exploration and exploitation on our ecosystem (c) in the management of our towns, villages and rivers' (Ikomi 1999, online).

The conference duly took off with the delegates of the three groups presenting their opening statements. These delegates were made up of academic and professionals of the three ethnic groups, who were based in North America. Their opening statements dealt with the remote and immediate causes of the hostilities as well as proffering short and long-term solutions to the conflict. However, the conference could not really proceed beyond this point as the directions of the proposals by the various delegations became clear.

For example, the Itsekiri delegation refused to go further unless the twin items of the issue of the title of the Olu of Warri and the status of the city were removed from discussion. For the Itsekiri delegation, the opening statement of the Urhobo delegation was nothing less than the adoption of the views of the foremost, home based protagonist of the Urhobo cause in Warri (Itsekiri Report 1999; Itsekiri Delegation to Peace Summit 1999). On the other hand, the other two delegations accused the Itsekiris of trying to banish the main issues of the peace talks from the agenda on the grounds that they were, for them, settled issues and non-negotiable. Furthermore, the Diaspora groups of Itsekiri origin participating in the conference are said to have received instructions from the highest authority in Itsekiriland to the effect that in the absence of the express permission of the *Olu*, they could not talk peace on behalf of the Itsekiri people. From the point of view of the other groups, this negated the purpose of the conference, which was to avoid as much as possible, the importation of home precepts into the peace forum of the Diaspora (Urhobo and Ijaw Report 1999; Ekeh 1999; Natufe 1999).

In effect, the conference failed to achieve its objectives. Each delegation wrote separate report on the proceedings and on why the conference collapsed. The Ijaws and the Urhobo delegations issued a joint communiqué while the conveners also issued their own. This outcome essentially reproduced the course of the crisis and the stalemate existing at the home front. If anything, this indicates the tendency of the Diaspora community to 'live the conflicts in their homeland long distance'. Even the idea of preserving the 'coalition' that brought about the peace conference died with the collapse of the peace conference.

The laudable initiative to find a solution to an inter-communal war in the country of origin through an inter-communal conference made up of delegates from the Diaspora failed due to the inability to transcend the paradigms on which the conflict had been interpreted by the contending ethnic groups. The conference initiative of the Diaspora elements turned out to be a forum to transmit the established positions of the warring communities in the homeland. Yet, as an initiative it cannot be faulted. In a country such as Nigeria where inter-communal wars are not uncommon independent initiatives of those affected, yet far removed from the actual battleground could provide some degree of detachment that may be crucial in reaching an acceptable solution. While the Washington DC Conference on the Warri crisis failed to meet its set objective in this regard, it, however, offers some useful ideas on which Diaspora groups can approach inter-communal crisis in their homelands.

A Post-Conflict Reconstruction Initiative: The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project

Since the South African pioneering experiment, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been increasingly adopted by countries emerging from serious conflicts, especially those involving the deployment of state machineries in the perpetuation of various forms of atrocities against groups, communities and individuals. The Liberian TRC is considered a pioneer of sorts in the prominent role it has accorded to the country's Diaspora in the effort to reconcile its people as an important component of the post-conflict reconstruction of the country. The project is designed to give a voice to Diaspora Liberians in the promotion of justice and human rights 'as part of the truth, justice, accountability and reconciliation processes in Liberia'.[155]

A major project coordinated by the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights in the United States, the process involves two main phases and it mirrors the TRC process which has been underway in Liberia since 2006. The first phase consists of a statement-taking exercise in the USA (Minnesota, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, New York and Washington DC), the United Kingdom, and the Bujumbura Refugee Settlement outside Accra, Ghana. This phase of the exercise makes provision for statements to be taken via telephones for those who may

not be resident in the major cities scheduled for the exercise. In addition, volunteers are made available for those who may have problems putting their statements in writing. Statements are expected to give opinions on the causes of the conflict, what happened to oneself, friends, family and neighbours in the course of the crisis from 1979 to 2003. The impact of the crisis on personal property, town, county, ethnic group and country are also areas in which statements are expected to throw some light. Recommendations on how the country should proceed are also expected from statement-givers.

The second phase of the project is the public engagement phase and is again expected to involve public conferences, discussions, tributes to victims, and public.[156] The TRC mechanism which is currently on going in the Liberian Diaspora is no doubt unique in the sense of the systematic acknowledgement of the vital role which the experiences of the exiles, migrants and refugees could contribute to the national healing process. The painstaking manner of the organisation of the exercise as well as the publicity of the exercise in the Diaspora is a measure of the value which is attached to the input of the Liberian Diaspora. However, experience with some TRCs suggests that key players are sometimes reluctant to send in memoranda to the commissions or appear before it in public hearings. In such cases, some quasi-judicial powers of the commission can come into play. It is in this area that the commendable effort to include the power to compel appearance before the Commission in the Liberian TRC mechanism could fall short of its potential promise. The Diaspora community lacks the power to compel appearance of any unwilling citizen. It may not also have the authority within the host country to compel an appearance at the public phase of proceedings. Memoranda may also require physical inspection and verification of claims for which the presence of statement givers may be a necessity, yet may not for one reason or the other, be immediately practical. This of course will adversely impact the evaluation of presentations.

The Liberian Diaspora TRC proceedings are ongoing and there are no indications that the issues raised above have at any point dogged the process so far. Yet, they are pointers to potential challenges which could impact negatively on the quality of the outcome and the legitimacy of the whole process if victims find themselves denied the opportunity of confronting their persecutors before the TRC. But, more importantly, the TRC recognises that Diaspora elements harbour important memories, knowledge and skills which are required for the post conflict reconstruction of Liberia. To that extent, it is a platform that offers healing and reintegration to a Diaspora element that may have become bitter and alienated by the prolonged conflict in that country.

Suggested Policy Directions

Regional bench marks in terms of quality of life of citizens, human rights observance, constitutionalism and democracy should be considered for governments in the sub-region. Neighbouring territories have been used to launch attacks in many of the conflicts in the sub-region. Existing treaties prohibiting such hostile activities in the sub-region should be reinforced with specific, punitive and enforceable sanctions against violations.

Events can mobilise 'inactive' or 'dormant' Diasporas into politically active ones. National policies should therefore be put in place to bridge the knowledge and participatory gap between the Diasporas and the affairs of their home countries. There is no reason why those in the Diaspora should not be able to participate in elections in their home countries. In other words, the vote should be extended to them. The increasing ease of information flow and technological advances in the age of globalisation has made the logistics involved in organising their participation in such elections easier. Regional policy should encourage this. Beyond this, regional policy should encourage harnessing the developmental potentials of the Diaspora, especially in the areas of remittances and humanitarian interventions in health and education.

Concluding Comments

There is reason to believe that the political weight of Diaspora communities in intra-state conflict has increased. This may be linked to the rise of new patterns of conflict and the speed of mobility and communication, which has made group identities much less territorially bounded. The political and economic activities of Diaspora-based organisations blur the distinction between domestic and international affairs, supporting links that abridge the sovereignty of states and also extend the scope of their foreign policies.

Beyond the provision of financial resources, Diasporas play important roles in setting the terms of debate around issues of conflict and identity. The concept of homeland is inherent in the Diaspora identity and serves as a focal point of Diaspora political action and debate. Therefore, Diaspora groups are a vital link between globalisation, conflict, territory, and identity. Often, homeland conflict is the touchstone of Diaspora identity and Diaspora social organisations regularly mobilise around providing support for actors engaged in the conflict back home.

Diaspora organisations thereby usually become a factor that inadvertently complicates processes of conflict resolution and may make homeland conflicts more protracted and indeed help to internationalise local conflict. The Diaspora has helped both to internationalise the Niger Delta crisis by the creation of the various websites where the peculiarities of the region and the exploitative activities of state and multinational corporations are placed on the global front burner.

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, exiles resident in neighbouring countries played prominent roles in the launch of the conflicts. Active steps have been taken by communities in the Diaspora to get involved in finding lasting solutions to crisis in the homeland. As our case study on the Warri crisis indicates, no matter the noble intentions of the Diaspora communities, they must avoid the pitfall of 'living the conflict they are meant to resolve long-distance'. In the case of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora project, the main barriers to bringing the full potentials of the Diaspora on the reconciliation project may as well lie in the fact that the voluntary character of the exercise cannot be breached in the host state even when circumstances compel otherwise.

The positive role of remittances in maintaining household viability and sustainability was well canvassed in the paper. But the paper also drew attention to the hidden danger in the efforts of states to curb 'illegal money' getting into the coffers of terrorist organisations. This is understandable in a context where the dominant global powers have erected their foreign policy platforms around the 'war on terror'. However, the small scale flows through which the Diaspora communities help to ameliorate the consequences of violent hostilities at home and keep hope alive must not be allowed to become another casualty of this new war.

The involvement of the Diaspora in conflicts in West Africa, as elsewhere, is a complex one. Its role in some cases could be said to contain traces of conflict-increment tendencies, as in the launch of the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone or during certain stages of those wars. The same trend is apparent in Casamance separatism in Senegal. It is not always the case that only rebel groups utilise the Diaspora. Governments also recognise their potentials in conflict situations and do mobilise them behind their own goals. However, the evidence of remittances and the vital role they play in sustaining the lives of the displaced and other war affected persons suggest some fundamental positive contribution of Diaspora to the ability of households and individuals to survive conflicts.

Remittances have also been indicated as being critical to post-conflict reconstruction efforts of governments. Along with the strong advocacy of justice and equity and a general fight against neglect, marginalisation and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta which various Diaspora groups have championed, it is apparent that the Diaspora could usefully be tapped in the continuing efforts at conflict management in the West African sub-region.