



# An evolving migration-development nexus: DfID and British politics of race and belonging

Sarah Peck

Department of Geography, Northumbria University, UK

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## ABSTRACT

The last three decades have witnessed increasing interest in the connections between migration and development. Within this body of work less attention has been paid to the ways in which ideas of race and racialised histories and geographies shape the migration-development nexus. Focusing on diasporic communities as key actors within this nexus and using empirical material from Great Britain's Department for International Development (DfID), this paper explores the shifting constructions of 'the diaspora' within the global development context from DfID's inception in 1997 to its demise in 2020. Constructions of the diaspora-development nexus can be framed as a (shifting) assemblage, bringing together contemporary post-colonial politics of belonging, the racialised histories and geographies of development and the changing (neoliberal) architectures and cultures of development. The paper concludes that in this context, diasporic-centred development can be considered a racialised socio-political mechanism, shaped by the shifting politics of race and belonging, which are themselves bound to colonial pasts and contemporary colonialities. This attends to processes of inclusion (and exclusion) in the global development sphere in contemporary Britain and speaks to the need to think more widely about how race intersects with the migration-development nexus.

## 1. Introduction

Diasporic-centred development is understood as a key part of the migration-development nexus. Whilst thinking on the nexus has evolved to include social remittances, more flexible forms of migration and understandings of the nexus through a gendered lens (Bachan, 2018; Bailey, 2010; Piper, 2009), less attention has been paid to date to the ways in which race intersects with the migration-development nexus, with Bastia & Skeldon (2020:9) commenting: "migration and development as a sub-field, still have a long way to go in paying sufficient attention to the historical relationship of domination and discrimination that are related to race and ethnicity". Using Great Britain as a case study, this paper aims to interrogate how Britain's post-colonial legacies and continuities have shaped constructions of diasporic-centred development through the contemporary politics of race and belonging.

In November 1997 Britain's Department for International Development (DfID) published its' first White paper: 'Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century.' In the White paper the government pledged to "build on the skills and talents of migrants and other members of ethnic minorities within the UK to promote the

development of their countries of origin" (DfID 1997:68). This was the start of DfID's engagement with communities in Britain who have more recently been termed 'diaspora' within the global development context. Diasporic communities have come to be seen as key actors within the migration-development nexus, situated in the inequalities of contemporary neoliberal globalisation and embedded within colonial pasts and contemporary mobilities. Often defined in this context through their financial, social, political and cultural connections to countries of heritage (Walton-Roberts et al., 2019), diasporic-led or diasporic-centred development is/was part of the development strategies of bi and multi-lateral institutions such as DfID, USAID, GIZ<sup>1</sup> and the European Union.

Inspired by and (hopefully) complimenting Wilson (2012; 2019), this paper uses a genealogy of DfID's engagement with diasporic communities from 1997 to 2020 to illuminate the part played by the contemporary post-colonial politics of race and belonging on DfID's construction and operationalising of the diaspora-development nexus. This period saw important changes in the way the British state engaged with international development, alongside significant shifts in the politics of race and belonging in Britain, particularly with reference to the

*E-mail address:* [sarah.peck@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.peck@northumbria.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> USAID: The United States Agency for International Development; GIZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Development agency).

perceived ‘crisis’ of central state-led ‘multiculturalism’ (Lentin & Titley, 2011). The paper begins by examining the literature on the migration-development nexus, articulating the relative absence of race within this body of work. It then goes on to trace the post-colonial politics of race and belonging in contemporary Britain. Engaging with the empirical material the paper shows how the post-colonial politics of race and belonging are one facet that sets the parameters for inclusion into the (state-led) global development space for members of diasporic communities. Constructions of the diaspora-development nexus can then be framed as a (shifting) assemblage<sup>2</sup>, bringing together the contemporary politics of belonging (which are shaped by post-colonial continuities), the racialised histories and geographies of development and the changing (neoliberal) architectures and cultures of development. The paper concludes that, in this context, diasporic-centred development can be considered a racialised socio-political mechanism, shaped by the shifting politics of race and belonging, which are themselves bound to colonial pasts and contemporary colonialities.

## 2. The evolving migration-development nexus and the ‘Diaspora option’

Whilst (uneven) mobility and migration are a longstanding facet of human existence, the explicit connections between development and migration are of increasing interest to state and non-state actors (Piper 2009; Raghuram 2009). At its core, the migration-development nexus is concerned with the ways in which the movement of people, as it intersects with gendered, racialised and class-based hierarchies, shapes the political, social, economic and cultural development of the locales differentially connected to their journeys and conversely how development of particular locales may shape patterns of migration and mobility (Bastia & Skeldon, 2020; de Haas, 2020; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). Migration and development are therefore theorised to be linked through complex connections, with de Haas (2010:228), for example, detailing a conceptual framework for the migration-development nexus in which migration is seen as an “an integral part of wider social and development processes”, showing the multi-directional pathways and flows between migration and differentiated development at the ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ scales. Alongside debates about the usage and impacts of financial remittances (see: de Haas, 2012; Gamlen, 2014; Guermond, 2020), understandings of the migration-development nexus have evolved to place greater focus on the contested potentialities offered through social remittances and conceptualisations of the nexus have also matured to integrate temporary mobilities and by applying a gendered lens to the nexus (Bailey, 2010; Bachan, 2018; Piper, 2009).

The ‘diaspora’ is a key figure within the migration-development nexus, traditionally defined through ideas of exile and dispersal (Cohen, 1997). Theories of diaspora have developed to articulate its ability to unsettle racialised politics of (national) belonging and the “critical and political potentialities” notions of diaspora can foster (Alexander 2017:1547; Brubaker 2005; Brah 1996; Hall 2017; Gilroy 1993; Trotz & Mullings, 2013). Conceptually diasporic communities are now more regularly associated with fluid processes – of journeying, ‘evolving’ and ‘formations in process’ (Mavroudi, 2019:281; Werbner, 2004), with Jons et al. (2015:113) commenting: “Recent geographical studies have thus stressed how diasporas are socially, culturally and materially constructed and constituted by identities that are dynamic and often ‘in-between’”. Diasporas maintain connections across time and space through everyday social ties, yet they are not conceived of as

homogenous, with disunity, fractures and power inequalities evident within diasporic communities (Christou & Mavroudi, 2015; Mavroudi, 2019). Demir (2022) however, conceptualises diasporic communities through their roles as translators and decolonisers in both their country of heritage and of ‘residence’. Diaspora, for Demir (2022:6), becomes “a critical concept, claiming its transformative and far-reaching potential”, yet others highlight the constraining effects of diasporas and their role in sustaining social and political boundaries (Christou & Mavroudi, 2015).

Conceptually diaspora articulates the potential extra-territoriality of the nation-state and how the ‘homeland’ can be reconfigured from social and political connections outside of its territorial borders (Ashutosh, 2020). The use of diaspora strategies and infrastructures by nation-states has been critiqued as a vehicle for ideologically based state expansion and as a form of governmentality, (re)producing intersectional inequalities, exclusionary ethno-nationalistic discourses of belonging and advancing neoliberal ideals (Ashutosh, 2020; Cohen, 2017; Dickinson, 2017; Ho, 2011; Ho et al., 2015; Mullings 2011; 2012). Diasporic orientation towards the homeland and the binary between ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ states is challenged by scholarship that focuses on the more varied geographies of diaspora, beyond connections to the ‘host’ and ‘homeland’, including circulations through diasporic ‘transregions’ such as the Black Atlantic, the urban spaces of diasporic life and the multiplicity of ‘homes’ (Ashutosh, 2020; Christou & Mavroudi, 2015).

Within the global development context, diaspora has become associated with (socially constructed) groups of people who maintain connections (financial, social, cultural, affective or political) with their real or imagined ‘homeland(s)’ despite living their lives outside of it (Mercer, Page & Evans, 2008; Walton-Roberts et al., 2019). The rise of the ‘diaspora option’ can be traced to the World Bank’s good governance agenda, with financial remittances positioned as resilient aid flows in the face of macro-economic reforms in the global South (Burman, 2002; Guermond, 2020; Page & Mercer, 2012; Smyth, 2017). With contestations over understandings and impacts of financial remittances (Carling, 2020), the (contested) potentialities offered by social remittances and diasporic civil society organisations has entered the diaspora-development discourse. In this context diaspora are lauded for their local connections, their ability to act as a bridge between global North and South, and their passion, commitment and understandings of cultural nuances (Kleist, 2008; Mullings, 2011; Vari-Lavoisier, 2020).

Engaging with the migration-development nexus in the global North is also conceived as a response to the perceived (racialised) threats posed by increasing immigration (Boyle & Ho, 2017; Mohan, 2008; Pellerin & Mullings, 2013), as Pellerin & Mullings (2013:95) argue, “particularly in Europe, another factor that motivated support for a Diaspora option was the belief that emerging immigration and security concerns could be solved by these diasporic developmental interventions” (see also: Sinatti & Horst, 2015; Wilson, 2012). This articulates the ways in which foreign aid and development co-operation can sustain imperialist geographical imaginaries and reproduce dominant global hierarchies and structures of control (Asher & Wainwright, 2018; Ballard, 2013; Duffield & Hewitt, 2009; Mawdsley, 2015; Noxolo, 2006; Sultana, 2018; Wilson, 2012), with contemporary development understood as a continuation of historical social relations, in which colonial expansion was organised through categories of race and capitalist relations solidified existing notions of racialised difference (Quijano, 2007; Robinson, 1983; Tilley & Shillam, 2018; Wilson, 2012; Wolfe, 2016; Wynter, 2003). Dominant development orthodoxies are critiqued for reproducing colonial (and racialised) forms of knowledge production, accentuating cultural imperialism and subordinating and infantilising ways of life in the global South (Noxolo, 2006; 2016; Power et al., 2006; Ziai, 2017). Development interventions, built on colonial and contemporary racialized hierarchies, can then perpetuate global inequalities and sustain geographical imaginaries and modes of control (Mawdsley, 2015; Noxolo, 2012).

In this context, diasporic engagement is promoted as an antidote to the power imbalances and the ‘whiteness’ of development and

<sup>2</sup> There has been significant geographical engagement with spatialised (and spatialising) vocabulary such as assemblage (see for example: Anderson & McFarlane, 2011). I use the term here to give a sense of the coming together of multiple shifting political currents. I also hope the term projects a sense of impermanence and fluidity about what diaspora can/does mean as it is positioned by actors such as DfID.

positioned as offering opportunities to ‘decolonise’ development (Ademolu 2021; Boyle & Ho 2017; Mercer, Page & Evans, 2008; Mohan 2008; Willoughby-Herard 2014:3; Wilson 2019). Yet constructions of diaspora by state (and non-state) bodies can be exclusionary on ethnic and racial lines, as well as through other intersectional social markers such as gender and socio-economic status (Dickinson, 2012; Mullings, 2012), with diaspora engagement strategies critiqued for reproducing intersectional inequalities, concealing the failures of neoliberalism and fostering the logics of racialised dispossession (Boyle & Ho, 2017; Brinkerhoff, 2011; Dickinson, 2012; 2017; Kleist 2008; 2014; Mullings, 2022; Wilson 2012; 2019). In the context of intentional Development, Wilson (2012; 2019) has argued that diasporic-centred interventions are part of the furthering of the racialised British imperialistic project, reinforcing both racialised hierarchies of citizenship and global North/South binaries.

Racial logics are integral for understanding the separate fields of migration and development. Ideas of development are founded on the racial hierarchies produced through European imperial and colonial projects, the expansion of racial capitalism and the contemporary global development industry (Ademolu, 2019; Kothari, 2006a; Noxolo, 2006; 2016; Pallister-Wilkins, 2022; Pailey, 2021; Patel, 2020; Sultana, 2019; White, 2002; Wilson, 2012) and migration and mobility are intertwined with racialised colonial logics and contemporary racialised systems of coloniality (Bhambra, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2018; El-Enany, 2020; Mayblin & Turner, 2021; Social Scientists Against the Hostile Environment (SSAHE), 2020). The migration-development nexus, and diaspora as a key actor within the nexus, has evolved and expanded, yet there has been less attention paid to the ways in which race intersects with the nexus of migration and development (see Wilson 2012, 2019 for exceptions). It seems imperative to ask how the post-colonial politics of race and belonging shape the nexus and the way it is operationalised. In considering this question in the context of Great Britain, it is to migration, and the politics of race and belonging in Britain that this paper will now turn.

### 3. Migration, race and belonging in Britain

The (mythical) story of post-war migration to Great Britain for people from countries of (and some imminently leaving) the British Empire is perhaps too well known, detailing labour migration to Britain to support public and social services and industry, often at the behest of such institutions. The presence of racialised groups in Britain prior to the 1950s has often been marginalised in these accounts, with histories focusing on post-war immigration and the hostile and violent political responses to it (Patel, 2021; Ward, 2004). In this post 1945 period many people migrated to Britain from the Caribbean, South Asia, Africa and the Pacific as a citizen of the United Kingdom and her colonies, expecting to have the right to live and work in Britain, as Patel (2021:3) comments: “only by retelling the story of immigration...as a diverse international story connected to empire, can we begin to see it clearly”. This post-war period saw a racialised reconstruction of Britain as the nation transitioned from one based on a geographical separation from and distance between the (predominantly white) imperial metropole and racialised colonies, to one shaped by the dissolution of this colonial segregation through migration (Hesse, 2000). This has been explored in great detail elsewhere (see: Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Hesse, 2000), with this paper aiming to only highlight the shifting trends in British politics, particularly in the 21st century.

From the 1950s and 1960s onwards race and belonging became more (and often highly) visible on the British political spectrum, as British culture shifted, with processes of decolonisation, from the “politics of race as empire to the politics of race as nation” (Hesse, 2000:6, citing Hesse, 1997), with the former and declining imperial context setting the framework for subsequent racialised immigration policies (Ward, 2004). The conservative orientation of this politics was exemplified in opposing the immigration of racialised people and extreme hostility and violence

towards racialised groups. More liberal articulations focused on assimilationist policies, alongside tighter immigration controls, and a series of immigration legislation introduced different racially coded categorisations of belonging to Britain, thought to be aiming to restrict the entry of racialised groups into the country, culminating in the 1981 British Nationality Act, which for the first time connected British citizenship to the territorial nation-state rather than imperial connections (Patel, 2021). Assimilationist policies emphasised the preservation of British identity as racialised groups were encouraged to adopt a ‘British way of life’ (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). In the early 1960s these policies expanded into integrationist ideals in which racialised and migrantised groups were supported to participate in society in an ‘appropriate way’ (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). Multiculturalism emerged in the 1970s, aiming perhaps to change the perspective on racialised groups in Britain “to actively valorising their aesthetic permanence in the national way of life and...providing a sense of self-worth for individuals from those communities.” (Hesse, 2000:7-8). Multicultural policies involved equal opportunities legislation, the active incorporation of racialised communities into institutional, governance and government structures and the active recognition of cultural difference (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2018; Hall, 2000; Hesse, 2000; Mathieu, 2018; Mitchell, 2004; Kymlicka, 2018; Uberoi & Madood, 2013). Yet as Kymlicka (2010:99) argues multiculturalism is “a political project that attempts to redefine therelationship between ethno-cultural minoritiesand the state”.

Hugely contested, central state-led multiculturalism is critiqued for its neglect of power relations and limited attention to racism, with radical anti-racist work confined to local politics and civic spaces and with questions of racism remaining ‘out of bounds’ (Brah, 1996; Hesse, 2000). With a perceived ‘crisis of multiculturalism’ (Lentin & Titley, 2011) ideologies of social and community cohesion became more prevalent in the wake the ‘Northern’ riots in 2001 and the subsequent Cantle report, the ‘War on Terror’ and the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005 (Back et al., 2012; Cheong et al 2007; Schuster & Solomos, 2004). In this (New Labour) context these discourses emphasised the responsibilities of citizens in the pursuit of a common societal goal, and the risk to rights if these responsibilities were not upheld, with active citizenship explicitly linked to the making of a British society and constructions of Britishness (Davies, 2012). More recent scholarship has articulated what has been termed a ‘post-multicultural’ shift (Gozdecka et al., 2014), with notions of race (and racism) explicitly engaging with both biological and cultural registers (Hall, 2017; Hall & Morley, 2019). Discourses of a ‘post-racial’ society are used to articulate an equal society that has moved on from its explicitly racialised pasts, with Bonilla-Silva (2015:1362) commenting on practices that show a “new style of discrimination because most of them are harder to detect and even harder to label ‘racial’”. In this post-racial illusion, culture is seen as central to the practice of racism, with the ‘othering’ of racialised groups through cultural concerns, rather than explicitly racist acts and practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Patel, 2017; Patel & Connelly, 2017:972).

The origins of these multicultural discourses articulate their colonial connections, with Brah (1996:225) commenting that the “post-war British discourse of multiculturalism emerged following labour migrations which brought workers from the former colonies to perform low waged work in a period of economic boom and labour shortages.” This explicitly asks questions about the enduring impact of post-colonial continuities on racial configurations within Britain, connecting Britain’s colonial past and its legacies with the racial repertoires of its post-colonial present and not obscuring the colonial period in understandings of the contemporary politics of race and belonging in Britain (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Brah, 1996; Hesse, 2000; Gilroy, 1993). It is in this context that this paper aims to explore how the migration-development nexus has been operationalised in Britain and how Britain’s post-colonial legacies, through contemporary politics of race and belonging, have shaped the nexus.

#### 4. Methodology

As a work of discursive analysis, this article is based on engagement with a range of secondary data, predominantly texts produced by DfID, as well as other materials including press releases, blog entries, policy documents, briefing papers, internal documents, tweets, speeches and grant agreements. Searches were carried out of the DfID web archives, which is part of the UK Government Web Archive, which aims to “capture, preserve, and make accessible UK central government information published on the web. The web archive includes videos, tweets, images and websites dating from 1996 to present.” (The National Archives, 2022). The DfID archives were searched from DfID’s inception to its reconfiguration in 2020 using three search terms ‘diaspora’, ‘faith’ and ‘ethnic minority’. These search terms were selected to aid the retrieval process, with the inclusion of the term ‘faith’ deemed necessary as the terms faith-based organisations and diaspora groups were sometimes used interchangeably by DfID.

These searches identified a range of materials, which were then read to produce an overview of DfID’s shifting engagement with diasporic communities from 1997 to 2020. Materials read included policies and briefing papers (for example, the four White papers produced by DfID in 1997; 1999; 2006 and 2009 and subsequent papers on International Development produced by the Coalition and Conservative governments), documents related to the direct interventions conducted by DfID and their aims, processes, impacts and evaluations, and also material that expressed the discursive attention DfID paid to the diaspora through ministerial visits, speeches, blogs, briefing papers and community engagement events. Where interventions were carried out in conjunction with non-state actors, relevant documents produced by these actors were also sought out and analysed. Relevant documents produced by other state bodies and departments, for example the International Development select committee report on migration and development (2006), the Voluntary Sector Compact (1998) and the Prevent Strategy (2009) were engaged with. Hansard, the official record for parliamentary debates, was also searched for the same time period for relevant debates that had occurred in the Houses of Parliament and the House of Lords.

With “language serv[ing] a political purpose” (Mullings, 2022:746), this was followed by detailed engagement with key documents to explore how DfID positioned, expressed and operationalised diasporic-centred development, and how that altered from 1997 to 2020, a period of significant change as Britain’s engagement in development was reworked and reimagined, and as the British state contended with the perceived ‘crisis of multiculturalism’ and the “problems of diversity and multiplicity which multicultural societies throw up” (Hall 2000:209). Texts were closely read to examine how shifting politics of race and belonging and associated racial discourses came into contact with expressions of diasporic-centred development, aiming to consider how the politics of race and belonging and the racial categories and imaginaries they produce are incorporated into the forms diasporic-centred development crafted and articulated by DfID.

To supplement this secondary data semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine individuals who had all been heavily involved in varying DfID diasporic-centred initiatives between May and November 2021. These ranged from current and former Members of Parliament, employees of International Development Agencies and members of diasporic communities. These individuals were purposefully selected due to their closeness to these initiatives and experience and expertise on the topic. The majority of these interviews were conducted over Zoom, with a couple conducted over the phone, with most interviews lasting between one and two hours. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission. These interviews were used to supplement the secondary data, acting as a way of cross-checking my understanding of the ways in which different diasporic-centred interventions had played out. This article, however, is drawn from detailed readings of the secondary data described above and the paper is not designed to act as a

commentary on the effectiveness of the interventions discussed or attribute the design and success (or otherwise) of these interventions solely to DfID.

#### 5. DfID and its evolving ‘diaspora option’

This section of the paper explores how DfID’s engagement with diaspora communities has evolved over time and how the politics of race and belonging may be part of this evolution. The election of the New Labour government in 1997 brought about significant changes to the development landscape in Britain. The UK’s Department for International Development (DfID) was established in May 1997 as the ministry responsible for international development policy, aid funding and commitments to international fora. Despite 1997 often being held as significant in Britain’s positioning as a global development actor, a ministry for overseas development had been in existence, in varying forms since 1964. Prior to the development of this ministry Britain operated its development assistance through colonial systems, including grants-in-aid for selected colonies and, from 1929, a colonial development fund which focused on capital schemes that would foster economic growth in the colonies, contributing to the national interest (Devanny & Berry, 2022; Ireton, 2013). The 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act marked a shift in focus for development assistance, with welfare programmes, as well as capital investment eligible for development assistance (Ireton, 2013). The reorganisation of the colonial service is also of note in the development context, with the Overseas Services Act (1961) encouraging colonial officers to remain in post following independence, with Kothari (2006b) detailing the transformation from colonial officer to development practitioner.<sup>3</sup>

This paper is concerned with how the colonial continuities shaping the politics of race and belonging may creep into the workings of the contemporary development industry in Britain (bearing in mind its own colonial legacies), specifically the operationalising of the migration-development nexus through the construction of ‘the diaspora’. DfID’s politics, priorities and approaches to diasporic-centred development inevitably changed over a period of time (1997 – 2020) marked by increasing political concerns about race and belonging in ‘multicultural societies’. The paper uses empirical material to interrogate the evolution of the DfID’s engagement with diaspora communities in the context of international development, and will engage in two key questions, firstly what spaces have been made for diasporic engagement in development by DfID? And secondly, for what purpose(s) have diasporic groups been engaged in development by DfID?

##### 5.1. Spaces of diaspora engagement: From networks to citizens to agents

This first empirical section will consider the varying spaces DfID crafted to engage diasporic communities in its versions of development and follow the trajectory of DfID’s approach that moved from network facilitation to spaces for active citizenship to arenas for diaspora to be agents for development.

##### 5.1.1. Networks

Over the twenty-three years of its existence DfID formulated multiple interventions to facilitate diaspora-centred development and articulated these in varying ways<sup>4</sup>. In November 1997 DfID published its’ first White paper pledging to “build on the skills and talents of migrants and other members of ethnic minorities within the UK to promote the development of their countries of origin” (DfID 1997:68). This reflected increasing

<sup>3</sup> Ireton (2013) also notes that with the existence of overseas territories Britain’s colonial period has not yet ended.

<sup>4</sup> This paper documents the key phases of this work, and programmes which received significant attention and funding and which represented a change in approach by DfID.



concern that mainstream development, both through state and civil society avenues, was dominated by (structures of) whiteness in its many forms. This was (partially) acknowledged in the first White paper, with the subsequent 'Building support for Development' strategy paper (1999) detailing DfID's hopes for engaging with racialised communities and wider civil society (see Thornton et al., 2009 for further commentary).

Mirroring concerns about the exclusion of racialised voluntary organisations from the third sector (see: the Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations Compact Code of Good Practice, 2001, published by the Cabinet Office of the Third Sector) and in the context of the publication of the Macpherson report on institutional racism, changes to race equality legislation in Britain and internal pressures from diasporic members of the Development Awareness Working Group, DfID commissioned 'The Getting It Right Together Black and Minority Ethnic Groups'<sup>5</sup> and DfID's Development Agenda - Scoping Study (GIRT)' (DfID, 2001). Involving interviews, policy analysis and focus groups, the report "offers analysis and recommendations to guide DfID in developing its relationship with BMEOs" and was part of an "increasing awareness across government of the importance of working with BMEOs." The report also suggested "that as an institution DfID is perceived as unrepresentative of the UK in terms of race" and that DfID "draws on external sources for the BME perspective in recognition both that this perspective is not sufficiently available internally, and that development and development awareness are of special significance to BME communities" (DfID, 2001).

DfID's responded to these concerns, and following mounting pressure from BMEOs about DfID's limited engagement with promises made in the 1997 White paper, by positioning itself (and the development sphere more broadly) as able to craft a space through which racialised differences can be 'recognised and accommodated':

"...we have provided initial funding for "Connections for Development", which is a BME led membership-based organisation, set up to help members become actively involved in delivering, funding and determining the work that will provide sustainable development" (DfID, 2006:13).

Connections for Development (CfD) was funded by DfID to develop a network of Black and Minority Ethnic organisations and diaspora organisations who could be part of the mainstream development landscape, as articulated in the strategic grant agreement for CfD:

"...Of key benefit to BME civil society and to international development, would be a structure that enables sharing of vision, values, and experience of all key UK players among BME groups interested in international development."

Strategic Grant Agreement between DfID and Connections for Development (CfD): representatives from within UK Black and Minority Ethnic Civil Society (2003).

With £750,000 funding provided over three years from 2003 to 2006, the Connections for Development network consisted of a board of directors and representatives of member groups, with the strategic grant agreement (SGA) articulating the myriad roles DfID hoped the network would play, including "bringing together diverse segments of UK BME civil society to explore commonalities and share learning", "...organising one major annual public event that recognises and celebrates the contribution that UK BME civil society makes to international development", "...facilitating access to capacity building for BMEOs from civil society" and "identifying key policy areas for potential input and influence" (DfID, 2003). DfID's initial engagement with diasporic

communities then centred around the facilitation of a network of 'BME' individuals, from varying racialised groups and communities, who had an interest in development, echoing the multicultural discourse of the time and New Labour's strategy to change the relationship between the state and civil society, positioning the third sector as service providers alongside the state and the market (see: the Compact on Relations between government and the voluntary sector in England, 1998: unpaginated, published by the Home Office). Funding for CfD was discontinued in 2007, following the production of DfID's third White paper, and increased emphasis on development as a space to foster 'active global citizens'.

### 5.1.2. *Volunteers and 'good' citizens*

The 2006 White paper 'Making governance work for the poor' (DfID, 2006) articulated a commitment to: "expand opportunities for our young people and diaspora communities to volunteer in developing countries" (DfID, 2006:82). This shift towards volunteering and active citizenship within the development landscape echoed wider government narratives of social and community cohesion, active citizenship, neoliberal professionalisation and civic thickening (Back et al., 2002; Back et al., 2012; Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Cheong et al 2007; Schuster & Solomos, 2004). Active global citizenship became a key construct within the development landscape, advanced in part by the perceived success of the 'golden thread of development engagement': Jubilee 2000, the Make Poverty History campaign (2005) and the response to the tsunami in 2004, with DfID (2006:9) articulating: "What makes the biggest difference to the quality of governance is active involvement by citizens – the thing we know as politics... when citizens get involved in any one of a hundred ways, it puts life into politics..." "And the best way to make a difference... is to get involved" (DfID, 2006:81).

Connected to discourses of social capital, active citizenship and volunteering, and the engagement of racialised and minoritized groups in particular, the Diaspora Volunteering Programme was launched in 2008 through a strategic grant agreement between DfID and Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO). Prior to the 2006 White paper, diasporic communities and VSO were already working together to develop volunteering initiatives, with a VSO report from 2006 commenting: "VSO piloted an innovative programme to support and share its experience with Diaspora organisations in establishing their own volunteer programmes with their own – and not VSO's – agenda." (VSO, 2006:6). An evaluation completed in 2009 details the connections between the earlier CfD initiative and the Diaspora Volunteering Programme:

"Some CfD member organisations became partners of the 'diversity unit' within VSO, an initiative started by VSO in response to the challenge that VSO volunteers were predominantly recruited from white middle class society. In this respect BME partners, sensitised in part by the CfD experience, became part of a drive for VSO to be more inclusive."

Thornton & Hext, 2009:27.

DfID's approach to diaspora engagement in international development spaces was then starting to be more tangibly channelled through spaces of volunteering and civil society, with constructions of diaspora associated with the promotion of active citizenship and citizen participation in international development. This foregrounds the desire to bring a wider 'public' into the development arena, rather than attempting to create a (new) civic network, with the creation of these spaces intimately connected to the (racialised) notion of 'a good citizen'. The Diaspora Volunteering Programme was also a way in which diaspora groups could be brought into the volunteering landscape as they acted as intermediaries between diaspora volunteers and communities in the Global South. A press release launching the diaspora volunteering programme detailed DfID's hopes for the programme:

"International Development Secretary, Douglas Alexander, today announced the next step to opening up volunteering opportunities to

<sup>5</sup> The term BME is used here when they are part of the original quote, with recognition of the problematic nature of the term, which anti-racist activists have long complained is dehumanising, too broad and negates the struggles of different groups.

people in all parts of British society. Mr Alexander committed £3 million over three years to support an initiative to encourage people from diaspora communities to get involved in volunteering to help fight poverty in developing countries. The funding, from the Department for International Development (DfID), will support and help develop, an initiative run by VSO...Douglas Alexander said:

‘People from diaspora communities are under-represented as volunteers, which is a lost opportunity. But this new support will help encourage greater involvement. Volunteers coming back to the UK will not only bring new skills and experiences but also have a stronger voice in their communities in generating support for the fight against poverty.’”.

DfID, 2008.

The volunteering space was then seen as a way to engage with diasporic communities and individuals with over 600 volunteer placements undertaken between 2008 and 2011 through 14 diaspora organisations in Britain and also a way through which diasporic civil society organisations could be supported to manage volunteer programmes (Thomas, 2016:123-124). The Diaspora Volunteering Programme was not funded again at the end of the three-year period with significant changes taking place both in DfID and the wider development landscape, to which this paper will now turn.

### 5.1.3. Agents and experts

In the context of the global economic recession, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition elected in 2010 placed greater emphasis on the transparency, accountability and value for money offered through the aid system in the post-financial recession period (see also: UK Aid strategy, DfID, 2015). Explicit connections with racialised and minoritized groups within development policy became less frequent and engagement with diasporic communities became more explicitly linked to cultural concerns, echoing what has been termed a ‘post-multicultural’ shift (Gozdecka et al., 2014). Spaces for diasporic engagement then evolved to become more focused on their ability to shape cultural, social and economic practices, with diasporic engagement often channelled through the EndFGM campaign (2013 - present) and the Common Ground Initiative (2010 – 2021). The EndFGM programme was part of a wider approach incorporating multiple government departments and running from 2013 to 2018 the first phase of this programme aimed to, amongst other objectives: “support diaspora communities in the UK to help change practices in their countries of origin” (DfID, 2013). The programme aimed to work:

“strategically with diaspora groups in the UK to leverage change in their home countries...[including] small-scale funding for diaspora community-based and advocacy activities.”.

DfID, 2013.

Justine Greening, the Secretary of State for International Development articulated DfID’s view of diasporic (women and girls) as optimal agents for this aspect of development:

“...This year DfID is taking a stand against two issues that are really critical symptoms of the low status of girls, a bit like a litmus test of how far we’ve got, Female Genital Mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. The diaspora have a key role in ending these practises both in the UK and in their country of origin.”

Greening, 2014

This gendered ‘civilising’ discourse places emphasis on the potential for diasporic communities to be powerful agents of development. This can also be seen in the spaces for diaspora created within the Common Ground Initiative (2010 – 2021). This co-funded programme, managed by Comic Relief, focused on the diaspora as fitting agents for gendered economic development in the global South, as described here by firstly by DfID and then by Comic Relief:

“The Common Ground initiative is a £20 million fund supporting African development through UK based small and Diaspora organisations. This initiative is managed by Comic Relief and co-funded by the Department for International Development. The initiative aims to increase access to grants for small and Diaspora-led organisations in the UK that are working to create real and sustainable changes to some of the poorest and most disadvantaged communities in Africa.”

DfID, 2010.

“The Common Ground Initiative was set up to harness UK African communities’ ability to drive positive change in Africa by investing in brilliant organisations led by members of the African diaspora here in the UK. Over the course of 10 years, Comic Relief and UK aid have supported more than 130 amazing small and diaspora led organisations through the Common Ground Initiative. With a focus on women’s rights and diaspora investment in African businesses, more than 1.4 million people have benefitted in a range of ways from the programme.”.

Comic Relief, 2020.

These quotes articulate a construction of diaspora (and diasporic women and girls in particular) as fitting agents (and experts) for particular forms of development and modernity, with the Common Ground Initiative highlighting and funding diasporic businesses initiatives that hoped to empower women and girls. Within these initiatives spaces were made for diaspora members to be experts in gender, tech and entrepreneurship and tasked with empowering predominantly women and girls in the global South.

This section has detailed how the spaces crafted for diasporic engagement in state-led development have changed over time – from network creation to spaces to be active global citizens to arenas in which to be agents of development through which cultural, social and economic practices can be addressed. Britain’s particular colonial histories and geographies shape the shifting politics of race and belonging, and in tandem with changing cultures of development, these shaped the formation of these diasporic spaces, moving from multicultural inclusion, to discourses of social cohesion to narratives of ‘professional’ ‘modernising’ missions. The utility and strategic nature of these diasporic spaces also shifted over time, a subject to which this paper will now turn.

## 5.2. The utility of diaspora spaces: Inclusion, social cohesion and ‘modernising’

This paper has so far outlined the different models and formations through which DfID looked to engage diasporic groups and communities and how this evolved over time. It will now move on to considering how these spaces were positioned and their strategic importance, asking for what purpose(s) have diasporic groups been engaged in development by DfID? The section will highlight three key overlapping trends within the evolution of DfID’s diaspora-development nexus, for diaspora spaces to offer inclusivity; for diaspora spaces to build social capital and finally for diaspora spaces to bring ideas of ‘modernity’ to the global South.

### 5.2.1. To be (seen to be) inclusive

Perhaps most obviously diaspora-centred development initiatives have been used to promote more racially inclusive forms of development. This theme of inclusion runs through many of the phases of DfID’s engagement with the diaspora:

“However, we also proactively seeking to engage new groups in our work: and black and ethnic minority groups are among those that we have targeted for higher priority work. However, we are also doing this out of a broad commitment to inclusiveness in our work”

DfID, 2002.

This desire for inclusivity was connected to the perceived benefits for DfID of diasporic engagement, with DfID keen to (instrumentally) utilise

the benefits they perceived diasporic communities to have in the global development sphere to enhance their work. One of their aims for CfD was to develop:

“A better-supported, informed and cohesive UK BME civil society, aware of its contributions to international development and able to participate strategically in these.”

Strategic Grant Agreement between DfID and Connections for Development (CfD): representatives from within UK Black and Minority Ethnic Civil Society (2003).

DfID then is looking to shape BME civil society to enhance international development and situate diasporic-centred development within the state-led development space. There is an awareness that diasporic communities are already involved (informally) in development, and DfID articulates its desire to bring diasporic communities into the formal mechanisms of state, and for them to have a better understanding of DfID's efforts, as Thornton & Hext (2009:26) comment:

“DfID was aware that BME civil society often understood development and development awareness differently. It knew that most members of BME civil society in the UK were unaware of DFID and had little idea of the international development targets. For this reason, DFID considered it vital that the BME sector was more aware of current development thinking...”

Thornton & Hext 2009: 26

The benefits of diasporic inclusivity are articulated by DfID through the ability of diasporic groups to connect varying sections of society. Diasporic participation, particularly through the CfD network, was also centred on the ability of ‘representative’ members of the diaspora to ‘be a mouthpiece’ for DfID and its work within wider racialised communities. DfID was seen as keen to use engagement with diasporic groups to ‘gain the trust’ of wider racialised communities:

“...Despite the ‘good story’ that DfID can tell in the assistance it gives to many of the countries that the Diaspora originate from, it is still regarded as part of the UK Government and thereby viewed with some suspicion by BME communities when it tries to engage, especially as DFID's engagement with BME communities has been limited in the past. Therefore it must gain the trust of an audience that is being targeted by different parts of government for many different reasons, and which has become in particular increasingly disenfranchised and suspicious of all government interventions and interactions with them.”

Naru, Condy & Humphries 2007: 26.

This speaks to DfID's engagement with the diaspora as about being (or appearing to be) inclusive and also using this inclusivity instrumentally, in being able to transmit state ideas about development to wider racialised communities in Britain. These interventions speak to a politics of race and belonging that reflects the multicultural policies of the time: the desire to recognise, accommodate and make spaces for diversity and the foregrounding of networks as spatial imaginaries through which these desires can be met. Despite some successes, funding for Connections for Development was not renewed in 2007, with an evaluation concluding:

“the concept was sound, but the vehicle chosen – a new organisation, Connections for Development (CfD), instigated by DFID and not well embedded in the broader UK BME institutional context – was not....”

Thornton & Hext 2009:26.

### 5.2.2. To build social capital and community cohesion

The 2006 White paper marked a changing narrative for DfID's diasporic-centred development initiatives. There was a noticeable change in vernacular from ‘BME communities’ as utilised in the empirical material presented earlier to ‘diaspora’, reflecting changes within the wider development sector related to the rise of the diaspora as

important development actors, initially in the context of economic remittances, and then more broadly related to social and cultural capital and remittances (see Newland, 2004; Wilson, 2019). DfID began to engage with diasporas as ‘remitting’ actors, initially through financial channels through their ‘Send Money Home’ programme and then through their ability to remit social and cultural resources to their countries of heritage. The transition to viewing diasporas as social, as well as financial, remitters was made through the Diaspora Volunteering Programme. In launching the scheme Shahid Malik, International Development Minister commented:

“The UK's diaspora communities have a tremendous wealth of experience and understanding of issues relating to global poverty to offer. Greater support for VSO's scheme will provide a fantastic opportunity to capture this and help get more passionate and committed people into the fight against poverty... The UK also stands to benefit from those who choose to volunteer overseas, as they return with more personal insight into the problems that the poorest people in the world face every day. They will also help to raise awareness and generate more support for our shared aim of eliminating poverty in the developing world.”

DfID, 2008.

Malik acknowledges the exclusion of diasporic communities from the dominant volunteering landscape, but also their knowledge and skills. He articulates the desire for schemes such as this to enhance British society, intimately connecting volunteering in the global South with benefits to British society and the creation of the global British citizen. This narrative of citizen participation within development to enhance social cohesion in Britain is articulated in DfID's race equality scheme 2006 – 2009:

“We also recognise that relevant Diaspora communities will have views and opinions about development policies that impact on their country of origin or heritage, and that their views on how the UK delivers its international development policies can influence the race relations' climate... Our overall aim for this area of work in relation to race equality is to support the promotion of good race relations in Great Britain through ensuring that relevant Diaspora community groups are involved in the development and review of policies that impact on them or their country of origin or heritage.”

DfID, 2006a: 17-19.

DfID regularly constructed the value of the Diaspora Volunteering Programme through its ability to utilize (professional) diasporic social capital to improve their countries of heritage and community (and race relations) in Britain, with a press release articulating the desire to enhance community relations at home through volunteering for development:

“London volunteers just back from Africa met DfID Minister Gareth Thomas today to talk about their experiences in the developing world.

The volunteers had been helping out in Kenya as part of DfID's Diaspora Volunteering Programme. The programme was set up to allow skilled professionals from diaspora communities to get actively involved in international development by volunteering in their country of heritage.

“Giving British black professionals the opportunity to visit their country of heritage and the chance to see for themselves how development projects work on the ground in Africa is a great way to encourage people to connect with communities at home and abroad and share the lessons learnt on their return.” said the Minister.”

DfID, 2009

This quote articulates the desire for volunteering to embody (neoliberal) professionalism and also to enhance community cohesion, echoing the dominant political rhetoric in Britain at the time. A final shift in the way DfID discursively positioned and constructed the diaspora can be seen following the election of the Conservative-Liberal

democrat coalition government in 2010. At this point DfID became more explicitly focused on economic growth and girls and women as ‘modernising’ agents of development. How diasporic communities were brought into that narrative will now be considered.

### 5.2.3. To ‘modernise’ the global South

In a landscape of increasing, although not new, hostility towards immigration in Great Britain and increasing insecurity for minoritized and racialised communities (El-Enany 2020; SSAHE 2020; Wilson, 2012; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019), the spaces crafted by DfID in the post-2010 era for diasporic engagement in development articulated the potential DfID saw for diasporic communities to modernise the global South, with the utility of these spaces now linked to discourses of cultural and economic modernity. Diasporic communities were positioned potential as purveyors of ‘Western/British’ culture and values, particularly in relation to girls and women, productivity and economic growth (Wilson, 2019). This sees a shift in the geographies of diasporic activities from discourses of active citizenship and bringing the positives of engaging in development ‘back to Britain’ to a focus on the ability of diasporic communities to take ‘Western/British’ discourse and values to ‘their communities’ predominantly in the global South, but also in Britain. As agents of ‘modernisation’ diasporic communities were articulated as useful to DfID through their ability to reach communities that DfID would not be able to access, here Justine Greening acknowledges the need to ‘tap into’ diasporic expertise:

“...we are increasingly engaging with the diaspora to tackle the discriminatory attitudes and mindsets that stops girls and women from realising their potential. DfID is also engaging with the diaspora in other ways, tapping into your expertise and utilising your networks. I’ve said the diaspora have a huge role to play when it comes to tackling the discriminatory beliefs and attitudes that keep too many women poor and marginalised”

Greening, 2014

Diasporic communities, and women and girls in particular are then positioned by DfID as having the knowledge, expertise and connections to bring (cultural) ‘modernity’ to women and girls in the global South, in relation to FGM and early forced marriage Greening stated:

“I know many diaspora groups are already doing important work on these issues to break the silence and raise awareness. In recognition of this as part of our flagship programme to end female genital mutilation, DFID is providing up to £1million to diaspora groups to support change in their country of origin...we will announce more details on how this will work shortly...”

Greening, 2014

The utility of diaspora as purveyors of perceived modernity is echoed by Greening in a speech on the Common Ground Initiative, in which she tells the story of Esther, a ‘British businesswoman’:

“Take Esther, a British businesswoman, who was inspired by the mushroom farmers she met in her native Ghana to help cultivate a potentially lucrative but undeveloped industry. In 2012, Esther set up a not-for-profit organization through Gem Consultancy to work in partnership with the national association of mushroom farmers. With support from the Comic Relief Common Ground Initiative, which is cofunded by DfID, they have already produced manuals, provided loans and training to over 50 farmers at a centre where they can also sell mushrooms a fair price. This brilliant project is not only an investment in people, mushroom farmers who will increase their income and improve their standard of living, it is an investment in Ghana’s wider economy.

Greening, 2014.

Esther’s diasporic identity and her engagement with the DfID and the Common Ground Initiative has increased market access in Ghana, emphasising the importance of development as inclusion in capitalist market relations, and how diasporic communities can foster a culture of inclusion within neoliberal market practices. It is then culture,

understood through gendered (in)equalities, “smart economics” and their intersections (Wilson, 2019:1669) that becomes the primary avenue through which DfID constructs the value of diasporic communities and their utility (Wilson, 2019). In this post-2010 era, through development discourses and practices diasporic women are increasingly placed in positions of agency and expertise relative to women in the global South, articulating their commendable ‘Westernised’ attributes and their useful hybridity in being able to ‘reach’ women and girls in the global South. This must be understood in a development landscape that placed increasing emphasis on neoliberal framings of development, and the transmission of professional knowledge and skills, and also in the context of a politics of race and belonging in post-2010 Britain that could be considered as engaging in a ‘post-racial’ discourse, in which cultural ‘othering’ became central to racial hierarchies.

## 6. Conclusion

Discourses of diasporic-centred development arose within the context of neoliberal globalisation and a migration-development paradigm that gives primacy to the global North (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Tan et al., 2018). Diaspora, as a category produced within the global development landscape, has been dominated by ideas of historical and contemporary connections with an (imagined) ‘homeland’, mobilised as a response to exclusion from mainstream development and promoted as a mode through which to take advantage of varying forms of transnational capital. By tracing the genealogies of diaspora within the development context, however this paper has shown that ‘diaspora’ is not a fixed category. With race less well attended to in the context of the migration-development nexus, this paper contends that in Britain the shifting politics of race and belonging, which are bound up with Britain’s particular post-colonial histories, play a part in the ways in which the diaspora-development nexus is operationalised at the scale of the state. Standing out in the analysis are three phases of diasporic engagement which all reflect a shifting politics of race and belonging, multiculturalism, community cohesion, a ‘post racial’ nation, showing how development processes encounter these politics through the spaces crafted for diasporic engagement and the perceived utility associated with these spaces.

It is crucial however to understand these spaces as not solely influenced by the politics of race and belonging, rather they are partial expressions of such politics. Spaces crafted for diasporic engagement in development by the state can be framed as (shifting) assemblages, bringing together the contemporary politics of belonging, itself shaped by post-colonial continuities, the racialised histories and geographies of development and the changing (neoliberal) architectures and cultures of development. Importantly for understandings of the migration-development nexus the politics of race and belonging must be included in this melee. Recognition of how a politics of race and belonging is part of the migration-development nexus articulates the need to understand contemporary constructions of the nexus as historically situated; the more contemporary politics of race and belonging in Britain are contextualised by and situated within Britain’s colonial past and postcolonial present, with postcolonial continuities crucial to understanding racial configurations in contemporary Britain. In this context, diasporic-centred development can be considered a racialised socio-political mechanism, shaped by the shifting politics of race and belonging, which are themselves bound to colonial pasts and contemporary colonialities. Analyses of the migration-development nexus must then take into account contemporary racial politics and also the origins of such politics.

The politics of race and belonging in contemporary Britain is part of the assemblage of discourses that shapes the ways DfID engaged with diaspora groups, detailing the influence of racial politics on the spaces crafted for diasporic communities and the purpose they hoped to serve. The production of these spaces had an impact on the avenues available for diasporic engagement in development and acted as a form of control



and governance for diasporic groups in the development sphere and as a way of governing relationships with the global South. Whilst there is evidence that these initiatives have increased the participation of diasporic communities within state-led development (see: Thornton & Hext, 2009), they also influence who participates and for what agenda and what types of expertise becomes valued. Since 2010, the operationalising of the diaspora-development nexus was more strongly associated with the idea of aid in the national interest, sustaining post-colonial imaginaries of the hierarchies between global North and South (Wilson, 2019). The purpose of the diaspora spaces created by DfID shifted over time yet, perhaps obviously, were always by connected to DfID's (changing) approaches and values. In DfID's discursive positioning of 'the diaspora' there is limited attention paid to the many heterogeneities of different diasporic communities and their relation to Britain and to international development. What is also left unsaid in relation to many of these initiatives is how they fit with the desire to reduce immigration to Britain and the connections this desire may have to development interventions. Also of note is the limited space made for diasporic initiatives that may have contributed to the decolonising agenda, with this neglect highlighted in the Getting It Right Together report (DfID, 2001), which details some of the tensions around the inclusion of an explicitly anti-racist agenda.

Mindful of the complexities associated with how development policies and interventions are constructed and operationalised, this paper shows the need to recognise the importance of a contextualised politics of race and belonging in analysing the migration-development nexus and the need to acknowledge, as Bastia & Skeldon (2020:9) comment the: "historical and contemporary relations of domination and discrimination" through which the nexus is conceptualised and operationalised.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Sarah Peck:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

#### Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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