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Academic diaspora response in crisis: an alternative approach

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ABSTRACT

The contribution of the diaspora has always been measured in terms of remittances to the country of origin. This article examines academic diasporas that contribute to their countries of origin in times of crisis and beyond through scholarly and innovative work. I argue that in times of crisis, the links between the diaspora and the country of origin are strengthened. Altruism, humanitarianism, benevolence, spirit, nostalgia, and the desire to rediscover origins are the main motivators for connection. This article proposes an alternative framework for analyzing the academic and intellectual contribution of the diaspora to its origins in times of crisis. This article is based on a thorough examination of triangulations between established and emerging diaspora theories and contemporary practices. Destination countries benefit from expertise and knowledge, while source countries can use diaspora intellectual resources to mitigate the effects of crises.

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Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a South Asian academic diaspora (Indian-American) made significant contributions to science and research. A team of researchers at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) studied the impact of the SARS-CoV-2 virus on the immune system under the direction of the diaspora. Specifically, they investigated to determine why some individuals become severely ill with COVID-19 while others have mild or symptomless infections. The team discovered that T cells, a specific type of immune cell, play a crucial role in fighting the virus. Patients with a greater number of these cells at the onset of their infection tended to have better outcomes, whereas those with fewer were more likely to develop severe disease. This study has significant implications for the development of COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. In addition, it sheds light on how the immune system responds to viral infections in general, which may have implications for the development of treatments for other infectious diseases. Their contributions to immunology and infectious diseases during the COVID-19 pandemic are well-known in India and beyond.

Diaspora communities are known to play an important role in responding to the needs of those affected in times of crisis, such as natural disasters, conflict, and political

instability, as they maintain close ties to their home country and use their networks, resources, and connections to provide support in times of crisis (Jindal, Baines, and Meh-jabeen 2023). This support can take many forms, including financial contributions, supplies and resources, and advocacy on behalf of affected communities. They also provide valuable perspectives and knowledge about crisis situations that may not be available through other channels. They can also use their connections and influence to raise awareness of the crisis and advocate for more effective action. Despite numerous challenges, diaspora participation in crisis response has the potential to have significant impact and support populations affected by the crisis.

Countries around the world use models that leverage the skills of their talented nationals in the diaspora for national development (Carrington and Detragiache 1998; Brown 2000). Hence, we generally tend to look at the contribution of the diaspora in economic terms (Ullah 2017). There is very little literature that recognises the academic and intellectual contribution of the diaspora through scientific research and publication. They contribute to research and scholarship in their fields and share their knowledge and experiences with host communities. Through philanthropy, diaspora communities support educational and research initiatives in their countries of origin (Aysa-Lastra 2007) and invest in the intellectual and academic development of future generations (Haque and Kim 1995; Akyeampong 2000). Diaspora communities build networks between their host and home countries that facilitate the exchange of ideas, information, and resources (Castles 1999). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Diaspora communities in different parts of the world worked with universities and research institutions to improve research and study programmes and support local development during pandemics.

People uprooted and dispersed over time formed diasporic communities. The global coronavirus epidemic has caused economies to shrink and borders to close, making it difficult for those forced to flee to find a safe haven, or at least a safe way to get there (Ullah 2010; Ullah and Haque 2020). As a result, diaspora communities are disoriented. In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, migration and diaspora scholars have witnessed global crises that forced us to redefine the concept of diaspora (de Haas 2006; Garchitorea 2006). Natural and man-made disasters have demonstrated how diasporas can respond quickly to local needs by pooling resources, leveraging networks, and deploying specialised skills and expertise (Ferdous and Ullah, 2022).

The term diaspora refers to people who have migrated from their country of origin to another country long ago while maintaining cultural, social, and economic ties to their home country (Orozco 2006). Cultural preservation, financial support, remittances, and political participation are all examples of such ties. Diaspora communities' relationships with their countries of origin are constantly changing and are influenced by factors such as political and economic conditions, migration patterns, and cultural exchanges (Thokwane et al. 2021) underscoring the complexity and diversity of diaspora communities and the critical role they play in shaping the world in which we live.

Diaspora and migrant communities are seen as remitters of money (Ullah 2018, 2020; Ullah, Hossain, and Huque 2021) as they provide financial support to their families and communities back home. They are an important source of income for many people and help boost the economy. They bring valuable skills and knowledge from their host countries to their country of origin, helping to improve the competitiveness of local

businesses and industries (Brown 2002), and engage in political activism and advocacy, drawing attention to issues affecting their country of origin and helping to influence public opinion and policy. This is how our understanding of diaspora contributions has become fixated on monetary contributions.

Less well known and recognised is the academic contribution of the diaspora in times of crisis to alert international communities, donors, and funders to the plight of their countries of origin through research and publications. In this paper, I examine how the diaspora community, in addition to remittances, supports their countries of origin in times of crisis. To this end, I look at academics, researchers, and scholars in the diaspora who make intellectual rather than traditional contributions in times of crisis.

The capacity and contribution of diasporas to humanitarian action in their countries of origin is significant. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the academic diaspora has played an important role in supporting both domestic and international populations. However, their contribution is under-researched and under-appreciated and rarely coordinated with other actors.

Objectives and methods

This article examines the various forms of engagement of the academic diaspora in their homeland. It attempts to show that the academic diaspora is involved in a variety of activities that contribute to the intellectual development of their home countries especially in times of crisis by identifying the forms of engagement in the home country (improving higher education, enhancing reputation, raising profile through research publications, scholarly innovation, financial referrals, and networks and associations) to make the home country proud.

The paper is based on an extensive review of secondary literature that includes articles from academic journals and reports and policy documents from international organisations. According to Webster and Watson (2002), the review of relevant literature is an important component of any area of study as it allowed us to synthesize information and reflect on previous research on the topic. In addition to secondary sources, 80 questionnaires were sent to academics and researchers in various countries, of which 45 were returned (a 51 per cent response rate). Eleven respondents agreed to additional Skype interviews/discussions.

Respondent's profile

All 40 respondents hold PhDs from prestigious universities in North America, Europe, and Asia. Ninety-one percent of the respondents earned their PhDs from universities in the United States, Canada, and Europe, while 9% earned their degrees from universities in Asia and the Pacific. Seventeen percent completed their degrees in their home country, while the rest did so abroad. The majority of graduates (87%) are men, and all respondents are married, with 58% working in the social and economic sciences and 42% in science, engineering, and medicine. I used out-migration and brain drain index, 0 (low) to 10 (high) (GEF 2022). Based on 177 countries, the average value for 2022 was 5.21 index points. The highest value was 10 index points in Samoa and the lowest value was 0.4 index points in Australia. The brain drains value rank 1 indicates

that the best and brightest minds usually migrate abroad, while the brain drain value rank 7 indicates that talented people have many opportunities in their home country (GEF 2022–2023).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework serves to guide and structure the study of the various factors that influence the response of diaspora communities to crisis situations. Some of the key elements of a theoretical framework for diaspora engagement in crisis situations are: the agency of diaspora communities; this perspective focuses on the capacities, networks, and resources that diaspora communities use to respond to crisis situations, as well as the motivations and incentives that drive their actions (Lampert 2009). In this framework, diaspora communities are viewed as active agents that can make a difference in times of crisis. The social capital perspective considers the various forms of social capital that diaspora communities can leverage in response to a crisis, such as trust, reputation, and networks of relationships. Political context considers the impact of the political milieu on diaspora engagement in times of crisis, including the role of government policy, political stability, and the degree of freedom of expression in the home country. Existing academic theories of diaspora emphasize the critical role that diaspora scholars can play in the transmission of knowledge and skills across borders (Brinkerhoff 2008). The pandemic highlighted the importance of this role, as the academic diaspora was able to leverage its skills and networks to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. For example, the theory of ‘brain gain’ states that academics from the diaspora contribute to the development of their home country through the transfer of knowledge and skills (Ite 2002). This was evident during the pandemic when diaspora scientists used their skills and knowledge to help their communities and promote the global response. ‘Transnational social capital’ theory underscores the importance of diaspora academic networks in the transfer of knowledge and resources. Scientists in the diaspora used their networks to collaborate with other researchers, share information and resources, and support their communities during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the academic diaspora made significant contributions to research, education, and information and knowledge dissemination (Rahman 2013). For example, they contributed to global scientific efforts to understand the virus (Figure 1), including research and development of treatments and vaccines. In addition, despite physical barriers, they have used online platforms to further educate students and share their knowledge with others.

Theories of pandemics and global crises have been studied extensively by scientists, policymakers, and academics around the world. One of the most popular theories holds that pandemics and global crises are caused by a combination of factors, including human activity, environmental degradation, and the globalisation of trade and transportation. In addition, globalisation has facilitated the rapid spread of disease and crises around the world as people and goods move more freely across borders (Jeanne et al. 2022). Other theories focus on the role of economic and political systems, including unequal distribution of resources, social inequality, and political instability, in exacerbating pandemics and global crises. Ultimately, understanding the complex interplay of these factors is critical to managing and preventing future pandemics and global crises.

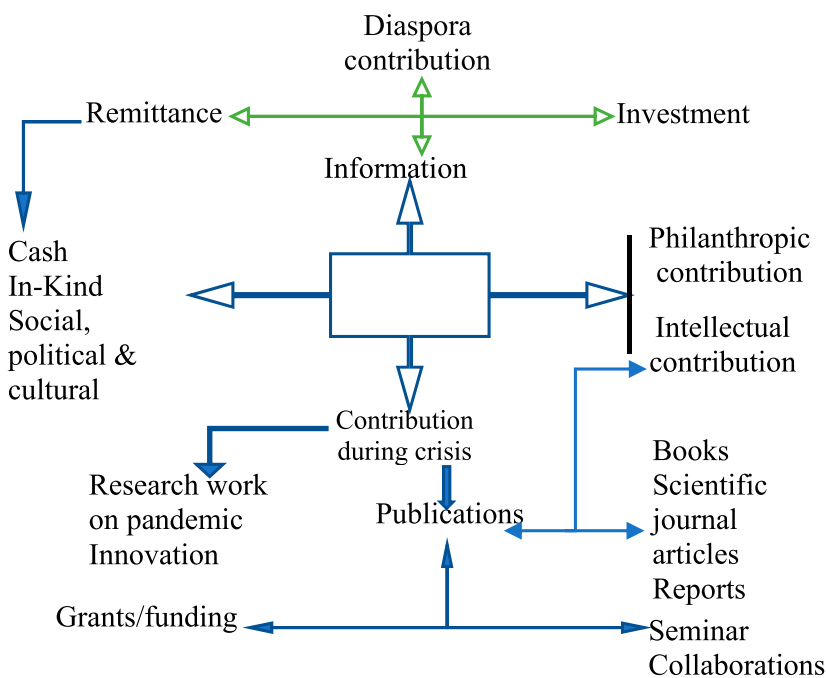


Figure 1. Analytical framework. Source: Author, 2023.

Global changes characterised by climate, pandemics, racism, and loss of humanity have contributed to the proliferation of what we call ‘liminal diasporas,’ which bring to light a long-standing problem and serve as a bitter reminder of Vijay Mishra’s (2007) depiction of the Indian diaspora as a collection of people in fear and grief. People in these diaspora communities live on the margins of society, where they struggle with discrimination and injustice, as well as the emotional and mental obstacles of daily life after a traumatic event.

This is significant in that we often accuse people in the diaspora of not maintaining close ties with their home country, though, in reality, their contribution is no less significant. According to this classical theory, a diaspora is created when people are forcibly or voluntarily separated from their homeland, and maintaining cultural and ethnic ties is critical to the diaspora’s survival. According to network theory, social networks and transnational relationships are critical to the creation and maintenance of diaspora communities. Cultural theory assumes that the creation and preservation of culture is critical to the formation and maintenance of diaspora identities, and therefore emphasizes the cultural practices and traditions of diaspora communities (Ullah, 2022 ; Archer, Francis, and Mau 2010). This political theory emphasizes the impact of historical and current political and economic processes on expatriates’ experiences and ties to the homeland. Gender, race, socioeconomic status, and religion are just a few of the factors considered by intersectional theory when analysing diaspora populations and their impacts. Each of these theories offers a unique perspective on the complexity of diaspora and highlights how different diaspora communities and their ties to their homelands function.

There is a wealth of scholarly work on diaspora studies, covering a wide range of perspectives and approaches. Among the most influential and renowned works in the field are: 'Diaspora: A Reader,' edited by Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly (1994), provides a comprehensive overview of classic diaspora theories and includes works by some of the leading scholars in the field, including Benedict Anderson, Clifford Geertz, and Homi Bhabha. Hall Stuart's (1997) seminal work, *The Globalization of Culture: A New Diaspora*, examines the cultural dimensions of diaspora and argues that diaspora communities play an important role in shaping global cultural flows and identities. 'Diaspora, Identity, and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research,' edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (1999), offers an interdisciplinary approach to diaspora research with contributions from anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and scholars of religion. 'Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Coming of a New (Dis)Order' by Robin Cohen (1997). This influential work asserts that diaspora communities play an important role in shaping the globalisation process and provides a comprehensive overview of the political and economic dimensions of diaspora. The book by Engin F. Isin and Evelyn Kallen (2013), *Diasporic Citizenship: An Introduction*, provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of diasporic citizenship and explores how diasporic communities engage with and challenge traditional notions of citizenship and national identity. These and many other works have contributed to our understanding of diaspora and laid the groundwork for future research and inquiry in the field. There are numerous prominent diaspora scholars, each bringing their own perspectives and approaches to the study of diaspora communities and their relationships with their countries of origin. These researchers have made significant contributions to the field of diaspora studies and continue to shape our understanding of the complex and diverse experiences of diaspora communities.

Brain-drain notion reversed

The Brain Drain Index is a measure of the extent of human capital flight or brain drain from a country. The index is calculated based on several factors, including the number of skilled workers leaving the country, the number of highly skilled individuals living abroad, and the level of economic opportunity and political stability in the country.

According to the latest information, the ranking of the Brain Drain Index for South Asian countries is as follows (The Global Economy, 2022):

Nepal – 53; Bangladesh – 63; India – 75; Sri Lanka – 81; Pakistan – 95; Bhutan – No data available; Maldives – No data available.

It is important to note that the Brain Drain Index is only one measure of the extent of brain drain and that its accuracy and completeness may be limited. The Brain Drain Index may change over time as economic, political, and social factors change within a country. The Brain Drain Index may have significant implications for South Asian countries. When skilled workers and highly educated individuals leave a country, it can result in a loss of human capital that can negatively impact the country's economy, workforce, and social and political development. The brain drain index can also reflect underlying problems in a country, such as lack of economic opportunities,

political instability, or inadequate education systems. These problems can contribute to brain drain and high- skilled migration, perpetuating the brain drain cycle.

The brain drain can have a significant impact on pandemic mitigation efforts, particularly in countries that experience high levels of health worker attrition. During a pandemic, health workers are on the front lines, and their expertise and skills are essential to managing and controlling the spread of the virus. In countries where there is a significant outflow of healthcare professionals, there may be a shortage of skilled professionals available to respond to the pandemic. This may result in a lack of capacity to manage and treat the influx of patients, leading to higher mortality rates and a longer outbreak period. In addition, the brain drain may exacerbate existing weaknesses and inequities in the health care system, leading to further strain and reduced capacity to manage the pandemic. The outflow of health professionals may also lead to a loss of institutional knowledge and expertise, making it more difficult for countries to build their health systems to respond to future pandemics.

For a long time, the concepts of brain drain and brain circulation were heavily criticised because millions of people in the diaspora were thought to be migrating their brains, knowledge and skill that developed in their home countries to other countries (Dodani and LaPorte 2005). In the long run, the connection to the homeland erodes, meaning that the country will eventually lose them forever (Ullah 2013, 2017). This study disproves this myth by demonstrating that the academic contributions of the diaspora equate to brain gain.

The academic diaspora plays a catalytic role in enhancing the international reputation of their home countries through their numerous achievements in host countries and other international engagements through their research, published articles, and conferences where they present their work (Amagoh and Rahman 2016). As a result, the diaspora has proven to be worthy ambassadors of their homeland, especially in the fields of social sciences, science, and technology. There are a significant number of professors, doctors, engineers, and scientists in relevant positions around the world. Their appointments to these positions and their contributions to scientific growth and knowledge are enormous. They work together to disseminate information about the quality of human capital in their home countries. Their activities range from extensive research on critical issues facing their home countries and the global community, to publishing books and articles in international journals and publishers, to presenting research papers at international conferences and receiving awards in their respective fields (Dodani and LaPorte 2005).

Academic diaspora in crisis: an alternative approach

Many diaspora members engage in a wide range of academic, research, business, and community service activities in their home countries, albeit on an ad hoc basis (GEF 2022–2023). In most cases, the quality of higher education in developing countries has deteriorated significantly over the years due to inadequate funding, ongoing economic and social crises, and poor governance (Thyne 2006). We have found that the academic diaspora represents a vast but untapped resource and opportunity for domestic universities to engage with the global knowledge community to promote national growth, especially in academia (Ullah 2013).

However, the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was profound, shaking the entire world economically, socially, and politically (Ullah, Jannatul, and Diotima 2022; Ullah and Ferdous 2022). In this moment of crisis, the world needed scientific explanations about the origins of the virus in order to find ways to reduce the death toll and bring the world back to normal. Thus, research and publications on the pandemic have been critical to better understand its causes, spread, and impact; inform public health and transmission; identify risk factors and protective measures; and evaluate the effectiveness of policy responses to interventions (Porat et al. 2020). Research and publication helped disseminate the latest knowledge and best practices to health care workers, policy makers, and the general public, leading to a more effective response to the pandemic. Most of the academic diaspora engaged extensively in this novel task.

Diaspora members have helped raise the profile of the academic and scientific community in their home countries and increase their visibility on the global stage by publishing research and participating in international conferences (Rahman 2013; Ullah 2013), collaborating with scientists in other countries. The contributions of the diaspora to their country of origin have a significant impact on the development and growth of the academic and scientific communities in that country and help promote cross-border collaboration and exchange. Currently, it is not possible to determine the exact number of journal articles and books published worldwide on COVID -19. Given the widespread interest in the topic and the rapid pace of research and publication related to the pandemic, the number is likely to be in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. The exact number is difficult to determine, as this would require constant monitoring of all relevant academic databases, journals, and book publishers.

It is expected that by the best of my knowledge, in 2021 hundreds of thousands of academic articles have been published on COVID -19. It is difficult to determine an exact number because new articles are published all the time and the pandemic was constantly evolving. The number of articles published on this topic may also be affected by the number of journals publishing on this topic, the number of articles received by each publication, and the criteria used to count articles (e.g. peer-reviewed articles only, articles in specific languages, etc.). It is not possible to determine the exact number of books published on COVID -19. As the pandemic progresses, new books on the topic are published regularly (e.g. academic monographs, popular science books, personal narratives, etc.), and the criteria used to count the books (e.g. only books in specific languages, books that are physically printed, or only those that are digitally published, etc.).

The major databases were flooded with research articles, letters, reviews, notes, and editorials on the topic COVID-19 in just six months. A new study estimates that Web of Science and Scopus indexed 23,634 unique published articles between 1 January and 30 June 2020 (Silva Teixeira da, Tsigaris, and Erfanmanesh 2021). A recent analysis shows that scientists from around the world published more than 87,000 articles on coronavirus between the start of the pandemic COVID-19 and October 2020 (Grabmeier 2021). Even considering the importance of the pandemic, researchers were surprised by the large number of studies and other publications on this topic in such a short period of time. As for biomedical and public health research, PubMed lists 262,077,248 articles on COVID-19 (as of 29 May 2023); and if we want to discuss science, let us pretend that an online meeting is equivalent to sitting in a seminar room-but it is not (Biancolella et al. 2022).

Many diaspora members write books that focus on their country of origin. These books can take many forms, including fiction, nonfiction, and memoir. Through their writing, diaspora members can share their personal experiences and views about their home country and its culture, history, and politics (Amy 2006). They can also provide insight into the challenges and opportunities facing the country and its people and examine the ways in which the country has changed over time. By sharing these stories, diaspora authors can help promote cultural understanding and bridge the gap between their home and host countries (Kosmalska 2022). They can also act as ambassadors by bringing the rich heritage and diverse cultural traditions of their country of origin to a wider audience. In addition, their writings can be a valuable source of information and inspiration for other diaspora members as well as for those who wish to learn more about the country and its people.

Diaspora members can also write scholarly books that focus on their country of origin. These books can be on a range of topics, such as environmental science, medicine, technology, and more. By contributing their expertise and knowledge on issues facing their home country, diaspora scientists can contribute to the development of innovative solutions and advance the scientific community in their country of origin (Newland 2017; Ullah 2017; Echeverría-King et al. 2022). Through their writings, diaspora scientists can also act as advocates for their home country by highlighting the country's critical scientific and technological challenges and helping to draw attention to the need for investment and support in these areas. In addition, by collaborating with researchers and institutions in their home country, diaspora scientists can foster academic exchange and create opportunities for joint research projects and initiatives.

In this way, scientific writing by diaspora members can have a positive impact on the development of their home countries and help build bridges between the scientific communities in their host and home countries. Diaspora members with scientific backgrounds may well write scientific books on COVID-19 that focus on their country of origin. These books can provide valuable insights into the local impact of the pandemic, including the health and economic consequences for the population, and the effectiveness of the country's response efforts (Leach et al. 2021). They highlight the unique challenges the country faces in constraining the spread of the virus and discuss the potential impact of the pandemic on the country's future.

By writing about the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of their country of origin, diaspora scholars can help provide a local perspective on the global health crisis and illuminate the unique experiences of people and communities in their home country. In addition, their writing can help raise awareness of the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the need for continued support and resources to address its consequences (Finell et al. 2021). In this way, diaspora members' scholarly writing on COVID-19 can contribute to global conversations about the pandemic and promote a better understanding of its impact on communities around the world.

It is likely that many diaspora members with scientific backgrounds have written hundreds or even thousands of scientific journal articles about COVID -19. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most significant public health emergencies of our time and has generated an enormous amount of research and scientific inquiry (Barbato and Thomas 2020). Diaspora members, with their unique experiences and perspectives, are well positioned to contribute to this work.

Through their research and writings, diaspora scientists have helped to improve our understanding of the virus and its impact, and to identify the best methods to prevent its spread and treat those infected. Their contributions to the scientific literature on COVID-19 can help inform public health policy, inform clinical decisions, and facilitate the development of effective treatments and vaccines (Rahmani and Mirmahaleh 2021; Rajan and Pattath 2022). Diaspora members' scientific writings on COVID-19 have been integral to the global response to the pandemic and have helped illuminate the impact on communities around the world. As of November 23, 2021, 2,4650,286 new book titles have been published this year. In 2013, an average of 2.2 million new book titles was published worldwide each year (Wordsrated 2022).

Diaspora in the pandemic: an exemplar

On 25 January 2020, the CCP-affiliated All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (AFROC) called on overseas Chinese to raise money and send protective equipment to Wuhan, where an outbreak of the disease had led to a shortage of medical care. Donations of personal protective equipment (PPE) poured in from overseas Chinese by mid-February 2020 (Jia 2020). Unofficially, donors had donated RMB 2 billion by March 11 (Xu, 2018). From 24 January to 29 February 2020, Chinese customs approved 2.46 billion PPE products worth 8.2 billion RMB, and on 1 June 2020, the Overseas Chinese Charity Foundation of China (Zhongguo huaqiao gongchanghui) declared that it had received 275 million RMB in donations from overseas Chinese (Prasso 2020; Ruiz 2020; Zhu 2020).

There is much evidence to suggest that the Chinese diaspora responded positively to AFROC's call for international support, although the actual volume of cash and in-kind donations is unknown. State and party-affiliated institutions such as AFROC and the Office of the State Council for Chinese Overseas Affairs (OCAO) have spent decades building partnerships that are now bearing fruit. By mid-March 2020, China had a better handle on COVID -19, which had already spread to Europe and North America, but the country lacked the infrastructure to accommodate the millions of exiles who would surely try to return home (Zhu Yidali shiguan, Chinese Embassy in Italy, 2020). Due to significant restrictions on the number of aircraft allowed to land in China, the majority of Chinese citizens remained in countries that were new COVID-19 destinations (Bradsher 2020). As a humane alternative, the Chinese government immediately began donating personal protective equipment (PPE) to Chinese citizens who were in Italy and later in almost all countries. As local and international criticism of China's response to the COVID-19 epidemic grew, Beijing began sending medical teams and supplies to several other countries in March to rewrite history in China's favour.

China's efforts to restore its image through discourse included portraying the CCP and China as selfless, capable, and responsible (Rolland 2020) and justifying its strict domestic lockdowns to contain COVID-19 as being in the best interest of the international community (Fallon 2020). The CCP launched a large-scale propaganda campaign to restore its credibility by emphasizing the 'heroic sacrifices' of the Chinese people, 'helping a world in need,' and China's emergence as a 'leading light' in the fight against the pandemic in contrast to liberal democracies (Rolland 2020).

Beijing's efforts to restore discursive dominance among Chinese diaspora organisations were bolstered by the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment in several countries. Xu Yousheng, vice minister of the United Front Work Department of the CPC (UFWD), was praised by the party's political journal *Qiushi* in March 2020 for his work correcting local politicians and journalists and mobilising petitions and public protests against racial discrimination, exclusion, and stigmatisation of Chinese communities abroad. He emphasized the importance of Chinese students studying abroad as 'model students' at home, pointing to the Chinese community in Prato, Italy (Xu, 2018). The official policy and rhetoric of the People's Republic of China (PRC) toward its diaspora has traditionally emphasized the importance of Chinese abroad abiding by the law, exhibiting self-discipline, and contributing to their host communities. Beijing's more recent diaspora governance is known for its reliance on the Chinese diaspora as an instrument of China's soft power (Thunø 2018). However, encouraging Chinese abroad to participate in political, anti-racist demonstrations is a new development.

To protect China's diplomatic interests and bilateral relations, the government has not explicitly forced Chinese living abroad to act as public agents and openly protest in the streets for their civil rights in democratic countries (Tran and Chuang 2020). The recent willingness of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to encourage the Chinese diaspora to actively advocate for its foreign policy goal of righting the wrongs of other states against the PRC, including racially motivated attacks, indicates not only the severity of the political impact of COVID-19 as perceived by the party-state, but also how the Chinese diaspora state has been able to successfully mobilise and enforce a strengthened political relationship with the Chinese population abroad.

There are numerous ways in which expatriates supported their home countries during the COVID-19 pandemic: Many in the diaspora sent money to their families and communities back home, which helped alleviate some of the financial burden caused by the pandemic. Members of the diaspora with medical backgrounds have returned to their home countries to help fight the epidemic by providing much-needed medical care and information. Throughout the pandemic, helping those in need has been a primary concern of diaspora groups who have planned and supported relief initiatives. Diaspora members have helped to draw attention to the impact of the epidemic in their home countries and to highlight the need for international assistance and resources. Activists from the diaspora were also active in asking their home governments and international organisations to support their home countries during the hurricane. People living abroad played an important role in the global response to the COVID-19 outbreak, providing critical financial, medical, and humanitarian assistance and advocating for additional international support.

Discussions and conclusions

Diaspora research is an ever-evolving field, with new research being conducted on a regular basis. Recent research gaps identified include the following: There is a need for more interdisciplinary research that brings together perspectives from different fields such as anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science to provide a more comprehensive understanding of diaspora communities and their experiences. As a result of wars, famines, diseases, disabilities, ethnic pogroms, refugee crises, and natural disasters,

displacement, alienation, erasure of identity, and precarity through danger and difference have greatly increased in the era COVID -19. When a pandemic is contained, people have hope that life will 'return to normal,' but the isolation of a certain 'kind' of people does not. In her compelling book *Postcolonial Disaster: Narrating Catastrophe in the Twenty-First Century*, Pallavi Rastogi (2020) notes that 'disasters always have terrible consequences, not only for individuals but also for the larger collectives to which they belong.' No matter what happens, the stories we tell give us a perspective. They show that once-extraordinary crises and tragedies are not, in fact, unprecedented or increasingly common.

The emergence of COVID-19 has heightened concerns about the unpredictability of life and the forces that divide and unite us (again). The closure of international borders due to the crisis means a restriction of freedom of movement. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of international collaboration and the role of the diaspora in science and research. Scientists and researchers from the diaspora have made significant contributions to the fight against the epidemic, including developing vaccines, providing professional advice, and sharing knowledge and resources. In addition, many diaspora communities have supported their home countries and institutions through fundraising, donations, and volunteerism. The pandemic has proven the value of diversity and the need to leverage diaspora knowledge and expertise to advance global health and scientific research. As the world continues to face the pandemic and other global issues, it is important to continue to leverage the diaspora to drive innovation and progress in science and beyond.

The staggering statistics on the size and quality of the diaspora community abroad, many of whose members are pursuing academic and scientific careers as college professors, researchers, engineers, doctors, and highly skilled technicians, are indicative of the potential educational benefits of the diaspora community. In the United States, for example, one in two members of the African diaspora holds a bachelor's degree. The need to mobilise this potentially enormous force goes far beyond the often-cited economic benefits, as it plays an important role in revitalising and catalysing indigenous academic and scientific institutions (Teferra 2018). The importance and contribution of the intellectual diaspora to the development of their countries of origin is now well established. Governments are actively seeking to improve access to them by establishing relevant posts in ministries, especially the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior, and international offices at the institutional level. It appears that the world has been conditioned to move from the deficit and emotionally charged discourse of brain drain that has long dominated the discussion of human mobility to a fashionable, fulfilling, and pragmatic form of 'brain circulation' This rising trend is particularly evident at the interface between the intellectual diaspora and higher education in developing and emerging countries.

More research is needed on understudied diaspora communities, such as those from the Global South, to examine their unique challenges and experiences. With the increased use of digital technologies, there is an increased need for research on how these technologies impact diaspora communities and their relationships with their countries of origin. More research is needed on the role that diaspora communities can play in promoting sustainable development in their countries of origin. This research may provide

opportunities for further exploration and understanding of the experiences of diaspora communities and the impact they have on the world.

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