Diaspora and Citizenship: Introduction*

The majority of current citizenship debates focus on the ways in which diasporic and migrant communities affect the citizenship regime in their country of settlement. In contrast, the papers in this special issue focus on the relationship between the sending state and its diasporic communities abroad. In so doing, the contributions seek to delink understandings of citizenship from state territoriality. The articles assembled here stress that both sending, or kin-states and diasporic people actively engage in the process of revising the meaning of citizenship. They demonstrate important ways in which diasporas impact on the delineation of citizenship regimes and the politics of national identity in their homeland. They also trace the salience of ethnic and cultural markers in diaspora politics and their implications for the articulations and practices of citizenship.

Every nationalist variant, whether terrorist, democratic or ‘banal’,i pursues the political goal of embodying its interpretation of the nation through territory, institutions and in some cases, the national diaspora. Furthermore, and as the name ‘nation-state’ suggests, a sense of national belonging represents one of the key sources of legitimacy and loyalty for states. Indeed, the nation has been described as “the ultimate object of competition for loyalty”.ii Whereas the state is legally able to command this loyalty to some extent,iii sub-state nationalists and the like must mobilise loyal support in their quest to undermine the legitimacy of the existing link between nation and state. Many of the debates surrounding diasporas and their politics also turn on the issue of loyalty. For instance, this slippery concept pervades the question of citizenship, which is currently so closely tied to nation-statehood that it can be considered the legal expression of national belonging. Citizenship continues to be regarded as a badge of loyalty to the nation-state, as exemplified in ceremonies involving oath-taking, or the practice of stripping political exiles of their citizenship. Put another way, loyalty is seen as one of the duties of citizenship, in return for state rights, security and protection.

Governments have always had to manage migration, respond to the influence of international diaspora, or attempt to co-opt supranational trading systems into their nation-building efforts. Indeed, the ebb and flow of modern history has much to do with states’ relative success at affording representation and quelling revolt amongst the masses and minorities alike. Yet twenty-first century nation-states are faced with a unique set of challenges. Migration and diaspora now create cultural, economic, social and virtual networks which bind people across entire continents, let alone countries. Faced with competing claims for their national loyalty, individuals are urged to choose one overriding national allegiance. In states which do not allow dual citizenship, for instance, bidding for loyalty is something of a zero-sum game. What nation-states’ evolving relationship with their respective diasporas suggests, however, is that nation-states themselves are looking beyond their territorial boundaries in order to draw those they deem co-nationals into a new sphere of influence. This has resulted in states playing an active role in “reconfiguring traditional understandings of sovereignty, nation and citizenship”.iv The suggestion here is that the quality of citizenship is changing, and that diasporas have an important part to play in shaping
new shades of belonging and their legal expression. For example, despite the fact that the Indian constitution does not ban naturalised, as opposed to ‘natural born’ Indians from holding the highest offices in the land, there was a political outcry against Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born head of India’s Congress Party, becoming prime minister in 1999. The suggestion was that she could not possibly be sufficiently patriotic. Conversely, India accords a whole range of rights short of citizenship to its diaspora (See Xavier in this issue). These contrasting examples show that in India “citizenship and nationality, although used interchangeably in common legal parlance, are not one and the same thing”. It also illustrates how India is responding to its diaspora by delinking markers of belonging from the territorial boundaries of the state.

**Diaspora as a relational process**

Diasporas have been extensively studied as historical and social phenomena in their own right and also in relation to their host and sending societies. Studies on diaspora have focused on the agency of diasporic communities in negotiating their relationship with their homeland, host societies, and co-ethnics in other regions. Pioneering work by Robin Cohen defined diaspora by the strong attachment of its members to homeland. Cohen argued that members of a diaspora share memories of a past, idealised or even imagined home, and a common bond to the country they or their forebears left behind. Furthermore, diasporas have been viewed as ‘independent actors’ involved with the politics of the ancestral homeland, actively creating homeland in an affective and temporal process. They have also been characterised as de-territorialised ethnic groups, with the link to the homeland facilitated by advances in international transport and communications. This homeland link, together with a relatively established and cohesive community abroad, has served as a distinguishing factor between members of a diaspora and individual migrants, who may retain no ties to their country of origin.

Not all migrants belong to a diaspora, because they might not identify with their country of origin, or homeland. Neither can we assume that a diaspora represents a homogenous group. On the contrary, we can detect “the presence of both cosmopolitan anti-nationalists and reactionary ethno-nationalists within diasporas”. The impact of diaspora and extraterritoriality affects both ‘host’ and ‘home’ nation-states. On the one hand, members of a diaspora might feel and express their sense of belonging to their (ancestral) homeland in different ways, be it through upholding its cultural customs and traditions, some form of political activism, or economic solidarity in providing remittances and other forms of financial support. They will have other identities, including perhaps several national allegiances. With respect to contemporary nation-states, the growing number of countries which allow dual citizenship testifies to a gradual acceptance of ‘divided loyalties’, not least in order to ease the flow of remittances and investment. Countries like India and Vietnam have been courting their respective diaspora communities in recent decades, and the economies of the Philippines, Mexico, and Egypt are heavily dependent on remittances. At times when political and economic upheavals challenge their authority, governments can also find ways of overcoming the territorial limitations to their governance through extending national membership to their populations abroad. Thus, Britain embraced the idea of dual citizenship to protect its nationals abroad at the end of its colonial reign and Greece actively promoted the idea of Greek diaspora during its struggle for independence (see Vogli in this issue). Russia undertook a
similar step of allowing dual citizenship to Russians and Russian-speakers with the
disintegration of the Soviet Union, in order to ‘protect’ its diaspora living in the new
independent states (see Kosmarskaya in this issue).

By contrast, the disadvantages for nation-states of ‘hosting’ a diaspora include
uncertainty surrounding military service and readiness to defend the nation in times of
crisis, more diffuse concerns about (inter)national security and stability, and worries
about diaspora members’ willingness to engage fully with their country of residence
by actively contributing to its culture and society. To some extent, these concerns are
shared by those ‘home’ countries which grant political rights to their own diaspora (as
in the case of India, discussed by Xavier in this issue). This rests on the problematic
assumption that citizenship or diaspora identities necessarily reflect a clear sense of
commitment and solidarity to a single, specific community. Linked to this, John Kelly
criticises Benedict Anderson’s influential view of national communities, as
“symmetrical units of imagined, communal self-love”\textsuperscript{13}, because such an
understanding suggests a horizontal leveling of individuals through notions of
national solidarity and comradeship, when this is belied by the hierarchies that
pervaded colonial rule and often persisted thereafter. It can also detract attention from
the upheaval of diasporic movement, and cases in which diasporas are denied an equal
role in their ‘host’ countries. For example, Kelly cites the case of Indo-Fijians.

Brought by British colonialists to the Pacific Islands as indentured labourers in the
nineteenth century, their descendants still remain subordinate to the constitutional
principle of ethnic Fijian paramountcy. These tensions are due in no small part to the
legacy of colonialism. This applies both to postcolonial states and former colonising
countries, whose own national identities continue to be influenced by decolonisation.
Most obviously, countries like the United Kingdom and France have been shaped by
migration and diaspora from former colonies. This durable legacy of colonialism has
also contributed to diasporas having been largely perceived as more or less stable
groups with a common cultural identity.

The prevailing, culturally bounded understanding of diaspora has been recurrently
questioned by an increasing number of studies. Rogers Brubaker proposes to view
diaspora instead as a ‘category of practice remaking rather than describing the
world’\textsuperscript{14}. In a similar vein, cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy suggest that
diasporic identity is best understood as a political stance expressed through individual
or group identities.\textsuperscript{15} Rather than focusing on diaspora as a discrete homogenous
community, glossing over the internal differences and tensions, Rhacel Parreñas and
Lok Siu stress the need to account for ruptures within and across diasporic
connections along the markers of race, ethnicity, sexuality and class.\textsuperscript{16} Collectively,
these authors call for more empirical studies on the triadic relationship between the
members of diaspora, homeland, and host society, in order better to understand the
processes of transnational and national identity formation. One common, distinctive
aspect of diasporic identity is that members of diaspora (or indeed individual
migrants) are only marginally included in both their host society and their ‘home’. Yet
diaspora as a discursive tool, a form of practice and a political stance draws
distinctions between self and other in the identity politics of both host and kin states,
and is closely related to the formulation of citizenship regimes in both locations.
Through the constant negotiation and contestations of the elements producing
diasporic relations, the cultural and political contours of diaspora and de-
territorialised nations are sustained. For diasporic subjects, the home is always somewhere else.

The papers in the present issue focus on exploring one element in this triadic relationship, namely the dynamics of the relationship between homeland and diaspora. Diaspora is analysed as a political project devised and negotiated by the kin-state with the members of its putative diaspora. The stress is on the process of ‘diasporization’ through which ‘homeland’ and diaspora are mutually constituted. All of the contributions to the special issue concentrate on how a complex web of historical dynamics, political agendas, and economic interests produce and uphold diaspora as an object of the state’s national discourse and practices informing its citizenship regime. Although it is sometimes thought that the production and sustenance of diasporic connections is specific to Asian state-diaspora relations or developing countries, the cases discussed in this special issue show that practices of diasporization are by no means limited to a particular region or state’s economic condition, and have been a feature of national politics practised by states of different political histories, cultures, and outlooks. This is not to suggest that ‘diasporization’ is common to all states, yet most states resorted to diaspora engagement policies at one or another stage in their history. In other words, the process of constituting diaspora is closely linked to the never-ending process of nation-building, where the trajectories of national and diasporic politics complement and feed into each other. Thus the historical and national narratives of the state heavily rely on culturally specific transnational discourses and practices.

Citizenship: Legal status and beyond

Citizenship means much more than gaining a passport and escaping the legal void of statelessness. It comes with the accretions of European history, such as voluntary participation in the civic ideal of the French revolution, the covenant between ruler and ruled which underpins the social contract, and the basis of the democratic system of popular sovereignty. Citizenship evidently has an important political dimension, as an arena in which to define the content of people’s rights and duties vis-à-vis the state. It also decides rightful claimants of those rights. Indeed, “why would we need to think of ourselves as citizens if there were no Others who are not?” In a world of nation-states, diasporas can be considered a problem because they do not fit into the equation of identity with territory, which underpins that global order. The idea that belonging entails a sense of ‘rootedness’ in a particular place is deeply ingrained in our thinking about nations and nationalism. In turn, the notion of “citizenship as boundary” translates the nation-state-territory nexus into legal language. This is one key means of managing the flow of people across borders.

As a form of national solidarity, citizenship symbolises membership in the nation-state. In addition to a complex package of rights and responsibilities, citizenship is a marker of identification dividing the society into those who belong there and those who belong somewhere else. Barry Hindess has recently argued that citizenship constitutes an aspect of a bigger governing system which functions by dividing world population into subpopulations with unequal citizenship rights. Supranational institutions and discourses thus impact on how the limits of citizenship are delineated. It is, for example, the case in the most ambitious model of
supranational integration of our day, the European Union, where the implicit presumption of common Christian roots of the member states has so far complicated the application process for the predominantly Muslim Turkey. The irreconcilable tension between ethno-cultural and territorially-based, civic, underpinnings of citizenship is further accentuated by the fact that ethnic preference in the citizenship legislation of member states has not been challenged by the European Union, and the 1997 European Convention on Nationality did not require the elimination of preferential provisions for co-ethnics that had already been in force before the adoption of the convention.\textsuperscript{XIV} This is an indication of the extent of the unequivocal and insoluble tensions at the heart of debates on European citizenship.

At the interface of the citizen ‘in-group’ and the immigrant ‘out-group’, naturalisation procedures help constitute the borders of belonging. They are thus a privileged point of access to contemporary interpretations of citizenship. Migration policies must also be alive to the likelihood of long-term residence and the eventual attainment of citizenship. The introduction of categories, ‘points’ systems and quotas in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom are designed to reflect a migrant’s ‘usefulness’ and potential to make a contribution to the receiving state’s society. Citizenship regimes, particularly naturalisation policy, are an important corollary of migration in that they represent the primary means of official, legal integration into a state. Citizenship policies are thus a fundamental aspect of nation-building and, ultimately, state legitimacy. The concept of stability also continues to be a key justification for immigrant integration and naturalisation. Today, stability refers explicitly to social cohesion and implicitly to national identity, the assumption being that it could be knocked off course or ‘denatured’ by too many foreign elements. The case of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia serves to illustrate this point.

Although Chinese communities have settled all over Southeast Asia since the sixteenth century they remain at the mercy of latent racism there.\textsuperscript{XXV} For instance, the Chinese minority was long constructed as an alien ‘Other’ to a Thai nation, which in the early twentieth century came to be defined according to the ethnic Thai majority.\textsuperscript{XXVI} Here we encounter the issue of multiple citizenship, but this time as the instrumental tool of individuals, rather than as a marker of nation-state loyalty. Writing about the wealthy business elite within the Chinese diaspora, Aihwa Ong suggests that the “multiple passport holder is an apt contemporary figure; he or she embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets”\textsuperscript{XVII} This separation between state and personal identity, in turn, sums up a new conundrum for the Chinese state, which wants to tap into the expertise and investments of its diaspora, but also questions the political loyalty and patriotic motivation of its overseas community. Again with reference to the Chinese diaspora, Aihwa Ong shows how the presumption against dual citizenship long upheld in Germany, Southeast Asian countries and elsewhere is being undermined by those who collect passports as a form of ‘insurance’ against the vagaries of politics. She points to ethnic Chinese business elites from Hong Kong, Indonesia and Thailand among others, who may do business all over the world, but guard against a possible backlash or discriminatory policies by settling families in ‘safe havens’ in order to earn residency rights.\textsuperscript{XXVIII}
According to Aihwa Ong’s notion of ‘flexible citizenship’, some individuals view passports instrumentally in terms of status and security rather than as symbols of national loyalty and belonging. Ong also applies this flexibility to states, pointing out that the United States’ practice of giving green cards to large investors is one way of attracting global capital in return for a path to citizenship. In countries like Cambodia, citizenship has been traded as a commodity, which potential investors can purchase to facilitate their business dealings. Here, the equation of citizens with nationals qua members of a national community completely breaks down and the possibility of a hierarchy within citizenship emerges, whereby naturalised citizens are excluded from election or public office for fear that they will try to exert influence in their own and not the national interest. Linked to this, the meaning of Cambodian citizenship has also been a source of tension between returning exiles – many of whom have dual nationality – and those who stayed behind. In this debate, citizenship is used as a cipher for the delicate relationship between material interests and overriding allegiances, with many returnees arguing that “the number of passports cannot measure loyalty”. Despite citizenship’s strong theoretical associations with equality, then, it is clear that states do not always guarantee this in practice. Rather, shades of citizenship are emerging, both in legal terms and in the range of meanings attached to it as a marker of loyalty and belonging.

Diaspora and citizenship

Although migration is by no means a new phenomenon, its implications for national solidarity and state citizenship have become more prevalent in recent decades. Originally conceived as membership in a territorially bounded political community sharing a common sense of culture and belonging, citizenship and its relationship with state territoriality have been increasingly problematized by international migration. The accelerated character of migration has been transforming citizenship regimes in seemingly contradictory directions of de-ethnicization and re-ethnicization, characterized by Christian Joppke as ‘embracing emigrants, bashing immigrants’. These conflicting processes take place within the same national borders, as states traditionally known for their out-migration, like India and Italy, extend a form of external membership to their overseas communities. As a result, empirical and normative scholars of citizenship are increasingly recognising the effects of ‘external citizenship’ and their de-territorialising effects.

There has been much debate as to how newcomers should be expected to participate in the host society. However, labels like assimilation, integration and even ghettoization often say more about the country of residence’s approach to nation-building than individuals’ lived experience within a diaspora. Standards of language competence and naturalization requirements reflect a certain national ideal to which long-term residents are expected to conform, but are a poor measure of the everyday cultural competence which is often fostered by living a transnational life. This has been described as a kind of practical cosmopolitanism, or an acquired skill at negotiating different cultural systems and switching more or less expertly between them. With regard to their homeland, members of a diaspora may wholeheartedly support it and its policies, struggle against the incumbent regime – as in the case of political exiles – or adopt any stance in between. In turn, the challenge for
contemporary nation-states lies in how to include their own diaspora – through extending citizenship rights, encouraging investment, remittances and the like – at the same time as members of other diasporas resident on their territory. In the latter case, this involves defining boundaries of belonging, and thereby the degree of openness or exclusivity of their own national construct. As a result, transnationalism raises “issues concerning civic order and the cohesiveness of ‘host’ societies”.

Diaspora, as a significant aspect of a wider intensification in the speed and ease of all forms of exchange, has led in some cases to a multiplication in ‘irregular’ identity and citizenship configurations (See Xavier in this issue); the “migrant has always been the ‘Other’ of the nation…[b]ut if the Other is part of society (for example, as a worker, parent or taxpayer), how can national distinctiveness be maintained?” This is the dilemma facing contemporary nation-states. Multiple citizenship, denizenship, residence permits and domicile status are among the legal tools which have developed to cover cases in which residence, nationality and citizenship are not congruent. Some, like domicile, seek to establish an individual’s allegiance and derive from the default principle that citizenship should correspond to national loyalty. Citizenship tests and positive discrimination policies, such as measures favoring ethnic Malays in Malaysia, also follow this logic, thereby displaying the inherent contradiction in linking the potentially universal reach of citizenship to national belonging in the first place; “The principle of citizenship for all members of society demands the inclusion of new ethnic minorities into the political community; the principle of national belonging demands their exclusion”.

The fluctuating borderline between the ‘in’ group and the ‘out’ group, as embodied in citizenship legislation and naturalisation in particular, is a key marker of how the concept of nation is decontested. Citizenship is a legal construct with politically defined nationalist content and increasingly polemical connotations linked to immigration and asylum. Yet Yasemin Soysal has long argued that citizenship can go beyond the nation-state as a legitimating basis, to be replaced with universal human rights principles. A form of citizenship freed from national ties of ethnicity, culture or descent is also thinkable, in which residence is the ticket to political participation. According to this reading, citizenship would be an administrative tool to organize the polity, and require no proof of national loyalty or identity. However, this underestimates the importance of citizenship in regulating national membership, and how its development charts the interpretation of national self-understanding. Decoupled from the state, citizenship offers only a truncated form of political integration, and obviates any need for nation-building as a form of state legitimation. Importantly, too, it deprives the state of a key means of reaching out to its diaspora. On the other hand, decoupling citizenship from territory, as the extension of rights to diasporas tends to do, stretches the notion of ethnic belonging in a way which might be difficult to accept if the sending state is not similarly inclusive towards its residents (perhaps from other diasporas) who do not belong to the “dominant ethnie”. Indeed, if the deterritorialized award of citizenship to diasporas on the basis of ethnic belonging goes hand in hand with high hurdles to naturalization for incoming migrants and long-term residents, then there may be a regressive aspect to the link between diaspora and citizenship, which provides an agenda for future research.
The organization of the special issue

The proliferation of state power is in many respects paradoxical. In international milieux we see states’ dynamic initiation and participation in the supranational, global or regional-based formations and processes, which are opposed to narrow identity politics based on ethnic affiliation and national loyalty. At the same time, states actively endorse or tap into particular ethnic and national allegiances to serve their economic and political goals. Such engagements are becoming a globalizing rather than localizing trend; through links and connections based on ethnic affiliation, state power travels outside its territory to engage with transnational processes driven by international migration regimes. Territorially-based, nationally-bound perspectives on citizenship cannot fully appreciate and engage with the complexity of these processes. The five contributions to this special issue show how the articulation of citizenship can be intricately bound up with the politics of diasporization.

The opening article by Elpida Vogli discusses the role of diasporic politics in the Greek state during its struggle for national unity and after achieving independence in 1922. She shows how the ‘imaginary’ conception of the Greek national state was constituted with the Greek diaspora in mind. Modern Greek national politics was aimed at actively creating and ‘preserving’ the Greek diaspora. This engagement with diaspora had not only to do with the role of remittances for the independence of the young Greek state, but was closely related to Greece’s territorial claims and compensation after World War II. In other words, Greece’s pursuit of diaspora and emigration policies has been intimately related to nation-building. Greeks abroad were encouraged to sustain the link with homeland through such initiatives as ‘Greek Home-Coming year’, whereas ‘surplus’ population was actively produced as the new Greek diaspora. At the same time, Greece’s ethnic minorities were instructed how to behave ‘like Greeks’ through the newly promulgated Greek citizenship code.

Somewhat similar politics of diasporization are in place in present-day India’s experimentation with citizenship provision for Overseas Indians, as discussed in the article by Constantino Xavier. Caught between the necessity of attracting overseas Indians’ resources for the state’s material and symbolic economy on the one hand, and the suspicion of ‘divided loyalty’ on the other, the Indian state found an intermediate solution in the form of the 2003 law on Overseas Citizenship of India for Indians of foreign nationality. Coined the Indian ‘green card’, it provides economic and cultural rights to overseas Indians short of the right of political participation. India’s Overseas Citizenship remains an exclusionary act negating the rights of overseas Indians who migrated before 1947 as a labour force to British colonies and the more recent waves of manual labour migrants in the Middle East. Social status and material affluence, on a par with ethnic affiliation, are thus important aspects delimiting the contours of Indian citizenship and diasporic politics.

Nataly Kosmarskaya’s article focuses on the analysis of discourses and practices of ‘diasporization’ in contemporary Russia. She shows how Russia has viewed itself as a successor to the Soviet Union since its collapse, and as a ‘homeland’ to all Russian-
speaking citizens of the former USSR. Within this dynamic, ‘diasporization’ takes a socio-cultural form rather than being limited by ethnicized identity politics. In the case of Russia, involvement with what is deemed its Russian-speaking diaspora serves as an expression of Russia’s national identity crisis related to the difficulties of coming to terms with its post-imperial legacy.

In her examination of the relationship between diaspora and homelands, Illa Ben-Porat turns to the post-Soviet case of Israel and Russia courting Russian-speaking Jews. She argues that it is this relationship which not only characterizes but constitutes the meanings of diaspora and homeland. Both home and diaspora are contingent notions which ‘organize rather than describe the world’. The interplay between the homeland and diaspora shapes the boundaries of home and diaspora. The state of Israel constructs itself as a homeland through exclusionary diasporic politics towards particular groups abroad. The Law of Return in Israel negotiates the basis of Israeli citizenship principles enshrined in the Jewish religious laws, thereby claiming Jews from the former Soviet Union republics as Israel’s diaspora. On the other hand, Russia resorts to diasporization practices toward Russian-speaking Jews in an attempt to re-define its national identity as a homeland for all former citizens of the Soviet Union after its collapse. It is a fascinating case, illuminating how diaspora, citizenship, and nation-building are mutually constitutive and interconnected in a complex relationship.

The article by Ruth Wittlinger and James Koranyi draws attention to ‘perpetual’ diasporization in the case of Transylvanian Saxons and their troubled relationship with their dual home in Romania and Germany. Unlike other contributions stressing the state discourses and practices of diasporization, here diasporization is taken up by the migrant minority group as a form of citizenship practice. This article shows how the collapse of the Soviet bloc and German citizenship reforms in the 1990s, which partially changed the jus sanguinis principle in favour of jus soli, were precursors for Transylvanian Saxon immigrants in Germany to actively evoke Transylvania as their new ‘external homeland.’ This is not merely an act of memory and nostalgia for the past, but ‘physical constitution’ of and engagement with the homeland as an inalienable process of minorities’ identity negotiation. Diasporization is thus an integral and dynamic process defining the relationship between majority-minority groups.

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ix Shain and Barth, “Diasporas”.


xi Safran, “Diasporas”; Sheffer, *Diaspora*.

xii Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, p. 11.


Kasian Tejapira “The Lookjin Middle Class and Thai Official Nationalism” in Reid and Chirot, *Essential Outsiders*, p. 76.


Ibid, p. 130.


Shain, *The Frontier*.


Stephen Castles, “Citizenship and the Other in the Age of Migration” in Davidson and Weekley (eds) *Globalisation*, p. 28.


Castle, “Citizenship”, p. 32.


