

# Transnational Communities

An ESRC Research Programme

“perceptions of cultural belonging... have a new political immediacy in the much more labile post-Soviet world.”

## CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING: LOCAL EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

### Principal Investigators

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### Aims and objectives

To investigate rearrangements in the ways that the state, citizenship, and a sense of belonging are connected in countries directly affected by the collapse of the Soviet bloc and state socialism. Focusing on diasporas and peoples with transnational affiliations, our three research projects share a concern with the political challenges of changing patterns of identification and cross-border politics flowing from diaspora in the context of rupturing state systems as happened in 1989-91. The first study looks at how successive Hungarian governments since the early '90s have tried to regularise, once and for all, the legacy of the Trianon treaty of 1920 which left large numbers of co-ethnics immediately beyond the Hungarian borders. The second study, focuses on the transformation of notions of Armenian “homeland” over five decades. The final study explores German immigration and citizenship policies, by looking at the concurrent repatriation from Kazakhstan of centuries-old diaspora Germans and the attempt to create a new diaspora population of “ethnic” Jews in Germany.

These three projects were conducted in parallel, and share several core concerns:

- 1) perceptions of cultural belonging to a nation beyond the state in which a person lives, including attitudes towards the resettlement of diasporic peoples. Such perceptions have a new political immediacy in the much more labile post-Soviet world.
- 2) issues of authenticity – the definition of who is a “real” Hungarian, German, Jew, Armenian – has become a political matter in the past ten years, this begins to inform notions of citizenship both in the “homeland” and in the host countries of the diaspora
- 3) the impact of multiple ethnic, religious, and national identities on questions of citizenship and belonging. These are rarely given expression in formal politics where one finds the simplicities of either/or and exclusive attachments.

### Duration of Research

October 1998 – December 2001



### Methodology/study design

Ethnographic field research has been the dominant method of information gathering. This includes interviewing and participant observation, as well as studying relevant texts, migration documents, newspapers, archival material and memoirs. Each study required multiple visits to field sites, allowing for follow-up visits to linked communities in other countries, including Armenia, Syria, North America, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Kazakhstan and Germany.

### Policy implications:

.. The ease of social integration of newcomers and diasporic peoples as citizens of a nation state is not perforce weakened by the strengths of their ties with each other, and across the borders with co-ethnics and/or homelands. Given the opportunity to engage in the social, economic and political life of the host country, newcomers and diasporic people develop lasting commitments to the new host state, while maintaining personal connections to fellow members of their ethnic group around the world. This leads to identification with the host state, as well as with the ethnic group. The question of where the balance lies will change according to the degree of security perceived both within the host state and for their compatriots elsewhere including a homeland.

.. Refugees (and asylum seekers) adjusted more quickly when living as extended family or village groups. When forcibly dispersed by the host state they spent considerable energy and resources finding each other and restoring the groups with which they had initially emigrated. The research demonstrates that, in spite of initial difficulties in "homeland" or diaspora, refugees/immigrants integrate and contribute to the society, given even the barest economic foothold.

**"These studies demonstrate the continuing centrality of attachment to a particular state"**

Current policies aimed at constraining immigrant flexibility are misplaced.

.. So called 'fuzzy citizenship' solutions for dealing with diaspora (such as the Hungarian Status Law) are far less innovative than their proponents claim and neither respond to actual transnational linkages nor encourage a framework within which diasporas can function effectively in a host society. They should not be emulated as a model for cross-border affiliations in Europe.

### Theoretical Issues:

.. Contrary to claims that (national) citizenship is becoming less relevant due to the development of transnational political units, these studies demonstrate the continuing centrality of attachment to a particular state.

.. Diaspora interaction with homeland is not necessarily a centre/periphery relationship but a lateral one as well; while homelands may struggle to dominate relations with their diaspora, social analysts should not replicate this political strategy in their analyses.

.. The terms diaspora and transnationalism are not coterminous but in our cases the term diaspora was more revealing when assessing ethnic linkages across the borders. We found other transnational links (labour mobility, religious organisations, political parties) layered onto diasporic links but it is the interaction of these with diaspora networks that remains of most interest.

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“ The politicisation of ethnicity via a play on symbols is a particularly fruitful area of research. “Homeland” changes over time and attachment to a particular homeland or vision of one can be manipulated and/or developed if there is a resonant connection and especially if there is a perceived crisis.

### **Hungarians ‘beyond the borders.’**

“ Uncertainty in the Magyar political class over quite where the Hungarian nation begins and ends has long been a source of anxiety in central and east European politics. The ‘status’ of the Hungarians beyond the border remains a potentially destabilising political topic in Romania and Slovakia.

“ While Budapest political rhetoric has recently stressed the attachment to the ‘unitary Hungarian nation,’ this study shows how the ethnic identification may be of subordinate importance to social status, historical position and actual opportunities of the diverse Hungarian ethnic populations.

**“attachment to a particular homeland or vision of one can be manipulated... especially if there is a perceived crisis”**

“ The Hungarian ‘Status law,’ promoting cross border connections with and subsidies for co-ethnics, is ethno-territorial in conception and, despite a fine propaganda campaign, fails as an appropriate regional initiative. Even as a practical measure the law at best creates new obstacles to the operation of currently flexible (if unofficial) labour markets. It is striking that the take-up of the benefits of the law has been extremely variable.

### **How German are they? Repatriated Russian Germans and ‘new’ German Jews.**

“ The post-unification German state has attempted to ‘normalize’ itself in the world of lib-

**“Ethnic identification maybe of subordinate importance to social status, historical position and actual opportunities”**

**“Racist understandings of ethnicity remain remarkably powerful in German public discourse”**

eral democracies - as another cosmopolitan society - with reference to its policies towards a hierarchized set of foreigners.

“ Research into the recruitment to Germany of Jews from the former Soviet Union has revealed not only legal loopholes, but also contradictory intentions on first, the part of the German state and its confrontation with its post-WWII moral and social restructuring; and second, on the part of the Jews themselves, who often do not see Germany as their ultimate point of immigration.

“ Critical debates surrounding changes to the Citizenship Law in 1999 often concerned ‘loyalty,’ but derived from essentialist beliefs and practices of Germanness. Ideologies grounded in racist understandings of ethnicity remain remarkably powerful in German public discourse. Ethnicity tests serve as gatekeepers which permit or exclude individuals and groups from moving to Germany and assuming German citizenship.

### **Competing Armenian homelands**

“ The Republic of Armenia has become transformed into a modern-day “homeland”, a state with a diaspora. The centrally approved and state-organised “gathering-in” of tens of thousands of Armenians from the Middle East, especially after WWII, served to rejuvenate Soviet Armenia but it also eventually undermined communities in the diaspora. ‘Returnees,’ however, remain attached to their old village and those in diaspora are also committed to their host nation states. As influenced by the different social and political environments, they maintain sometimes conflicting approaches to issues of identity and authenticity – who is a “real” Armenian?

“ The issue of authenticity remains central in a variety of forums, in Armenia and in diaspora, and in regard to certain recurring topics: language and literature, religious affiliation, attitudes towards work, charity/volunteerism, for example. At the same time, diaspora social and intellectual life, if not its political focus, is considerably dispersed and as likely to be lateral, between diaspora communities, as oriented towards Armenia.

## Selected Outputs

S. Pattie

1999 - "Longing and Belonging: Issues of Homeland in the Armenian Diaspora" in *Political and Legal Anthropology Review (PoLAR)*, vol. 22, no 2.

2001 - "The Armenians" in *Endangered Peoples: Struggles to Sustain Cultural Survival*, volume on Europe. Jean Forward, ed. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Forthcoming: "Armenians in Diaspora" in *The Armenians*. Edmund Herzig and Marina Kourkchian, eds. London: Curzon Press.

Forthcoming - "Memoirs and Mementos: The Construction of Narrative Among Armenians" in *Identities, Places, Citizens: Anthropological Perspectives on Cyprus* - dedicated to Professor Peter Loizos, Y. Papadaxis and G. Welz, eds. London: Curzon Press.

Forthcoming - "New Homeland for an Old Diaspora" in *Homelands and Diaspora: Holy Lands and Other Places*. Andre Levy and Alex Weingrod, eds.

M. Stewart

2002 - Preface, in E. Sik ed. *Magyarországon élő Romák migrációja (The Migration of Roma living in Hungary)*. Budapest: MTA

200? - *The Hungarian Status Law and transnational politics*. Available from Centre for Democracy and Society, UCL

2001 - Keynote address: *A critique of Kymlicka's Multicultural citizenship in the east European context*.to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Trust International Symposium on Collective Rights, Madingley Hall, 30th October.

2002 - Public Lecture, *Multicultural Hungarian Romany Policy: model or muddle?* British Association for Central and East European Studies, 8th March.

R. Mandel

2000 - *Making diasporas: Transnational migrants in Germany*, Public lecture at American Academy Berlin, November

2002 - *How German are they? Questions of citizenship and race in Germany*. Submitted for journal publication. MS available from Centre for Democracy and Society, UCL

2002 - *How German are they? Questions of citizenship and race in Germany*, Series of talks sponsored by the Center for the Study of Social Transformations, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, April

Present - Collaborating on a film about Citizenship and Belonging, with Berlin filmmaker, Sema Poyraz

## Transnational Communities Programme

On the programme's website (<http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk>) you will find contact details for all the project teams, guidance notes for would-be authors in the book series', information about past and forthcoming events, downloadable working papers, a searchable bibliography of world diasporas and links to related sites. An on-line news digest, TRACES aims to make sense of the human dimensions of globalisation by monitoring news items from around the world and presenting them in summary form. You can register on-line to receive hard copies of newsletters, reminders of website updates and information about related events.

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