

THE DIASPORIC CHALLENGE TO IDENTITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN-CROAT EXPERIENCE

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Ethnically diverse immigration can present difficulties to policy makers trying to frame and implement a foreign policy that is in the host nation's interests. Such immigration can also present challenges to the host nation's internal cohesion. This paper outlines a framework for understanding these problems and then applies it to Australia and immigrant Australians of Croatian origin.

Most studies of migrants to advanced industrial democracies focus on their motives for migrating and on policies for receiving them.¹ The importance of continuing contacts between migrants and their homelands has been downplayed, if not ignored. This is especially true in Australia where official rhetoric in Canberra slights transnational ties that influence ethnic communities. A 1977 Green Paper, *Immigration Policies and Australia's Population*, cautioned that 'ministers are under pressure from ethnic groups to favour one side or the other in international disputes to which Australia is not directly a party, but in which migrants' countries of origin are involved'.²

A search of more recent federal documents reveals little attention to homeland-migrant relations. Australian newspapers and television programs are replete with discussions of immigration issues, and scholars debate whether increasing ethnic diversity is undermining or enhancing national cohesion and civic culture.³ Others assess domestic ethnic political representation,⁴ ethnic group efforts to influence immigration policy,⁵ and government attempts to assuage conflicts between recent immigrants and native-born Australians.⁶ However, there is a paucity of Australian immigration literature acknowledging that the globalization and the democratization of technology, manifest in mass use of the

Internet and relatively cheap and rapid long-distance travel, enable immigrant communities to maintain closer contact with their homelands than was feasible in the past.⁷

A growing body of research overseas, however, suggests a Janus-like situation in which migrant communities not only participate more fully in host state politics, but at the same time connect to their places of origin and to national or ethnic kin in other countries.⁸ Contrary to conventional Marxist and liberal theories that suggest the gradual substitution of ethno-national homeland identities with class affiliation or increased engagement with the host nation, migrant identities more and more transcend political borders. This research focuses on diasporas, conceived as ethno-national communities of people outside their country of origin which create and sustain contacts with the homeland and maintain significant social distance from the host society.

Australia and other settler societies would profit from analysis of this sort because they contain numerous immigrant communities with the potential to increasingly assert their ethno-national identities, either because of homeland conflicts that encourage fixation on ethnic origins, or because of shared community experiences in, and distance from, the mainstream society. This paper lays out a

theoretical framework for studying diaspora communities and uses the framework to discuss a single community — Croats in Australia. The evidence is based on research and interviews recently conducted in Canberra and Melbourne, and is presented here to demonstrate the potential benefits of more research on the transnational identities of members of Australia's immigrant communities.

COMPETITION FOR LOYALTY

Members of diasporic communities are subject to multiple loyalties which produce new challenges for multiethnic host countries, as intensive transnational contacts alter conceptions of citizenship and belonging.⁹ First, the host state and society exert an 'internal-national' pull on immigrant identities. Second, specific ethnic communities within the host society also provide an 'internal-ethnic' pull. But third, the country and state from which immigrants originated also exerts an 'external-national' pull on diasporic communities. Finally, particular ethnic communities in the homeland society may also exert an 'external-ethnic' pull. These diverging pressures may not be incompatible, however. The simultaneous internal-national and internal-ethnic pulls are in harmony with Australian multiculturalism's organizing principle, to wit, that ethnic communities are allowed, even encouraged, to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness while the resulting amalgam of ethnicities is conceived as uniquely 'Australian'.

Can multicultural policies that are essentially domestic in their orientation also address international pulls on diasporic communities? Whether or not one credits the domestic claims

made for multiculturalism, its facility in handling the foreign ties and concerns of diasporic communities is not immediately apparent. Where external loyalties compete with, instead of complement, internal loyalties, efforts by homeland states to mobilize local diasporic communities may weaken Australian national integration in at least four ways, as summarized in Figure 1.

In cell A, the pull of loyalty toward homeland states may lead members of diasporic communities into conflict with the Australian state and society. The circumstances propelling such conflict are perhaps rare — suspicions of German and Italian immigrants during the Second World War as members of a 'fifth column' being one instance.

In cell B, external-national mobilizing efforts, usually state driven, may redefine or re-nationalize diaspora members within Australia. Many countries with large numbers of immigrants in Australia actively encourage dual citizenship, and they attempt to mobilize communities in Australia for homeland political purposes. For example, Italy's Christian Democrats support extending voting rights to people of Italian birth settled abroad in order to gain support from southern Italian migrants,¹⁰ southern Slavs journeyed home at the behest of homeland governments to

Figure 1: Conflicts resulting from multiple claims to the loyalty of members of a diaspora

	Internal-National	Internal-Ethnic
External-National	<p>A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-state War • Fifth Column Suspicions 	<p>B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diaspora Mobilization • Dual loyalty
External-Ethnic	<p>C</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to State Authority • Capture of Foreign Policy 	<p>D</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-ethnic Conflicts • Intra-ethnic Conflicts

support ethnic kin in war and to rebuild war-torn economies in peace,¹¹ and Athens brokered a reconciliation among left/right political factions in the Greek-Australian community to ensure diasporic unity on the Macedonian question.¹²

Globalization and the development of transnational identities enable homeland political actors to mobilize of national members and ethnic kin residing in host countries and vie for their support. For such homeland governments, host country naturalization is not seen as some kind of final act, because expatriates may eventually return home. Personal comments submitted to a recent Australian Citizenship Council report on Australian citizenship reveal the tensions between being a loyal and committed Australian and taking out foreign citizenship.¹³ While the preponderance of statements attest to multiple citizenship as a 'positive force' and a means to promote Australian values and economic interests abroad, questions remain about whether a person can be loyal to two countries in a global system of shifting alliances and interests.

In cell C, external ethnic pulls may bring diaspora members into conflict with Australian interests. For example, Australia reluctantly recognized the independence of Macedonia, but in deference to the Greeks opposed to recognition of the Macedonian state it has yet to allow a Macedonian embassy in Canberra, despite the Macedonian community's claims. Finally, in cell D, external ethnic pulls, including lingering enmities toward other ethnic communities, may influence inter-ethnic relations within Australia. Tensions, including limited violence, between various communities tied to the former Yugoslavia, as well as between Turks and Greeks, demonstrate this possibility.

AUSTRALIA'S CROATS

Over the last two decades, Greeks, Serbs, Kurds, Jews, Turks, and a host of other communities in Australia have engaged in activities ranging from fund-raising and lobbying Parliament to flag-burnings and fire bombings in connection with homeland concerns.¹⁴ Of course, only individuals at the extreme fringes of these communities participate in the criminal and most contentious types of behavior. But more politically and socially acceptable forms of diasporic behavior, clearly manifest in the Australian Croat diaspora, imply modest challenges to national integration and social cohesion.

The first Croat settlers can be traced back to the 1850s when Dalmatian sailors, lured by the gold fields, left their ships in Melbourne or Sydney. Price records that some 4,000 of the male settlers in Australia between 1890 and 1940 were from Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁵ These migrants largely consisted of agricultural workers, some of whom had suffered through war in their homeland and experienced hardships at the hands of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav regime under King Alexander.

Homeland concern focussed on Croat political dissent in the diaspora, and it encouraged loyalists abroad to form political associations in order to gather information on Croatian communist and nationalist tendencies.¹⁶ But not until the arrival of some 24,000 Yugoslavian refugees after the Second World War were homeland political divisions and political activity obvious in the diaspora. Many of these 'displaced persons' and subsequent waves of post-War immigrants were 'political migrants' who either supported the Axis-allied Croatian regime during the war, or were victims of Tito's 'Croatian Spring' crackdown.¹⁷ These immigrants did not leave homeland

political concerns behind and Belgrade closely monitored political activities in the diaspora.

Tensions also developed with the Australian host society. For much of the period since the Second World War, the Croat community has borne the stigma of fascism and terrorism, and today it is frequently viewed as 'extremist' and violent in its relations with other Southern Slavs. Thus, some Australian Croats are alienated from Australian society in part because:

[F]or many Yugoslavs political life centres around the communities and their concern with homeland affairs. As Yugoslavia's politics have always been conducted on a totally different basis from those of Australia, these concerns may insulate Yugoslavs from local political reality as well as alienating them from local institutions.¹⁸

This was never more evident than during Yugoslavia's disintegration in 1991, when animosities between the different Yugoslav nationalities in Australia intensified. That year there were competing marches of Serbs and Croats on Parliament House in Canberra and angry demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne. The diaspora played an even more direct role in the establishment of the independent Croatian state. Long a nation of emigration, Croatian elites began to actively campaign for diasporic Croats to return to the homeland. A story in *The Age* in October 1991 reported that overseas Croats had raised US\$30 million to fund the war for independence.¹⁹ The number of Australian Croats who left Australia to fight for an independent Croatia is not officially known. But anecdotal reports suggest that there were at least several dozen. Six such young men from Australia, Germany, and the United States earned the rank of general.

These events and mobilizations helped transform Australia's Croat community from a disenchanting, sometimes fractious ethnic group into a powerful and relatively wealthy diaspora with a new sense of purpose and confidence. Many Croat social clubs and communal organizations that up to that time had called themselves 'Yugoslavian', promptly changed their names and allegiances, to reflect their ethnic distinction from Serbs. A key cause of this change was intensified transnational links that stemmed mainly from the outreach efforts of political elites in Croatia. Australian Croats who had never before participated in Croatian community life were urged to join existing and newly created ethnic organizations and to reaffirm their ethnic identity. Accurate statistics regarding return migration are difficult to obtain because many who have emigrated to Croatia maintain their dual Croatian and Australian citizenships, a factor that is not apparent in immigration or other official government statistics in either country. However, simple observation suggests that second and third generation descendants in the diaspora were so caught up in the fervor of the early 1990s that they returned to Croatia in significant numbers.

Australian Croats participated directly in homeland politics in several ways during the 1990s. They were granted the right to vote in Croatian elections. Polling stations were periodically erected by the Croatian government in its Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth consulates, as well as in community centers, clubs, and churches designated by Zagreb. Australian citizens of Croatian origin participated in the 1990 Yugoslav election without holding Yugoslavian citizenship and in the 1992 Croatian election without holding Croatian citizenship. This

constituted a departure from the practice that acquisition of a new citizenship in a host society denotes a new political allegiance, and it indicated that the Croatian state views the adoption of Australian citizenship by the diasporic community as a formality. For their part, Croat participation in homeland elections indicates that some Australian Croats, despite a 95.5 per cent naturalization rate, take out Australian citizenship to improve their position in Australian society or to affirm a new loyalty. But this act does not necessarily mean that they renounce their loyalty to their homeland.

Additionally, in 1992 the worldwide Croatian diaspora was granted representation in the Croatian parliament. Twelve seats out of 92 were reserved for diaspora Croats, as compared to only seven for national ethnic minorities, so that non-resident ethnic kin are provided more political representation than are the resident non-Croat population. Croatian diplomatic officials reveal, and research supports, the contention that Croatian politicians, especially those from the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party, frequently visited diasporic communities in search of political and monetary assistance, at the same time evoking patriotism toward the homeland. Glenny claims that the Tudjman government relied heavily on political donations from the diaspora, receiving more than US\$4 million for the HDZ election campaign alone in 1990.

In sum, there is evidence that homeland ties have influenced national identity in Australia's Croat community. Homeland

authorities claim that there are 300,000 members of the Croatian diaspora in Australia. Many of these people have been deeply involved in social, economic, and political homeland developments and have been mobilized by the Tudjman regime as a vital part of its support. Whether the Croatian government's outreach efforts will continue with the same intensity is uncertain. The newly elected president, Stipe Mesic, ran on an agenda that advocated reducing the power and influence of the Croat diaspora in homeland affairs. But he is the former chairman of the diaspora-mobilizing HDZ, and is thus fully aware of the resources and expertise that the diaspora can offer to a politician eager to solidify power.

What is more certain is that foreign ties will increasingly influence the configurations of many diasporic communities, Croats and others, in Australia. States have the power and resources to determine the choices that are available to people. The key point is that for members of diasporic communities there are two or more states involved. And with interests in both homeland and host country affairs, intense loyalty to Australia is unlikely. While diasporas may mobilize without the assistance of homeland states, most efforts to organize politically are likely to be influenced by the extent to which homeland governments establish relationships with their diasporas. Australian policymakers would be wise to incorporate these contingencies into their perspectives on immigration and ethnic policies.

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- ⁹ C. S. Foon, 'On the Incompatibility of Ethnic and National Loyalties: Reframing the Issue', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1986, pp. 1-11
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