

— SPECIAL SECTION —

# Thinking Beyond the Centuries of Neglect: Diaspora and Democratic Processes in the Context of Ukraine

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## Introduction

In the last decades, the world of democracy and cross-border mobility has been experiencing a historic sea change, one that is taking us away from the nation state-based model of democracy and diaspora of past times towards a form of mutual alignment with no borders and frontlines (Keane 2018). Many of the ‘hot topics’ in international relations and migration research such as transnationalism, deterritorialisation, citizenship and voting rights, European disintegration, migration crises, the rise of terrorism and global security threats, all challenging the ‘container model’ of the nation state, are linked today to larger questions of democracy, democratic development, and the actors involved. Transnationalism, as a theoretical and conceptual tool to capture processes and links across administrative and political borders (Glick-Schiller *et al.* 1992), fits the study of diaspora and its involvement in democratic processes in a world where improved modes of transportation as well as new means of modern telecommunications have shortened the social distance between sending and receiving states.

In his attempt to describe a history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Charles S. Maier (2000) preferred to focus on space rather than time to track what he refers to as one of ‘the most encompassing or fundamental socio-political trends of modern world development’, principally the emerging ‘crisis of territoriality’ (Maier 2000: 807). This crisis is not meant to suggest that territory has been eroded or is in decline, but rather that the way we understand bounded territory, principally in the form of a state, can no longer be assumed to be a self-contained spatial unit that organises our political, economic or social lives. To cite one example, Maier (2016: 830) suggests that ‘those who aspire to use political resources to mitigate market inequalities will have to do so on a post-territorial basis, or, at the least, on different scales of territorial space’. Put differently, addressing the inequalities of wealth distribution requires a method that extends beyond bounded territorial space, beyond, in today’s division of space, the nation-state, and considers instead a post-territorial or transnational vision of the

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market. The sense of the crisis of territoriality advanced by Maier (2016) orients the research presented in this section; we recognise the delocalising power of diasporic networks, of media technologies and space-time compression, while also acknowledging the continued potency of territory to define identity, nationality and, crucially, to act as a home for particular political systems.

The collection of papers in this section aims to overcome the territorial bias that shapes democratic thinking and underpins diaspora scholarship (particularly diaspora engagement with democratic processes and its potential and contribution to democratic change) and to propose a deterritorial vision of both these elements. Having the Ukrainian case study at its centre, this section asks how the modern perspective of dispersal offers a useful way to conceptualise diaspora, while examining how the modern diaspora activity enables diasporas to influence the processes of democratisation in their homeland. In this section we seek to probe how various actors and groups, located across territorial space, can affect political systems and, more specifically, influence democratic processes. In that sense, this section is driven by a post-territorial vision of politics and democratisation processes that privilege networks of affiliation and organising, rather than geographically-bound political movements. It focuses on the nexus between one form of displacement, diaspora, and a particular political system, democracy, to provide insights into how the former might impact democratic processes. Specifically, this section explores that nexus principally in relation to the role of the multifaceted Ukrainian diaspora and their efforts to get involved in the democratic processes and democracy building in contemporary Ukraine.

### **Diaspora, democracy and territory: rethinking the nexus**

Of particular concern to this section is the vision of ‘territorial mentality’ that seems to underpin studies of diaspora and democracy (Keane 2018). Territory is a central component or is perceived as a necessary precursor for democracy to take shape (Keane 2009; Merkel 2014) and for diaspora to intrinsically link community to the space outside of their natal (or imagined natal) country (Cohen 2008). Indeed, as Therborn highlights, all ‘politics begins with place’ (Therborn 2013: 509) and, as Maier elaborates, it is within territories that decisions are made, or as he states, ‘territory is thus a *decision space*. It establishes the spatial reach of legislation ... collective decisions’ (2016: 3) and of politics (2016: 6). And yet studies of democracy, a form of political governance, have offered little reflection on its territorial dimension (Oleinikova 2019). A significant reason for this neglect, according to Cara Nine, is that ‘democratic theory is exclusive to persons’ located in a fixed geographical space, addressing ‘how [these people] should be treated and how their associations should be organised’ (Nine 2012: 93), all the while ‘ignoring’ how a fixed territorial space anchors and circumscribes our understanding of democracy (Nine 2006: 101). Even in more recent attempts to ameliorate the marginalisation of territory in democracy research, it is people and their co-habitation that remains the focus. For instance, in his 2016 examination of a political approach to understanding the development of democracy, David Miller hypothetically asks, considering ‘the set of people who occupy the area defined by mooted boundary B, is it possible to create a well-functioning democracy within the area so defined?’ (Miller 2016: 40). This is one of the core questions that drive our research in this section. Using diaspora as the lens through which to wrestle with the issue is highly appropriate because unlike democracy, theories of dispersal have, at times unwittingly, engaged significantly with territory, and attempted to account for the ways various transnationally located social and political movements have contended with borders and fixed geographical spaces (Anderson 1998). The reason for this high-level engagement stems both from the meaning of diaspora, as a form of dispersal from a set territorial space, and the timing of its emergence as a field of scholarly enquiry. Diasporas, as Bayeh (2019) suggests, are non-state-based political groups that can ‘escape’ or transcend boundaries, work and connect across them, stemming from macropolitical structures such as the bounded state. Regarding its etymology, ‘diaspora’ derives from the Ancient Greek verb *speirō* ‘to scatter’ and the preposition

dia ‘through or over’. As Judith Shuval argues, ‘a critical component’ of diaspora is that it entails a ‘history of dispersal’ and a ‘collective ... cultural memory of the dispersion’ (Shuval 2000: 43). What is often said to have been scattered or dispersed are metaphorical seeds, which highlights the intrinsic reference to land and territory contained in the term. Historically, Robin Cohen (1997) distinguished five types of diasporas, one of which is deterritorial diaspora, as not connected with an actually existing state, but rather an imagined/symbolic homeland, such as the Roma or Kurds. Safran (1991) likewise pointed out this characteristic (a common memory about the place of origin which could be an imagined one, as it was for centuries in the case of Jews or Armenians).

In his summary of current approaches to diaspora, Cohen (1997: 135–136) suggests that ‘diasporas are positioned somewhere between “nation-states” and “travelling cultures” in that they involve dwelling in a nation-state in a physical sense, but travelling in an astral or spiritual sense that falls outside the nation-state’s space/time zone’. In this line Cohen (2008) sees that theorising diaspora should begin by looking at the cases of people who live outside their place of origin rather than using a particular theory already established to portray them. Diaspora has been transformed (at least in a theoretical sense) from a descriptive condition applied largely to Jews in exile, to encompass a multitude of ethnic, religious and national communities who find themselves living outside of the territory to which they are historically ‘rooted’. This also points to the widely held assumption that diasporas are dispersed from a particular place or originary site. While this has been comprehensively debated within diaspora studies, some arguing against the importance of the territorial centre (Bayeh 2019; Hepp and Couldry 2009; Gamlen 2019) and others asserting its enduring relevance (Zielonka 2017), the significance of geographical space and land remains ever present and is inescapable within this field.

Another reason for the deep engagement with geographical space, related to the emergence of diaspora studies, is equally significant especially as it reveals of the kind of territory that seems to interest or orient diaspora research. It can be argued that even though ‘state/country of origin’, ‘home’, ‘homeland’ are frequently used in the diaspora literature, often what is more than likely implied is the nation-state. Mishra (2006) highlights this point in his important study *Diaspora Criticism*. He argues that of ‘the many supplementary terms that swirl in the orbit of diaspora criticism (hybridity, décalage, discontinuity, multilocality, nomadism, double consciousness and so on)’ transnationalism and nationalism feature as the most prominent (Mishra 2006: 131). Like Mishra, Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur contend that the nation is a key component in what they refer to as the practice of ‘theorising’ diaspora (Braziel and Mannur 2003: 3–4, 7–10). What, however, is curious about the importance of the nation-state is not just its unquestioned frequency, but that nation-states, which emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, post-date the occurrence of diaspora communities by, one could argue from the perspective of the Jewish or Greek diasporas, thousands of years. In light of this disjointed sequence of timing, what explains the centrality of the nation in diaspora research?

The answer to this can be traced to the timing of the emergence of diaspora studies as opposed to diaspora communities. Braziel and Mannur argue that the increased interest in diaspora research dates from 1991, with the inauguration of the journal *Diaspora*. Since then ‘debates over the theoretical, cultural, and historical resonances of the term [diaspora] have proliferated in academic journals devoted to ethnic, national and (trans) national concerns’ (Braziel and Mannur 2003: 2). This was reinforced more recently by Girish Daswani and Ato Quayson in their introduction to *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. They write that with the *Diaspora* journal ‘the field progressively acquired scholarly coherence with a visible set of debates and practitioners’ (Quayson and Daswani 2013: 7). In other words, the institutionalised diaspora scholarship is a relatively contemporary field of inquiry. Tölölyan (1991: 4) highlights that ‘dispersions, while not altogether new in form, acquired a different meaning by the nineteenth century, in the context of the triumphant nation-state’. The appeal of the nation-state in the last several decades has not waned (Brubaker 2009) and, according to

Massey, there has been an intense reconsolidation of the nation-state since the 1980s (Massey *et al.* 1994: 4). This is evident in the rise of exclusivist claims to territorial space, especially in the form of reactionary nationalisms opposed to new migrants and processes of globalisation (Massey *et al.* 1994: 4, 151). Such claims of exclusivity are even more pronounced in a post-9/11 milieu where states have strengthened their own powers in terms of homeland and border security in a bid to curtail the influx of undesirable and supposedly threatening outsiders. Thus, the displacement of people, especially in a context where the nation-state is being reconsolidated, means that diaspora studies need to be understood as interacting with and even defining itself against nationhood.

According to Maier, territory is not just a ‘decision space’ but is also simultaneously ‘constituted as an identity space or a space of belonging’. Territory specifies the ‘domain of powerful collective loyalties’ which is evidenced by how ‘political and often ethnic allegiances’ are supposedly ‘territorial’ (Maier 2016: 3). The notion of territory as both an ‘identity’ and ‘decision’ space resonates closely with the concept of the nation-state, where the nation is seen to reflect a common if not ethnic then cultural identity, and the state represents the geographical limits of legislation formation, political decision making and sovereignty. But Maier, like so many diaspora theorists, has noted that the affiliations between territory, identity and decision-making, or between the state, nation and democracy, are not congruent – ‘Identity space and decision space have diverged’ (Maier 2016: 3). For democracy research this has significant implications, aside from the assumption of territory as a necessary site for democracy to take shape as mentioned above. Democracy scholarship has noted but also criticised the idea that the success of democracy is contingent upon the inhabitants of a democratic space sharing a common identity. As Carl Schmitt argued almost a century ago, ‘Democracy requires ... first homogeneity and second – if the need arises – elimination or eradication of heterogeneity’ (Schmitt 1988: 9). Eliminating heterogeneity at odds with democracy, as noted by Seyla Benhabib who attempts in her article *Democracy and Identity* to address the perplexities of these two terms, ‘of the tensions between the universalistic principles ushered in by the American and French Revolutions and particularistic identities of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, race and language’ that cohabit the same democratic territorial space (1998: 85). Benhabib develops a typology of identity/difference movements to address this concern, a concern that had particular urgency after the political transition in CEE countries due to the ‘1989 decline of superpower polarism and the end of the Cold War [which] have brought with them a dizzying reconfiguration of the map of Europe’ (1998: 86). Her study focuses on identities within nation-states and how the development of a civic polity can help to accommodate difference within democracy. Benhabib’s understanding of cultures as heterogeneous, dynamic, porous, hybrid, and as communities of dialogue fraught with power, helps to explore how diverse and dispersed communities interact with power institutions and influence the democratic processes. This section benefits from the questions raised by scholars like Benhabib, but approaches the complexity of geographical space, territory, identity and democratic decision-making from a diasporic view-point to ask how does a geographically dispersed national community shape and influence democratic processes. The ‘dizzying reconfiguration of the map of Europe’, although initiated three decades ago in 1989, remains a prime site to propose this investigation, with a particular focus on Ukraine as a fledgling democracy that has suffered many shocks in the post-Cold War era, and is a nation that is affected and shaped by a high coefficient of dispersal and diaspora.

### **Why Ukraine?**

27 years of Ukraine’s independence and the recent Euromaidan protests showed Ukraine to be a state poised between East and West European paths, with a long connection to Russia in the East. Ukraine’s search for its identity and future is deeply rooted in historical fractures, indicated by its longstanding ties beyond its borders,

which have shifted many times. All these years since independence Ukraine has been struggling to become a successful democracy, developing an active civil society and fighting the corruption, oligarchisation of power, and nepotism that undermine Ukraine's democratic efforts. Diaspora communities have played an important role in this struggle, shaping the democratic Ukraine from abroad through international media, the transnational roots of memory and the search for collective identity, and transnational linkages of elites within Ukrainian political and economic regimes. Having established themselves as active agents of democratic transition, galvanising the transnational interest-based politics promoting democracy, expanding claim-making from their local to national, supranational, and global levels of engagement between their states of residence and Ukraine, Ukrainian diasporas have become a bridge to Western knowledge, expertise, resources, opportunities, global markets – all that operate beyond the territory, time, and space of a nation-state – and at a most efficient deep level, help to root the democratic change 'inside' Ukraine (Oleinikova and Bayeh 2019). With a sizable proportion of the population living outside the country and transnational embeddedness that has unexpectedly intensified in the Russian-Ukrainian political conflict, Ukraine makes a suitable case to examine and understand the relationship between democratic processes and diaspora, and the potential of the latter for democratic change.

The case of Ukraine with a high coefficient of dispersal and diaspora teaches us empirically and theoretically to think of diaspora and democracy as post-territorial phenomena, because Ukraine's democratic development has happened not just inside but from abroad (from its diaspora) and entailed confronting questions about Ukraine's position in the European region, challenging the idea that an independent Ukraine must be a territorially bound and nationally exclusivist entity (Oleinikova 2019). The case of Ukraine shows us that territory matters but so does connectivity between the diaspora and Ukraine, where the functioning of the dispersed communities has made promising strides over the last decade, playing an important role in the emergence of the Euromaidan protests in 2013/2014 and continuing to remain vibrant since. While democracy often means electoral politics and voting, and can refer to government systems and principles of popular sovereignty, in this section under 'democracy' we mean not only a set of democratic systems and principles, but also the development of a way of life committed to greater equality and the public accountability of authorities that rests on history, civil society, shared memory, and diaspora communities and their involvement that accelerates various structural shifts in contemporary Ukraine.

There are *two main reasons* why Ukraine is important for understanding the complexity of territory, identity and democratic decision-making from a diasporic viewpoint.

The *first main reason* lies in its importance for the future of Europe. Ukraine is transnationally embedded, with a highly globalised diaspora which is involved in Ukraine's democratisation efforts via not only direct financial help to pro-democracy groups and NGOs, but also by direct human resource transfers in the form of diaspora members relocating to Ukraine to occupy positions in Ukrainian government (see details in Klavdia Tatar's contribution). These efforts contribute to shaping Ukraine's West European path and Ukraine's democratic success, which is of geopolitical strategic importance for the future of Europe.

The Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014 and their ambivalent aftermath underscored why and how Ukraine remains a state between the East and West European pathways. Ukraine was largely invisible to the European Union and the rest of the West in the first decade of its independence. Relations were based on the vague EU–Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1998 (similar accords were offered to all post-Soviet states). None of the then 15 EU members at the time saw Ukraine as a priority. It was too far away from the EU, too difficult to understand, and too close to Russia. Ukraine appeared on the 'European' political radar screen with the EU enlargement in 2004. Especially after Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution brought a pro-Western, democratic-leaning government to power, the EU started to think about a special policy for Ukraine. Since 2013 the activation of Ukraine's fight for its European choice and the war in Eastern Ukraine have reshaped

the geopolitical map of Europe and derailed cooperation between Russia and the West. Of course, the ‘West’ is a relative notion. The existence of collective sanctions against Russia is empirical evidence that the ‘West’ exists. It is very significant within the framework of democracy subject matter that the West’s solidarity developed as a reaction to Russian aggression against Ukraine. Such reaction and support for Ukraine is a sign of the importance of the current dynamics in Ukraine for Europe and globally. While that laid the foundation for a new (excluding UK) and extended European Union (potentially including Ukraine), a Ukraine–Russia conflict creates the possibility of this construction extending further East. Moreover, the stakes in Ukraine–Russia relations always were, and indeed continue to be, about Russia–Europe relations. Political scholars, observers and international leaders from around the world recognise the global importance of Ukraine’s crisis and current fight for democracy (Snyder 2015; Yekelchik 2015).

The *second reason* why Ukraine is important and is central to this section lies in Ukraine’s transnational embeddedness and growing globalisation and post-territoriality (Oleinikova 2020). Modern Ukraine has never been that global before. Ukraine is one of eight countries in the world with the greatest number of people living outside the country’s borders (‘diaspora’) (others being India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, China, Bangladesh, Syrian Arab Republic and Pakistan), as well as being the European country with the largest number of people living in other European countries (5.9 million) (Ahmadov and Sasse 2016). The Ukrainian exodus was a series of mass migrations that mean that today, more than 20 million Ukrainians live outside the country, according to the Toronto-based Ukrainian World Congress (Satzewich 2002). That compares to 39 million still living in Ukraine. Canada and the United States have the largest Ukrainian communities outside the former Soviet Union. Other significant long-standing communities are found in Brazil and Argentina, while more recent migration has put an estimated 500 000 Ukrainians in Poland, 300 000 in Italy and 100 000 in Spain (Oleinikova and Bayeh 2019).

Empirically speaking, the dynamics of diaspora involvement in democratisation efforts in contemporary Ukraine presents something of a maze, containing at its centre normative contradictions as well as theoretical puzzles. As Ukrainian diasporas have become more involved and concerned with the development of their homeland, particularly in the last five years in response to the Euromaidan, this shows that dispersed communities in the digital, spaceless and fluid age (Kozachenko 2019) tend to play a crucial role in the democratisation of the home state and have a global impact. As Kyivans froze on the Maidan in 2013–2014, fighting for their European choice, Ukrainians in diaspora organised small ‘Maidans’ in their respective inhabited corners of the world. Ukrainians went out into the streets of London, Tokyo, Sydney, New York, Warsaw, and Frankfurt and fought for a wider global response. For example, in Australia, a 40 000-strong Ukrainian community urged the country to impose sanctions on Russia after its annexation of Crimea. The small Ukrainian community in Hong Kong submitted a petition to the Russian consulate, which later informed the embassy in Beijing.

Knowing the mobilisation of Ukrainian diasporas, when hosting the Ukrainian World Forum in Kyiv in August 2016, the former president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko stressed that Ukrainians all over the world should unite and protect their country (Fedyuk 2019). Sociologists Olga Oleinikova and Jumana Bayeh (2019: 15) aptly pointed out that one of the positive outcomes of the conflict in Ukraine is ‘the reinvigoration and reunification of Ukrainians globally’. According to them, the Ukrainian diaspora enhanced its ability to drive actions globally to benefit Ukraine: it lobbied foreign governments, organised protests, collected aid, and informed the world about events in Ukraine.

Despite its global scale, this transnational post-territorial dimension in the Ukrainian context is underexamined; therefore, modern Ukraine appears to be a good laboratory to explore the complexity of territory, identity and democratic processes from a diasporic viewpoint and understand how a geographically dispersed national community shapes and influences democracy formation in the home country. The fact that Ukrainian diasporas play a significant part in the country’s affairs provides a demonstration of a diaspora’s interaction

with its country that challenges the relevance of the self-contained unit to organise our political, economic or social lives, mentioned above. Taking Ukraine as an example, the papers in this section discuss and showcase the empirical evidence of how a geographically dispersed national community acts beyond the territory of residence and has capacity to mobilise politically from afar to influence democratic formation.

### Special Section overview

Building on the critique of the existing scholarly preoccupation with territory and exploring how we can move beyond its gravitational force to anchor democracy, the papers in this issue push democratic theory and diaspora studies beyond the boundaries of territory, time and space, by rethinking the old themes and developing new perspectives. The new ideas and perspectives presented in the papers are driven by two main standpoints:

- recognition of the post-territorial dimension of democracy, multiple spaces of belonging, networks and transnational political involvement (action);
- understanding of transnational embeddedness, global dispersal connections and democratic potential of diasporas: the power of the dispersed national community to shape and influence democracy formation from afar.


*Ukraine and Greece – Two Diasporas: Engagement and Disengagement with the Homeland at Times of Crisis*, by Foteini Kalantzi and Iryna Lapshyna, is the first in line to challenge the orthodox understanding of diaspora and democracy, as being attached to territory and space. Kalantzi and Lapshyna posit a modern perspective on dispersal and offer a new way to conceptualise diaspora. Their paper maps the various ways diaspora has been traditionally understood and tracks the tensions evident between orthodox and more progressive approaches to dispersal. They propose a deterritorialised form of diaspora, where diasporas are approached as actors rather than objects of state policy, which is an attempt both to recognise the homeland mobilising effects to ‘diaspora’ and to critique the particular ways in which diasporas engage or disengage in the modern globalised world. Kalantzi and Lapshyna explore how the new forms of diaspora engagement and disengagement are an avenue through which to examine delocalised processes of democratisation.

The next contribution, *Helping the Homeland in Troubled Times: Advocacy by Canada’s Ukrainian Diaspora in the Context of Regime Change and War in Ukraine*, by Klavdia Tatar, analyses the diaspora diplomacy (the case of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada), that includes advocating and lobbying for the interests of the homeland with the governments of host countries and international organisations. It is argued to constitute an important way by which diasporas influence the processes of democratisation. The paper analyses the recent changes in Ukraine, starting from Ukraine’s independence and accelerated by the Euromaidan uprising, and continuing to the present day’s fragile ceasefire and low implementation of reforms in Ukraine. Throughout, the Ukrainian diaspora has been an influential fighter for the country’s better future. In this respect, the paper presents the context for the possible active involvement of diasporas in Ukraine.

### Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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