'he Politics of Multiple Belonging
Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe and East Asia

Edited by

FLEMMING CHRISTIANSEN
University of Leeds, UK

ULF HEDETOFT
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ASHGATE

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List of Contributors

Georges van den Abbeele is Director of both the Davis Humanities Institute and the newly established Pacific Regional Humanities Center at the University of California at Davis, where he is also Professor of French and Humanities. He is the author of *Travel as Metaphor* and coeditor of *French Civilization and its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). He is currently working on theories of national identity with particular attention to the case of Belgium.

Benedicte Brøgger, Senior Researcher at the Work Research Institute, Oslo, Norway. Research director of the Enterprise Development and Innovation Group.

Flemming Christiansen, Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies, University of Leeds, UK. Author of *Chinatown, Europe* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

John Czaplicka is a Cultural Historian affiliated with Harvard University's Center for European Studies. His recent publications include an edited book, *Lviv: A City in the Crosscurrents of Culture* and, together with Blair Ruble, *Composing Urban Histories and the Constitution of Urban Identities* (both 2003). His current projects consider urban history and place-based identity in East Central Europe.

Gerard Delanty, Professor of Sociology, University of Liverpool, UK. His most recent book is *Community* (Routledge, 2003).

Virginie Guiraudon, Research Fellow at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). Member of the executive board of the European Union Studies Association and the editorial board of *Comparative European Politics*.

Xiaolin Guo, Lund University. Her research focuses on state and society. Her publications include articles in *The China Quarterly, The Journal of Peasant Studies*, and contributions to edited volumes.

Annette Skovsted Hansen, Assistant Professor of Japanese History at Aarhus University, Denmark.

Ulf Hedetoft, dr.phil., Professor of International Studies and Director of the Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark (AMID), Aalborg University. He has written widely on issues of nationalism, European integration and globalization,

most recently in *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity* (co-edited with Mette Hjort; University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and *The Global Turn: National Encounters with the World* (Aalborg University Press, 2003).

Riva Kastoryano is a Senior Research Fellow at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) and teaches at the Institute for Political Studies in Paris. Her work focuses on relationships between identity and states, on minority and community formation in Western democratic societies. Her most recent book is *La France, l'Allemagne et leurs Immigrés. Négocier l'identité* (Armand Colin, 1997), English translation *Negotiating Identities. States and Immigrants in France and Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2002). She is also the editor of *Quelle identité pour l'Europe? Le multiculturalisme à l'épreuve* (Presses de Sciences-Po, 1998); *Nationalismes en mutation en Méditerranée Orientale* (with A. Dieckhoff; Ed. du CNRS, 2002); *Staat – Schule – Ethnizität. Politische Sozialisation von Immigrantenkindern in vier europäischen Ländern* (with Werner Schiffauer, Gerd Baumann, and Steven Vertovec; Waxman Verlag, 2002).

Xiujing Liang currently teaches in East Asian Studies, the University of Leeds, UK.

Michael Rudolph, Institut für Ethnologie at Heidelberg University. Current research project on 'Dynamics and Efficacy of Ritual Performance and the Constitution of Socio-Cultural Identity in Taiwan and Morocco' within the Interdisciplinary Project *Dynamics of Ritual* at Heidelberg University. His most recent publication is 'The Quest for Difference vs the Wish to Assimilate: Taiwan's Aborigines and their Struggle for Cultural Survival in Times of Multiculturalism', in Paul R. Katz and Murray A. Rubinstein, *Religion and the Formation of Taiwanese Identities* (Palgrave, 2003).

Ray Taras is Professor of Political Science and Director of the World Literature Programme at Tulane University in New Orleans. He has recently published *Liberal and Illiberal Nationalisms* (Palgrave, 2002).

Luigi Tomba is a Political Scientist affiliated with the Contemporary China Centre and Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University, Canberra. His most recent publications include *Paradoxes of Labour Reform: Chinese Labour Theory and Practice from Socialism to Market* (University of Hawaii Press and RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

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Introduction

Flemming Christiansen and Ulf Hedetoft

Belonging, Ethnicity and Nation

We often use terms like 'ethnicity' and 'nationalism' to label people's belonging to a state, territory, nation or community, frequently in a process of categorization which assumes or ascribes belongingness in such terms as essentialized, universally applicable, invariable and deterministic concepts.

This mode of thought and analysis has the Western nation state blueprint writ large all over. As the world became gradually ordered on the principle of national self-determination, according to which legitimate states originate in nations, nations are rooted in ethnicities, and convergences between states, nations and territories are the actual or desired state of affairs, people's primary 'belonging' became universally recognized as residing in their 'national identity' as the provenance and site of their individual and collective destiny. 'Politics of belonging' was coterminous with the politics of nation-building (often racially argued in no uncertain terms), cultural homogenization, minority assimilation and national defence, or, in other words, with the construction of 'imagined political communities' within national boundaries and the dissemination of this national principle (practically via the export of the superior qualities of 'nation xyz') worldwide, both by means of colonial rule and – later – as a weapon used by the colonized masses in their struggle to rid themselves of their colonizers.

Thus, 'belonging' was first politicized in and by the nation state context in a process of different interacting 'modernities', then essentialized (ahistorized) as 'natural identity' in a process of ascriptive discourse which has been a resounding success, with elites as well as masses across the globe.

In this sense there can be no doubt that the generalized categories described above contain a large measure of validity and explanatory value. However, they can also, depending on context, application, evaluative charge and extent of universalization, obscure more than they uncover and distort more than they clarify. Rashly used, and without proper regard for the present-day global context, they may blind us to the precise nature of different forms and processes of belonging, to how feelings of belonging are constructed and 'negotiated' in different political settings, to individual, local and regional variations in belonging, and to the interplay between highly different politics and strategies of belonging – from 'below' as well as from 'above'. This is particularly true in the current climate of contending and mutually contested 'politics of belonging', the multiple landscape of fast-changing, overlapping and porous identity constructions/debates

which globalization in its many permutations has been instrumental in placing on the public and academic agenda, and which has highlighted the relative shortcomings of the Gellnerian assumptions about congruity between individual, nation and state (springing from a Central European context which has rarely – and certainly not until after the so-called 'end of the Cold War' – done anything but practically question them, except as Utopian ideals).[1] Increasingly, people across the world and across social divides have become prone to regenerating, constructing, and negotiating ethnic identities in a search for some measure of order, transparency and control of their lives; groups and individuals simultaneously play on a variety of identity registers; appeal to both the nation state and supranational bodies for recognition of individual and group rights; create organizations to promote ethnic and sub-ethnic identities and to represent group interests; use national and ethnic icons in business and construct ethnic business ideologies; while artists, philosophers and grassroots movements wrestle with civic and existentialist conundrums of identity, emerging configurations of belonging, and new nexuses of culture, space and politics – one of the problems being the moral foundations of belonging in the age of globalization, caught between the seemingly unethical nature of particularity (pointing toward a rejection of nationalism and racism and an acceptance of liberalism and cosmopolitanism) and the still-prevalent and ubiquitous sense of the superiority of one's own belonging (tending toward a reaffirmation of nationalism, localism and exceptionalism cf. Hedetoft, this volume).

The origins and circumstances of ethnicity and nationalism and the social and political contexts in which people construct their belonging(s) differ historically, from case to case, and from nation to nation. Thus, by focusing on the discrete and specific contextual features of these kinds of constructions, by shifting the focus away from ethnicity and nation as static categories to belonging as an act and a process, we are better able to capture the richness, nuance and variety of the social and political conditions under which people commit and entrust their loyalty to larger communities.

A central assumption underlying this volume is that belonging and the political forms and articulations it gives rise to are multidirectional and ambiguous (sometimes 'logically' contradictory), typified by increasingly mobile or at least internationally oriented/knowledgeable individuals appropriating and engaging in multiple belongings and political identities that transcend and to a degree (are intended to) challenge the labels of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity'. Belonging implies that individuals identify with a certain type of community and, conversely, that communities see and construct themselves as containers for individual belonging. Belonging thus works in two directions, embodying individual psychosocial agonies (like those of a young man in Singapore, exposed to a multitude of collective identities – cf. Brøgger, this volume) and the political construction of collective symbols for identification (like the appropriation of urban landscapes and languages for emerging nationalist statehood in Central Europe – cf.

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1   Gellner (1983); Hall (1998).

Czaplicka, this volume). Further, belonging implies political competition between collectivities like nation states and migrant communities, where such groups, defined by their self-perception and possibly external ascription as ethnically separate entities, engage in making claims on the state in which they live while remaining culturally and socially tied to their place of 'origin'. Notions of 'multiculturalism', devised as much to exclude as to include 'alien' elements from the nation state, nevertheless widen the range of individuals' possibilities for identification and generally the 'opportunity structures' within which they may operate, thereby leading to new forms of inclusion that in effect run counter to the ideals of multicultural societies and threaten the cohesiveness of the nation state (Delanty in this volume). The political agency of indigenous peoples, for instance, gives substance and articulation to their senses of belonging, while using the subordinate status imposed on them to define their own – new, rather than 'primordial' or 'authentic' – collective identity in competition with the polity that constructed them.

In this sense the present volume intends to sketch both the conceptual and empirical intricacies of ethnic, national and transborder forms of belonging against the background of varying political and cultural configurations, disparate modernities and changing realities in – primarily – Europe and East Asia, attempting to understand change both in terms of 'domestic dynamics' and 'forces of globalization'. On the one hand, nationalism and modernization have developed very differently in these two parts of the world, having followed different (though clearly interactive and interrelated) historical paths and dynamics, and having resulted in regionally discrete patterns and permutations of culture, language and sovereignty – regionalism, nationalism and imperialism – and identity, citizenship and migration (Chow et al. 2001; Haratoonian 2000; Hedetoft and Hjort 2002; Mabry 1998; Said 1978; Schwartz 1993).

Processes of inclusion/exclusion have shaped up differently, as have discourses of homogeneity, ways of tying people and state together, the density of civic society, and the meanings of the separation between private and public. Finally, it is clear that, on this background, processes of globalization also have different impacts, have received different cultural and political responses in the two parts of the world and have therefore impinged somewhat differently on forms and perceptions of belonging.

On the other hand, however, these differentiating factors should not make us blind to the fact that they are all expressive forms of conceptually related structures and processes. However differently 'national' or 'ethnic' or 'local' belonging might shape up in Europe and East Asia, first, they are nevertheless manifestations of more universal patterns of reconfiguring, e.g. 'nationality' as a common notion of belonging and a point of spatial reference for groups and individuals in both parts of the world, faced with similar or comparable domestic and global forces of homogenization; and second, their regional commonalities are always punctured by significant regional diversity as well – national belonging in Denmark is not a carbon copy of national belonging in Belgium (Abbeele, this volume), nor is local

belonging in Japan configured in the same way as local belonging in China (Skovsted Hansen; Guo, both in this volume).

We must not, therefore, fall into the trap of treating East Asian countries as little more than a bleak exception to the 'universal' (read Western) pattern, with implicit or explicit reference to its degree of estrangement from the European/ North American experience; nor should we assume, for that reason, that differences are unimportant and that it is wiser (possibly more politically correct) to collapse all manifestations of nation, identity and belonging into one undifferentiated pot. Both 'Western' and 'East Asian' experiences of belonging, uprootedness and exile must be viewed as a differentiated field to be explored, sensitively and in a nuanced manner, by reference to a context of general theoretical assumptions and ramifications – or, conversely, as empirical resources for drawing theoretical conclusions about the nature and direction of 'constructed belongingness' in the world order of the 21st century. Ethnic minorities in Europe, for instance, are constructed differently from national minorities in China in political, historical and cultural terms, and their dynamics diverge, but theories, concepts and analytical tools must be sufficiently spacious and comprehensive to be able to account for all such ethno-national configurations and their 'global' interaction, as special cases/reflections of more general processes.

The confrontation of multiform realities within a common set of conceptual reference points is conducive to a deepening and a strengthening of our understanding of issues of 'belonging' both in Europe and East Asia. Interesting and relevant areas that open themselves to exploration within this framework – and some of them are indeed the focus of theoretical and analytical investigation in this volume – are, for instance, whether and how the claims-making efforts of non-EU residents on European states and the European Union reflect back on their links with their 'home' countries? Does Islamic activism in Europe, shaped by the European context, have an impact on Muslim 'nationalities' in China? Does the European construction of an Oriental Other create political and economic niches/opportunities for diasporic groups from East Asia? The field also invites challenging comparisons: How do elites in European states and Japan juggle politically imposed ethnic homogeneity against the social reality of ethnic diversity? Could we see both China and EU-Europe as two contemporary forms of 'empire', and how should we in that case and on the background of two different historical trajectories explain the interaction between 'political nationalism' and 'ethnic belonging' in the two regions? How can we explain the differential meanings of core terms like 'nationalism', 'patriotism' and 'identity' (when translated into Chinese, these concepts carry different connotations than when they are used in English) in Europe and the Far East? And to what extent do political discourses and mass stereotypes of national belongingness and of the respective 'Western' and 'Eastern' Other frame and condition social integration and political interaction between European and Chinese communities, in Europe as well as in China? In recent years, scholarship has begun to address some of these issues. A volume by Daniel Chirot and Anthony Reid (1997) entitled *Essential Outsiders* has

put a comparative perspective on the agenda, and works by Aihwa Ong (1997; 1999) have opened up an understanding of Chinese transnational citizens. These recent debates understand transnationalism as rooted in history, as a continuation of a long trajectory of modernization spurred on by global political forces. Transnational citizenship among overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, one may argue, took shape partly due to racial discrimination by colonial regimes in French Indochina, British Malaya, and the Dutch Indies and the politics of the post-colonial states in the region and the pivotal role which a few of the overseas Chinese were able to play in the economies – different in each setting, but largely as a modernizing, capitalist class able to draw on contacts across borders. The exodus of Hong Kong capitalists to Vancouver and Toronto in the 1980s (Mitchell 1997), for example, transforming Canadian Chinatowns and pushing up residential property prices, can, of course, be perceived of both as a continuation of old patterns of migration inspired by the legacy of colonial rule, and as the emergence of a transnational bourgeoisie[2] acting within the new globalized economy. Indeed it is both, and it is probably impossible to make one clear distinction between the two perspectives.

This volume seeks to contribute to the field, focusing on the difference of ethnic and national belongings as they emerge in processes of political construction in Europe and East Asia. The individual contributions seek to lay bare these processes in particular settings, using a variety of cases. However, before we introduce the individual contributions, a few additional observations on core problems related to 'belonging' and 'multiplicity' as framing concepts for a new type of 'identity politics' worldwide are appropriate.

Belonging and Globalization

In their book entitled *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*, Stephen Castles and Alistair Davidson (2000) argue that we are witnessing the beginnings of the 'end of national belonging' (which is simultaneously the title of the seventh chapter of their book). 'The context for a citizenship based on belonging to a single nation is being eroded' (Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 156), they contend, though the process of erosion and redefinition of citizenship 'in response to globalization' (ibid.) is uneven and impacts different nation states unevenly. However, even nation states that until recently were seen as extremely homogeneous, have been forced into realizing that they are now on the fast track toward becoming multiethnic societies. It is Castles and Davidson's core argument that this process is primarily driven by the characteristics of migratory patterns in the contemporary world, its 'rapidity' and 'its great variety...forcing the creation of a new layer of citizenship above that of the nation – the citizen who does not belong' (Castles and Davidson 2000, p. 157).

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2   Mitchell (1997) calls them 'transnational cosmopolitans'.

The argument is compelling and no doubt contains more than a grain of truth (though other factors should be added to the picture given of new forms of citizenship: the movement of global elites, the impact of international human rights institutions, the lack of popular trust in national politicians worldwide, and much more). There are indications that the components of the traditional nation state compact are indeed becoming unhinged and, in the mental and practical horizon of elites as well as masses, decoupled from one another: 'nationality' from 'ethnicity', 'people' from 'state', 'citizenship' from 'belonging', even 'culture' (frequently global) from 'identity' (frequently sub-national). International migration weighs heavily into this picture, more perhaps as an effect of globalization than an independent cause (Hedetoft, this volume), but its significance is in any case immense. What is more doubtful is whether 'the citizen who does not belong' (a phrase carrying echoes of Marx's 'vaterlandslose Gesellen' as a concept capturing the objective interests of the proletariat) is the happiest way of describing this new dimension to the citizenship *problematique* and to understand the rationale and direction of multiculturalism (Delanty, this volume; Glazer 1996; Parekh 2000). In turn this is linked to the important question of the resilience and integrative potential of the national state – both as a site of structures of opportunities and a site of identity and belonging – to the way migrants (and other minority groups) cope with different kinds of belongingness; and to the more general question pertaining to the strategies of political elites and their chosen instruments for handling the challenge of globalization to their 'national' power, sovereignty and interests.[3] What all the groups involved – political elites, opinion leaders, ethno-national cores, national minorities, migrant organizations, NGOs, transnational institutions, 'homogeneous' as well as 'composite' polities etc. – seem to agree on is that 'multiculturalism' is a political issue, and not merely a question of cultural difference, diversity and multiplicity in strictly cultural and/or sociological terms. In other words, it is an issue which universally is being assessed in terms of its impact on the functionality, governability and loyalty structures of national societies, in terms of 'opportunity' or 'threat', 'potential' or 'problem', promises for more open, liberal-minded societies vs the risks it might pose to traditional ethnic solidarity structures as the underpinning of post-Second World War welfare states (Wolfe and Klausen 2000a; 2000b).

Champions of the liberal position contend that polities based on multiculturalism are not only feasible and workable, but humane and future-oriented too, guaranteeing the loyalty of diverse groups to the same overarching polity (Benhabib 1996; Kymlicka 2001; Tully 1995). Adherents to the homogeneous position counter that the most stable political regime is one based on a oneness of culture and ethnicity, that this is the only way to safeguard civic responsibility toward the state, and that minorities must be taught to assimilate to the dominant cultural premises (Miller 1996; Powell 1969; Smith 1996). For this view, belonging – like 'sovereignty' – is basically indivisible, and national

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3   Giddens (2000); Hirst and Thompson (1996); Van Horne (1997).

allegiance is incompatible with a diversity of cultural practices. The liberal position (veering toward cosmopolitanism) refutes this objection by claiming that belonging consists of several layers, where some may well be directed toward a 'foreign cultural/religious setting' and others, more overtly political, toward the political culture and practices of the 'host country'. This is in fact the most democratic and efficient way of ensuring the loyalty and participation of minorities, they argue, where homogenizers insist that democracy and solidarity can only come to fruition on the basis of ethnically close-knit societies.

On the other hand, both positions are fraught with internal problems: Multiculturalists have difficulties defining the cultural limits of political entities, i.e. how much diversity a state can abide without falling apart, and how its constitutional basis and administrative practices may be orchestrated in such a way as to make multiculturalism a viable proposition and to safeguard a feeling of 'horizontal' solidarity as well as a commitment to shared values and a common future among its citizens (Bauböck 1994). And homogenizers – apart from confronting a world which makes their premises look more and more unrealistic, leading to a frequent denial of the obvious: that 'their' societies have already passed the point of no return to traditional homogeneity long ago – are hard put to it to define what 'cultural homogeneity' actually implies and how much difference this homogeneity can absorb without altering its basic characteristics – i.e. its degree of closure around itself.

What they usually agree on, as previously noted, is that multiculturalism and hence multiple belongingness is and should be a political/politicized matter, and hence subject to scrutiny, negotiation and construction within a traditional or novel framework defined by and within the nation state as the overarching arbiter of functionality, legitimacy and citizen/polity interaction. Whether – and how – 'culture' is significant in this context is a matter for these processes of endless contestation to decide. In this welter of identity negotiations and skirmishes about rightful belonging, however, at least four decisive elements stand out:

First, that 'multiculturalism' in all its various forms and guises (Delanty, this volume) is a codename for a particular, latter-day type of discursive identity politics conducted by traditional nationalists as well as 'postmodern' cosmopolitans and internationalizers. Multiculturalism has little if anything to do with the cultural properties of each component entity, nor with the 'encounter' and 'assimilability' of these cultures measured on the prima facie evidence of their cultural characteristics *per se* – rather the question is one of the functional benefits of multicultural societies for the political order and stability of a country. In other words, multiculturalism is what the word indicates: an 'ism' lodged between ideology, discourse and political instrumentalization. This is true even in those cases and for those theorizers and groups where multiculturalism turns into a near-essentialistic credo; arguments 'in favour' are always heavily functionalistic (order, well-being, benefits to the national economy, legitimacy, inevitability, democratic efficiency...) – unlike arguments for the maintenance of 'ethnic nationalism', which tend toward a discourse of fundamentalism, sacrality and the

inescapability of a common identity – nationality for the sake of nationality – and hence are prone to getting immersed in tautological rhetoric. Multiculturalism (and hence the politics of multiple belonging) is thus a question of the cultural options and limits to national political regimes, and the ways in which these options and limits are being defined and redefined through the interaction between representatives of 'ethnic groups', 'national political institutions' and 'transnational processes'.

Second, that the terms on which this process of political identity contention is being carried on imply that traditional, core national 'indigenousness' is being squeezed from all sides: from liberal, outward-looking globalizers as well as from xenophobic, anti-immigrant political factions and movements; from anti-globalizing NGOs as well as from national political leaderships, who in the 'national interest' increasingly tend to compromise on national sovereignty; from immigrant and refugee organizations who not only symbolically embody the 'global threat' to traditional ways of life but insist on their right to their own cultural-political preferences; and from international human rights institutions which support such particularistic claims-making processes and hence seemingly help erode the ethnic bastions of the National by backing multiculturalist efforts and discourses.

This decoupling of national interest from ethnic identity is a paradox, since multiculturalism (much like the rationale behind liberal nationalism as well as European integration) is no more than the tip of a globalizing iceberg and pre-eminently one of the many attempts by supporters of the national idea to defend and retain the nation state in a context which is radically different from the mid-20th century (national boundaries being less rational, nationalism being less easy to legitimate, the nation state being less functional). The irony of political multiculturalism is that it is most accepted and legitimate when its protagonists (even as unlikely ones as former British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook in the run-up to the May 2001 General Election: 'Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish'[4] and so forth!) declare their multicultural ideal to be a novel integrative national paradigm, and thus attempt to defuse it as a political threat by on the one hand depoliticizing it and on the other treating it as a new and original container of loyalty to the nation state – the avenue toward a more contemporary and more mature form of citizenship and civic participation. This is why multiculturalism – apart from being highly suspect in 'homogeneous polities' – is both a method of inclusion and exclusion: minority cultures that do not conform to this recipe of 'unity-in-diversity' and differentiation between civic-political and ethno-cultural forms of identity and belonging are not part and parcel of the multicultural compact (cf. Black organizations in the USA, aboriginal organizations in Australia).

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4 'Robin Cook's Chicken Tikka Massala Speech. Extracts from a Speech by the Foreign Secretary to the Social Market Foundation in London', *The Guardian*, 19 April 2001 (http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4174096,00.html).

Third, that there are 'unintended consequences' of the overriding paradox, consequences which are not so easily handled and which do not conform to a single blueprint. In one sense, 'ethnic identity' (understood as coterminous with national belonging) has been estranged by the conflictual processes through which the nation state has attempted to adapt to and incorporate globalization. The immediate results are on the one hand multiculturalist strategies, on the other popular and political reactions intent on maintaining the stability and identity of the old order, and frequently blaming victims of globalization – unwelcome refugees and immigrants – for the disturbance of the peace.

But in another sense this is also an ethnic emancipation process, since it gives a multiplicity of politico-cultural actors far more latitude to (re)define and (re)configure their identity-as-interests and interests-as-identities, no longer constrained in the same way as hitherto by the national configuration. This process goes upward toward the creation of transnational interest/identity patterns (transnational NGOs, the EU, migrant organizations), but more frequently downward in a particularistic process of national or regional separatism (e.g. Central European states freeing themselves from the USSR); local 'subculturalization' (celebrated in a return to 'original cultures' worldwide and appropriated by tourist marketing ventures galore); or regionally based transborder identity constructions, like the Øresund project around Copenhagen in Denmark and Malmö in Southern Sweden.

For the individual migrant, his or her 'global' existence is vested in the multiple political construction and management of essentialized difference, for it is the ability to refer to several identities that matters. Transnational belonging, where the individual is able to use their ethnic belonging in two nations, is one possible form, often politicized, like in the case of Turkish immigrants in Germany and other parts of Europe (Kastoryano, this volume). The belonging to globally distributed networks of 'sub-cultural' or 'sub-ethnic' networks or communities is another – Chinese migrants construct organized bonds referring to sub-national units of regions and speech forms, and so have organizational frameworks that span many countries and provide political links with local governments in China; the 'sub-culturalization' – the seeking back to primeval bonds – in that sense provides the transnational belonging with even stronger globalizing power for the individual actor.

Fourth, do the processes of culturalist 'othering' we have seen in the post-Cold War period carve the world up in new provinces that negate both 'national belonging' and 'multiculturalism'? Where the Cold War mixed political ideology and military security in the creation of blocks, the 1990s saw 'world civilizations' emerge as the main blocks. The cultural subjugation of the East by the West as exposed by Edward Said (1978) was transposed into the 'clash' of civilizations competing for global dominance – the Christian, Islamic, 'Sinitic' and other lesser civilizations were all delinked from the nation states of the world and defined by their immutable cultural essence (Huntington 1996). Is the imagining of one's Other part of building the community? If that is so, is a truly global community